Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Pia Bateman – Chief Executive Officer

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28th October 2026

Dear Member,

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
5th November 2026

The Annual General Meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) will be held in the meeting room at Unit 3 Holes Bay Park, on **Thursday 5th November 2026 at 14:00** to discuss the business on the under mentioned Agenda. Parking is limited, please consider other forms of transport, or share lifts. Parking may be available at the Premier Inn Holes Bay Hotel, however, please be aware that spaces are not always available. In order to check if parking is available, you are required to use the Horizon Parking App. Poole railway station is approximately a 15-minute walk from the office.

Members of the public can request a guest telephone dial-in code from enquiries@southern-ifca.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Birchenough
Deputy Chief Officer

AGENDA

1. Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman for 2026-2027
To appoint a Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Technical Advisory Sub-Committee.

2. Apologies
To receive apologies for absence.

3. Declaration of Interest
All Members are to declare any interests in line with paragraphs (16) and (17) of the Southern IFCA Code of Conduct for Non-Council Members.

4. Minutes – 20th August 2026
To confirm the Minutes of the Technical Advisory Committee meeting held on 20th August 2026 (Marked A).

PROGRESS REPORTS

5. To consider the following:

a) **Emergent Updates** – to receive an update on any matters of relevance which have emerged since the publication of this agenda.
b) **Marine Stewardship Council, Audit of the Poole Clam & Cockle Fishery 2026** – to receive an update from DCO Birchenough

c) **Solent Dredge Permit Byelaw, 2026/27 Season** – to receive an update from IFCO Churchouse and DCO Birchenough (Marked B)
d) **Progression of Review Workstreams** – to receive an update from DCO Birchenough

ITEMS FOR DECISION

6. **Development of a Recreational Fishing Forum** – to consider a report from IFCO Mullen & DCO Birchenough (Marked C)

GUEST SPEAKER

7. **Solent Seascape Project - Seascape Recovery Plan** – to receive a presentation from Louise MacCallum, Solent Seascape Project Manager

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

8. **Whelk Population Survey Report 2026 & Non-Technical Summary -** to receive a report from IFCO Mullen (Marked D)

9. **Fisheries Management Plans** – to receive an update report from PO Wright (Marked E)

10. **Date of Next Meeting**
To confirm the date of the next meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee on the 5th February 2026 at Southern IFCA, Unit 3 Holes Bay Park, Sterte Avenue West, Poole Dorset BH15 2AA.

Note: Item 11 below will involve the consideration of information which is exempt by virtue of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and therefore the public will be excluded during consideration of this item.

11. Poole Harbour Several Order – Request to Amend Business Plan
To consider a confidential report from IFCO Meredith-Davies (Confidential, Marked F)

Marked A

SOUTHERN INSHORE FISHERIES & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE – 20th August 2026

Minutes of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), held in the meeting room at the Southern IFCA office in Poole at **14:00 on Thursday 20th August 2026.**

Present

Dr Antony Jensen	Chairman, MMO Appointee
Mr Richard Stride	Vice Chairman, MMO Appointee
Dr Heidi Guille	MMO Appointee
Ms Alison Ruscoe	MMO Appointee
Mr Mark Cornwell	MMO Appointee
Mr Mark Roberts	MMO Appointee
Ms Elisabeth Bussey-Jones	MMO Appointee
Mr Connor Reid	Natural England
Ms Pia Bateman	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Deputy Chief Officer (DCO) Dr Sarah Birchenough, IFCOs Ms Hester Churchouse, Ms Celie Mullen, Mr William Meredith-Davies, Ms Chelsea Perrins and PO Ms Imogen Wright were also present.

Apologies

44. Apologies for absence were received from Mr Colin Francis (MMO Appointee), Mr Rob Milton (MMO Appointee) and Ms Rachel Irish (Marine Management Organisation).

Declarations of interest

45. There were no declarations of interest declared.

Minutes

46. Members considered the Minutes of the meeting held on the 7th May 2026 (Marked A). There were two points of clarification discussed, the first regarding The Poole Harbour Fishery Order 2015 where it was confirmed that the management of aquaculture is separate from the Marine Stewardship Council Certification of the Poole Harbour Clam & Cockle Fishery, and the second relating to the Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Byelaw Monitoring and Control Plan outputs for the 2025/26 season and the application of Threshold Trigger Levels in the fishery. The minutes were approved by mutual consent.

PROGRESS REPORTS

47. Emergent Updates

The CEO informed Members that, due to changes in the Membership, including the Chair of the Authority, and changes within the Team, Member Appraisals which would usually take place in August would be deferred to after the Annual General Meeting of the Authority where the Chair and Vice Chair for the period 2026-2027 will be determined.

DCO Birchenough updated Members on the Shore Gathering Byelaw and Fishing for Cockles (Amendment) Byelaw, noting that the Byelaws have now completed the MMO QA process and have been submitted to Defra for consideration prior to being passed to the Secretary of State. DCO Birchenough informed Members that there had been no large-scale changes to the Shore Gathering Byelaw or accompanying Impact Assessment through the MMO QA process and that for the Fishing for Cockles (Amendment) Byelaw, the main update was to the delivery mechanism for the Byelaw moving to revoke rather than amend the existing

Fishing for Cockles Byelaw, this having been advertised to stakeholders and notification of the change remaining on the Southern IFCA website. DCO Birchenough outlined that there had been four rounds of MMO QA in total between December 2024 and July 2026. Officers are looking ahead to prepare for future implementation of the new regulations and Members will be kept informed of the Byelaws' progress through the next stage of the process.

DCO Birchenough informed Members that, following the submission of a Southern IFCA response to the marine licence application submitted by BCP Council for the dredging of Dolphin Sands and Spit Bank for the purposes of beach replenishment, Southern IFCA were invited to a meeting with the Council, ERM, the consultant on the project, and local fishers. The aim of the meeting was for the Council and ERM to outline how comments raised during the consultation had been addressed. The meeting was attended by Southern IFCA, a representative from the MMO and 10 fisher representatives from local ports including Poole and Mudeford as well as from further afield, including Shoreham where vessels are operating in the Poole Bay area. DCO Birchenough outlined that concern remains that the majority of the points raised in the Southern IFCA consultation response have not yet been answered and that a written response to Southern IFCA's consultation response has been requested. DCO Birchenough informed Members that it was stated at the meeting that after the 28th August an updated version of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which accompanies the licence application is due to be made available which should detail all points raised during the consultation and the response from the applicant to each point. At the meeting the MMO also confirmed that, due to the level of input and concern raised during the consultation, there would be a further round of consultation for this marine licence application. DCO Birchenough outlined that Southern IFCA will review the updated EIS when it is available and will participate as a statutory consultee in the second round of consultation. It was requested of the applicant that any further rounds of consultation and engagement be made accessible for all relevant stakeholders, considering the provision of information and the holding of meetings at suitable times and venues to accommodate the greatest opportunity for feedback and input to be provided.

Regarding the Shore Gathering Byelaw, Ms A Ruscoe queried how it contributed to achieving the 30x30 Government target. The CEO outlined that the Byelaw contributes directly to MPA management by managing all hand gathering activities over sensitive designated features within District-wide MPAs, increasing the overall footprint of MPA management within the District.

In relation to the marine licence application, Mr R Stride informed Members that he was in attendance at the meeting representing the South Coast Fishermen's Council and was pleased that the relevant case officer from the MMO was present and had an opportunity to directly participate in discussions. Mr Stride commented that full detail on certain questions had not been provided however recognised that substantial feedback could not be provided through a single meeting. Mr Stride commented on the rationale for the project in relation to coastal and flooding management, noting that it is felt that the extent of the proposed impact exceeds that which could actually occur, and also noted that concern over the proposed works is often combined with that of the beach replenishment itself. Mr Stride thanked Southern IFCA for their participation in the consultation to date and the support for the fishing industry.

DCO Birchenough commented that the placing of sand for beach replenishment is already a licenced activity and that the current licence is focused on the removal of sediment from the local area for that purpose.

Ms E Bussey-Jones thanked Officers for the detailed consultation response and asked for confirmation as to who had been in attendance at the meeting and whether there would be

similar meetings held with stakeholders with a conservation interest. DCO Birchenough confirmed the attendees and outlined that Natural England had provided a consultation response previously but that the meeting had been framed around the fisheries sector and relevant regulators. Southern IFCA did not have information on whether other meetings had been organised with other sectors.

The CEO queried whether the second consultation would seek to collect socio-economic data. DCO Birchenough stated that the current understanding was that interested parties would be presented with an updated EIS for comment, but that the applicant had been strongly advised by Southern IFCA and fishing industry representatives to collect socio-economic data and conduct an impact assessment. At the meeting the applicant had stated that this was not a statutory requirement for the application. Members discussed that the updated EIS would need to address all the evidence gaps identified with the proposed project.

Dr A Jensen informed Members that in July, he, Mr R Stride and the former Chairman Cllr. Paul Fuller attended Alnwick Castle in Northumberland for a national day to mark the 15-year anniversary since the inception of IFCAs in 2011, also incorporating recognition of the value and specific needs of England's inshore fleet and celebrating successes in the sector through the Inshore and Small-Scale Fisheries Consortium. Dr Jensen and Mr Stride agreed it had been a very welcoming event.

Dr Jensen stated that he felt the take home message was that fishers would like to be more involved in the regulations that impact them, noting the importance of consultation in the decision-making process. Dr Jensen commented on the good work that is being achieved at Southern IFCA in this regard, particularly with the recent Community Drop-In Surgeries and noted that the message was also aimed at other regulators besides IFCAs with the importance of communication evident in some cases where understandings behind management and changes in fishing practice were lacking. Mr R Stride commented that the event was focused on the decline in inshore fisheries with first-hand context provided through a visit to local fishing ports. Mr Stride expressed that he was hopefully that other regulators in attendance had also noted the importance of this aspect of inshore fisheries. Dr Jensen informed Members that copies of the 'Inshore Small Scale Fisheries Consortium Impact' and 'Securing Sustainable Inshore Fisheries in the UK – a vision and priority action plan' reports were available.

Dr H Guille raised a current consultation exercise being undertaken with the aim of setting up the next version of the National Under Ten Fishermen's Association (NUTFA), as a non-sector representation group, and asked Members with a commercial fishing interest if they had been involved and their thoughts on sector interest in such a group. Mr R Stride stated that he was on the steering group for this project and had also directed the consultation to speak with Mr M Cornwell, noting that a consultant had been taken on to develop a structure for the group. Mr Stride outlined that having such a group would allow for similar outputs to NUTFA, primarily engagement at a national level. Mr Stride also informed Members that the intention was to bring industry into the process at an earlier stage to help develop the structure of the group and how it would work with the aim of encouraging greater participation once it is established. Mr Stride stated that the group has been called the 'English Small Scale Inshore Fisheries Network' with the aim being to create a network rather than a new association.

Members discussed the attendance of fishing industry groups at the national event, noting an understandable focus on the northeast region given the event location. Members discussed local representative groups including the Lyme Bay Community Interest Company and that this may no longer be in operation.

48. Black Seabream Co-Developed Principles – Year 1

DCO Birchenough provided Members with an overview of Year 1 of the Black Seabream Co-Developed Principles being in operation across three Dorset Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) from 1st April to 31st July. DCO Birchenough outlined that the intention for Year 1 was to support engagement, raise awareness and seek compliance following the co-development of the Principles with the Dorset Community and that extensive pre-season engagement had taken place including the provision of a range of engagement materials and coastal engagement by land and sea patrol. DCO Birchenough informed Members that there were 148 instances of engagement prior to 1st April spanning all communication methods and that information was also distributed to be included on over 20 noticeboards within the Christchurch, Poole and Swanage areas. DCO Birchenough outlined that since 1st April, there had been another 87 instances of engagement across land patrols and sea patrols, both targeted and as part of other compliance and enforcement work. All MCZs were covered and engagement was also provided more widely across all areas of the District. DCO Birchenough informed Members that across the MCZs, 30 sightings records were made of vessels engaged in fishing for black seabream inside the MCZs, and 58 outside of MCZs, noting that one takeaway from Year 1 was that the majority of targeted fishing for black seabream took place outside of the MCZs. DCO Birchenough also covered the Data Collection Programme, which will continue to run year-round, with Officers collecting 23 data entries between 1st April and 31st July and 7 data entries being received from the fishing sector.

Senior IFCO Parry provided Members with an operational overview from Year 1 noting that the Co-Developed Principles received a generally positive response across all sectors. Senior IFCO Parry informed Members that there was a good level of awareness and understanding of the reasons for introducing the Principles, particularly in relation to the sustainability of black seabream fisheries and the need to protect spawning aggregations within the MCZs. The value of data collection was also recognised, noting the limited availability of catch and effort data from recreational and charter fisheries. Senior IFCO Parry informed Members that some stakeholders had expressed support for moving beyond a voluntary approach and that, if measures were determined to be required in the long-term, a regulatory approach would be more effective and would allow for a consistent and fair approach for all participants.

Senior IFCO Parry outlined that between 1st April and 31st July, 15 targeted sea patrols were undertaken, during which vessels operating within or in the vicinity of the three MCZs were engaged. Senior IFCO Parry noted that this provided not only an opportunity to monitor compliance with the Principles but also engage directly with fishery participants about the purpose of the Principles, explain the requirements, answer questions and reinforce the importance of responsible fishing practice within the MCZs. Senior IFCO Parry informed Members that during the season, no breaches of the Principles were identified, providing a positive indication of the level of acceptance for the Principles amongst the community. Feedback from one individual in the charter fishery was that individual customers would be allowed to make their own decision regarding compliance with the Principles due to the Principles being voluntary.

Senior IFCO Parry outlined that continued engagement was undertaken on the importance of contributing to the Data Collection Programme, noting that at the start of the season there appeared to be a high level of willingness to participate. It was noted that the practical implications of recording and submitting information did become a barrier to submission for some participants over the course of the season and that several charter skippers, although supportive of the programme, did not have sufficient time to complete the required information. Feedback received included the importance of data collection arrangements being straightforward, proportionate and capable of being incorporated into normal fishing

operations. During the season Southern IFCA explored alternative methods of data submission including providing wipeable A3 recording boards and pens which could be filled in at sea, photographed and then cleaned for the next trip. This was welcomed by the charter sector who felt that this may make data provision easier.

Dr A Jensen thanked Senior IFCO Parry for his update and asked how Officers were engaging with the community and queried if they were talking to people on the quayside or alongside on patrols. Senior IFCO Parry confirmed that Officers were engaging in multiple areas, on the quayside at the point of landing and before trips started, but that the majority of engagement was via vessel patrols, this providing an opportunity to understand if vessels were targeting black seabream and their operations in relation to the MCZs.

Ms E Bussey-Jones thanked Senior IFCO Parry for an interesting report and Officers for their work in this fishery. Ms Bussey-Jones commented that fishers operating as custodians was a positive approach, giving ownership of the fishery to those involved in it and encourage sustainable practice. Ms Bussey-Jones queried whether recreational fishers were more engaged with the Principles than the commercial sector and the proportion of recreational and commercial fishers fishing inside the MCZs.

Senior IFCO Parry confirmed that commercial fishers were also engaged but in all cases were fishing outside of the MCZs with the commercial fishers targeting different species. Mr M Roberts asked whether it was the same commercial fishers being sighted and whether targeting of black seabream was taking place or whether catches were incidental. Senior IFCO Parry stated that the majority of commercial fishers were netting and that they were targeting flat fish species which would primarily be found outside of the MCZs. Mr M Cornwell commented that the use of nets for the target species would not come up high enough to catch black seabream as a bycatch.

Ms Bussey-Jones asked whether the recreational sector was more in favour of statutory legislation. Senior IFCO Parry stated that from engagement this season, private recreational anglers were the sector most in favour of future statutory legislation for black seabream.

Members discussed the approach of allowing charter vessel customers to determine for themselves the level of participation with the Principles. Some concern was expressed that this may not allow for the benefits and purpose of the Principles to be fully understood if the messaging is not being conveyed by the skipper. Dr A Jensen commented that he understood the concern and that the difficulties faced by charter skippers in applying voluntary measures to their customers had been a topic of discussion during the development of the Principles, noting that there were mixed opinions on this with skippers also adamant that customers would be expected to abide by the Principles when on a fishing trip and those that took an alternative approach being very much in the minority. Dr Jensen commented that each charter business will be aiming to work with the Principles in the manner that they are most comfortable with.

The CEO commented that this was currently a minority view and related to only one vessel, reflecting on the need for a wide circle of engagement to allow all participants to make their own decisions. The CEO stated that there perhaps needs to be a different approach to communications going forward to allow charter vessel customers to review information before their fishing trip to increase understanding of the Principles and the underpinning rationale, perhaps utilising QR codes in suitable locations. The CEO noted that the scope of engagement was broad and therefore complex and that there are multiple ways this can be approached, recognising that the majority of stakeholders will be receiving the appropriate messaging.

Members discussed the balancing act of engagement and monitoring in the fishery, and that continued monitoring would allow for any issues such as this to be identified and considered as well as allowing for continued feedback from the stakeholder community.

The CEO stated that if, at the point of a review, Southern IFCA were to consider statutory interventions, there would need to be demonstrable non-compliance with the Principles and at this stage this has not been identified. Members further discussed communication and engagement methods and how materials could be made easier for skippers to use in providing information to customers, including how the right communications could help businesses promote that they are operating sustainably. DCO Birchenough commented that all relevant charter businesses were given the opportunity to display their logo on the Black Seabream webpage on the Southern IFCA website, currently the British Spearfishing Association is the only organisation to take this up, and were provided text that could be used on external websites.

Dr H Guille suggested that stakeholder groups could be utilised to help with communications and engagement as well as the potential for working with academic institutions on media content and whether this could be explored through FaSS funding, volunteering to assist with this if needed. It was agreed to discuss the potential for this further outside of the meeting.

49. Review of Pot Fishing Management in the Southern IFCA District

DCO Birchenough provided Members with an update on the review of pot fishing management which was agreed to take place following the removal of the proposed Southern IFCA Pot Fishing Byelaw from the MMO QA system and which aimed to scope future pot fishing needs and potential management requirements. DCO Birchenough reviewed the common themes on this topic which had come through the Community Drop-In Surgeries including concerns over the data used to inform the proposed Pot Fishing Byelaw, the appropriateness of planned management, changes in stocks of pot fished target species and the importance of pot fishing in the District. DCO Birchenough stated that the Authority had also reflected on other aspects of the development and progress of the proposed Byelaw, including the QA process and national considerations.

DCO Birchenough informed Members that confirmation had been received from the MMO and Defra that the proposed Pot Fishing Byelaw had been removed from the QA process and that the resulting review was now underway, seeking to work with industry and wider stakeholders. All stakeholders who have indicated that they take part in pot fishing in the District through their Southern IFCA Fish for Sale Permit were sent a letter (annexed to the report) providing an update on pot fishing management and the proposed next steps in the review process as well as including a graphic showing the delivery of the Community Drop-In Surgery Process and the outcomes. DCO Birchenough outlined that a first opportunity for engagement with the sector would be undertaken through the autumn/winter period with quayside and at-sea engagement. DCO Birchenough informed Members that the outcomes of the initial stage of the review, including a full scoping exercise on future pot fishing needs and potential management requirements will be presented to Members at the February TAC for consideration of the inclusion of further stages of the review in the Annual Strategy for 2027/2028.

Dr H Guille queried whether previous drafts of the Pot Fishing Byelaw and associated documents could be circulated to Members. DCO Birchenough confirmed that there is a section on the Southern IFCA website for ‘Ongoing Reviews’ which contains copies of the proposed Pot Fishing Byelaw and associated documents pre-MMO QA process. Members were invited to request any documents not available through the website directly. DCO

Birchenough noted that the February TAC was not looking to reach a conclusion on a new pot fishing byelaw but would reflect on what had been learnt to date and recommendations to take into the next Financial Year.

The CEO informed Members that industry had been pleasantly surprised at the approach taken by Southern IFCA to withdraw the proposed Pot Fishing Byelaw, with a resulting positive impact on coastal relationships between industry and Southern IFCA, noting that Southern IFCA are the first IFCA to take this approach. The CEO reflected that this reinforces the point that the current byelaw process post the IFCA development stages is too long and that this can have implications for the appropriateness of the proposed measures. Dr A Jensen commented that this had been a bold move, and it was positive to see this approach being taken.

Dr H Guille queried whether, if the Byelaw had proceeded in a timely manner through the process and had been put in place, there would have been sufficient flexibility in the Byelaw for amendments to be made to management measures on the basis of feedback or new evidence and whether there are any lessons learned in the adaptability of management that could be taken into the new review. Dr Guille reflected on current emerging issues such as octopus and changing ecosystems and how this would need to be able to be accounted for through flexibility in management measures.

The CEO outlined that all Southern IFCA byelaws seek to introduce as much flexibility as possible in line with requirements under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. In this case, the Pot Fishing Byelaw was proposed to be a permit byelaw with adaptation of technical measures possible through permit conditions.

Mr C Reid queried the data which is currently available that has surpassed the data used to develop the original proposed Byelaw. DCO Birchenough outlined that the data used to inform the proposed Byelaw is now 6-8 years old, discussing how data availability, species occurrence and the way in which species are targeted have all changed in the interim period as well as changing perspectives and improvements as to how data is incorporated and used in evidencing management nationally. Dr A Jensen noted that there have been local projects looking at variations in size at sexual maturity for common whelk which would help evidence any changes to Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) as one example, as well as the need to review external datasets from the District and other areas such as that being developed by the MMO on the recent octopus bloom.

Mr M Roberts asked whether the elongated QA and ratification process for Byelaws may make the scenario of considering byelaw suitability more likely. The CEO noted that this is one of the main points from the last IFCA four-year compliance and operations review and that there is a specific project to look at this process but that this in turn is taking time to deliver.

ITEMS FOR DECISION

50. The Solent Native Oyster Survey 2026: Report to Inform Solent Dredge Permit Byelaw Category B Permits

IFCO Churchouse presented to Members the outcomes of the Solent Native Oyster Survey 2026 and the implications for the consideration of the Solent Native Oyster fishery, managed under the Solent Dredge Permit Byelaw through a Category B Permit.

IFCO Churchouse informed Members that the Solent Native Oyster Survey outputs are linked to Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) thresholds, set out in the Management Intentions Document

for the Solent Dredge Permit Byelaw, and that these thresholds, along with any other available evidence are to be considered by the Authority in determining management of the Solent Oyster Fishery. IFCO Churchouse outlined that Category B Permits under the Solent Dredge Permit Byelaw have not been issued for any fishing season since the introduction of the Byelaw in 2021 and that prior to this, the native oyster fishery has been closed under the Southern IFCA Temporary Closure of Shellfish Beds Byelaw since 2013 based on native oyster beds being severely depleted.

IFCO Churchouse summarised the survey outputs, informing Members that CPUE remained low across all the Solent oyster beds sampled in 2026, and that all Bivalve Management Areas (BMAs) and individual beds remained below the set thresholds for consideration of management intervention. IFCO Churchouse outlined that the total number of native oysters at or above the MCRS of 70mm had decreased by 33% compared to the last survey in 2024 and that there has been no consistent improvement in CPUE across the Solent. It was noted that there were demonstrable increases in some areas but that this is not consistent between survey years and that all but one of the five BMAs showed a lower average CPUE than the 2024 survey, with a continuation of a fluctuating pattern of stock abundance with the general trend being low CPUE and/or low numbers of oysters. IFCO Churchouse noted that whilst there had been an increase in native oyster below MCRS in the 2026 survey compared to 2024, the majority were below 50mm and still attached to substrate and there had been no statistically significant trends in CPUE data through the survey timeseries dataset.

IFCO Churchouse outlined that, based on consideration of the data from the Solent Oyster Survey 2026, including CPUE and other available data, it was recommended that a closure is maintained for all BMAs for the next two years (2026/27 and 2027/28 fishing seasons) and that the permit application process for Category B Permits under the Solent Dredge Permit Byelaw is not initiated for the 2026/27 and 2027/28 permit seasons.

IFCO Churchouse outlined that Southern IFCA will continue to monitor the fishery in line with the Management Intentions Document with the next survey due to take place in 2028.

Dr A Jensen thanked IFCO Churchouse for her report and added that there is a PhD programme underway looking at oyster reefs in the River Hamble, specifically looking at ecological trends alongside bacterial characterisation of the sediment in relation to the recycling of nutrients. Members also discussed ongoing restoration efforts for native oyster under the Solent Seascapes Project.

Mr R Stride asked if there was any prospect of recovery of native oyster in the Solent. IFCO Churchouse responded that 88% of the oysters under MCRS surveyed were still attached to substrate and it appears that the oysters are growing to a small size and then being lost from the population before reaching MCRS. Members discussed that despite restoration efforts there does not yet seem to be a high survival rate and that the occurrence of juvenile oysters may be due to the restoration efforts but that these are not getting through to maturity. Members discussed the potential factors impacting native oysters in the Solent including previous fishing levels, disease prevalence, predation, chemical contaminants, warming seas and the native oyster's complex reproductive process. It remains unknown which factors may be having or have historically had the biggest influence and exactly how the population was or is being impacted.

Ms A Ruscoe queried how the threshold levels in the Management Intentions Document had been determined and whether they should be reviewed. IFCO Churchouse outlined that data from 2017 and 2018 had been used as a baseline. DCO Birchenough commented that the threshold levels were not an automatic precursor to reopening the fishery and that it forms one

part of the decision alongside all other available evidence and metrics, noting that the threshold levels have been met previously for a small sub-set of beds but that, on reviewing all the evidence, the Authority had determined that the closure of the fishery needed to be maintained.

Members discussed the native oyster fishery in the Fal estuary and that thresholds here were based on landings but involved a very small group of fishers operating with a quota system, and that the fishery was very different to that in the Solent.

Ms A Ruscoe asked whether fishers engaging in the Solent Scallop Fishery were operating where native oysters may be found and, if so, whether native oysters must be returned. IFCO Churchouse outlined that there is some overlap but, in accordance with permit conditions, no native oysters may be retained.

Dr A Jensen queried whether King scallop or Pacific oysters had been found in the oyster beds. IFCO Churchouse stated that King scallop had been sampled in the channels in the Solent harbours and in two areas of the wider Solent and that Pacific oysters had been seen but in very small quantities, likely due to their preference for shallower waters than the native oyster beds.

Mr M Roberts asked whether any Category B Permits has been requested this year. DCO Birchenough confirmed that the application process had not been opened and, pending the Members decision, would remain closed to any applications.

Mr R Stride queried whether there were any concerns regarding capital dredging in Southampton Water based on current marine licence application consultations and whether there is any evidence to suggest that the dredge material is contaminated. DCO Birchenough responded that Southern IFCA, as a statutory consultee, had responded to active consultations and had provided all relevant information on local fisheries and monitoring outputs, and that according to reports and modelling associated with applications any identified contaminants were within appropriate levels.

The recommendations in the report were taken together and were proposed by Mr R Stride and were seconded by Ms E Bussey-Jones. All Members were in favour.

Resolved

51. That Members approve The Solent Native Oyster Survey 2026 report.

52. That Members maintain a closure of all BMAs for the harvesting of native oysters for the 2026/27 and 2027/28 seasons.

53. That Members do not initiate the permit application process for SDPB Category B Permits for the 2026/27 and 2027/28 seasons.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

54. Poole Bivalve Survey Report 2026 & Non-Technical Summaries

IFCO Mullen provided Members with an overview of the outcomes of the Poole Bivalve Survey 2026 and introduced Permit Holder and Community Non-Technical Summaries, developed to aid the provision of monitoring information and outputs to the wider community.

IFCO Mullen reviewed the purpose of the survey and how data is collected, informing Members that for the 2026 survey a new element had been introduced recording the condition

of Manila clams sampled against a Manila Clam Condition Index, the index providing an indication of stock condition following harvest, used to establish a baseline dataset against which future surveys can be compared including comparisons with other dredging methods used within the District.

IFCO Mullen gave an overview of the condition index results, CPUE trends, size distribution and landings data for Manila clam and common cockle as the two main species targeted by the Poole Harbour Dredge Permit fishery, and outlined that when analysing Manila clam CPUE and LPUE values against the Trigger Threshold Levels (TTL) set in the Monitoring & Control Plan for the fishery neither TTL was triggered and therefore no further management intervention was deemed to be required in the fishery ahead of the 2026/27 fishing season.

IFCO Mullen summarised that the fishery appears to be operating sustainably for both target species, with observed changes in CPUE and population structure likely to reflect natural variations in stock abundance, with some sampled zones showing decreases and others increases relative to previous survey years. Overall, the results do not indicate any consistent evidence of a decline in stock status across the fishery.

Mr M Roberts thanked IFCO Mullen for the clear presentation of the survey outcomes and asked whether the condition index was part of a national framework or had been developed by Southern IFCA, as well as what level of resource is required for the survey. IFCO Mullen responded that the condition index is being used by Southern IFCA for the Poole and Solent Bivalve Surveys and mirrors existing indexes for species such as King Scallop. Regarding resourcing, IFCO Mullen outlined that Southern IFCA charter a local fishing vessel and skipper for the survey days utilising FPV Endeavour to support and that commonly six Officers are involved in the survey.

Ms A Ruscoe queried why Zone 2 had not been able to be sampled. DCO Birchenough outlined that this area of the Harbour is very tidally dependent and very shallow and therefore it had not been possible to sample the site within this Zone for multiple years, due to the complexity of needing to sample 27 sites within a 2-day window on the correct tides. Based on limited fishing activity in this area and suitable alternative sampling points forming part of the survey, consideration was being given to removing the site.

Members discussed the data used and clarity was provided on how the data from the survey feeds into the Monitoring and Control Plan for Manila clam but is also reviewed as a whole to determine whether there are any combined factors being observed such as changes in catch levels alongside changes in CPUE. Landings data was also discussed and that the best available evidence was that provided by Permit Holders on their fishing each day which enable an analysis of catch against hours fished that is comparable between fishing areas, vessels and over time. It was outlined that the metric of kg/day was used to aid fishers in understanding what the data is showing with this being their preferred metric as it more closely aligns to how they would consider the productivity of different areas. The metric kg/hour is also used internally to review the fishery outputs including at the level of individual vessels. In the event that outcomes from the Monitoring & Control Plan, or another source, indicated that further scrutiny of available data was required to ensure a sustainable fishery, then this data could be provided in a greater level of detail to aid Member discussion and consideration.

Members discussed the differences in catch rates and changes in catch rates between Manila clams and cockles. DCO Birchenough outlined that the fisheries are different in that cockle tends to be targeted to a greater degree on the basis of market demand whereas fishing for Manila clam is more ubiquitous. Dr A Jensen commented that the MCRS for both species is larger than the size at maturity which creates a biological buffer for the populations, also noting

that cockle is inherently subject to more and less abundant years due to the cyclical nature of this species, whereas Manila clam is more consistent. Members also discussed the results from Holes Bay in relation to it being a prohibited area for harvesting, Dr Jensen commented that historic contaminants in Holes Bay and other environmental conditions are likely to have some influencing factor on the patterns seen. Ms Ruscoe asked whether there was any further insight into why the population is seen to decrease in this area despite not being fished. IFCO Mullen responded that there has been an increase in MCRS in 2026 compared to 2025 which was the year when the largest decrease in CPUE was observed and that we therefore may be entering a period of recovery which may take time to be reflected in the CPUE data. Dr Jensen recommended that the data be reviewed alongside the length distribution curves going forward to check for any combined effects.

Dr A Jensen asked whether any fishers in the Poole fishery are landing spiny cockles as larger quantities are being seen to occur in Southampton Water. Officers stated that no landings of spiny cockles had been observed to date, IFCO Mullen stated that the species is found in the survey but not in large quantities.

55. Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Byelaw: Monitoring & Control Plan In-Season Monitoring Update, May to June 2026

IFCO Mullen provided Members with an update on the monthly analysis of Manila clam Landings Per Unit Effort (LPUE) data as a monitoring variable under the Monitoring & Control Plan for the Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Fishery In-Season Monitoring Programme for the 2026/27 season to date.

IFCO Mullen outlined that prior to the current season, as considered at the May TAC meeting, based on outputs from the Monitoring & Control Plan it was deemed that no additional management intervention was necessary to support sustainable Manila clam stocks in the fishery. IFCO Mullen informed Members that data provided by Permit Holders each month was analysed to calculate LPUE as kg/day, allowing for the identification of trends and comparisons to previous fishing seasons.

IFCO Mullen summarised the data outputs for May and June indicating in both months that the LPUE for Manila clam was increased compared to the previous two seasons (May = 35.1% increase compared to 2025, 43.2% increase compared to 2024, June = 32.1% increase compared to 2025, 54.1% increase compared to 2024). IFCO Mullen verbally provided data from July which showed an average LPUE of 136.29 kg/day, an increase of 29.1% compared to July 2025 and 82.1% compared to July 2024, noting that this was a 30% decrease compared to the highest ever recorded July value in 2020 and a 98.2% increase compared to the lowest ever recorded July value in 2016.

IFCO Mullen also informed Members that the Mid-Season Stock Observer Programme, the second monitoring variable under the In-Season Monitoring Programme, had been completed in August with CPUE data obtained from active fishing vessels across three catch zones in the Harbour. This data will now be analysed against the annual pre-season survey CPUE data to note any patterns or changes.

IFCO Mullen outlined that ahead of the 2027/28 fishing season a review would be carried out under the Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Byelaw Permit Conditions, which would include consideration of including common cockle as a second monitored species in the Monitoring and Control Plan.

Mr M Roberts asked whether the values represented the total catch per day or whether it was per permit holder, averaged across the 45 participants. Mr Roberts also asked the average value of a kg of Manila clam. IFCO Mullen responded that the LPUE represented the total landed for the month, divided by the number of days fished across all permit holders and then by the active number of vessels that month. Regarding the value per kg of Manila clam, this had varied within previous seasons from approximately £3.50 to £6.00 per kg.

Ms A Ruscoe spoke about the influence of market forces and how this may affect targeting of Manila clam or common cockle. IFCO Mullen outlined that market forces play a significant role in the fishery, and that in the current season merchants have been seen to cap Manila clam landings for Permit Holders based on market demand. DCO Birchenough added that the figures provided were not uncommon levels of catch and that there was variability in catch levels both within and between seasons, with the current data not indicating anything of concern and showing an increase compared to the previous two years.

Mr M Roberts queried how many days per week could be fished and how many of the 45 Permit Holders are routinely active. DCO Birchenough outlined that fishing was not permitted on a Sunday so could take place for 6 days per week. Senior IFCO Parry added that some of the merchants are not purchasing catch at the weekend which limits active participation. Senior IFCO Parry stated that overall levels of participation are variable, dependent each day on tidal windows, weather and other variables.

56. Fisheries Management Plans

PO Wright provided an overview of the matters captured in the Executive Summary, providing updates on a recent Cuttlefish Stakeholder Roundtable online meeting which discussed the outputs of the previous roadshow, responses to a cuttlefish questionnaire and a review of the Cuttlefish Action Plan. PO Wright also covered outputs from the Southern North Sea and Channel Skates and Rays FMP and that identification tools had been developed to help with increased accuracy in catch reporting, better information on stock health and stronger evidence for future management decisions.

PO Wright outlined that there was a public consultation currently underway on Scottish Led Joint UK Pelagic FMPs, three of which are of relevance to part or all of the Southern IFCA District. The relevant FMPs are North Sea Herring, Northern Shelf Mackerel and Northern Shelf Blue Whiting. PO Wright informed Members that the consultation closes on 14th October 2026 and Southern IFCA are currently reviewing the draft FMPs and are engaging with stakeholders on the relevant species to help inform a consultation response.

Dr A Jensen thanked PO Wright for her work on the FMP programme and expressed the benefits of having large volumes of information summarised for Members.

Mr M Roberts queried whether other IFCAs or the AIFCA were responding to the Scottish Led Joint UK Pelagic FMPs consultation. DCO Birchenough and the CEO outlined that the other IFCAs respond to FMP consultations as relevant to their Districts and that at AIFCA, part of Tim Smith's role is to collate and coordinate the provision of information across all IFCAs to the FMP programme. The CEO outlined that IFCAs are continuing to engage with Defra on the FMP programme and that there is an increased input from Policy Leads at Defra direct to Chief Officers to disseminate information, but that there remain challenges with regards to policy and negotiations with the EU on relevant fisheries and proposed FMP actions.

Dr H Guille asked for clarity on the funding for FMP work provided to IFCAs by Defra referencing previously raised concerns about the funding having been withdrawn from other

IFCAs. The CEO stated that the funding had been withdrawn from two IFCAs due to their not being a point of contact for an FMP, however the full rationale behind this was unknown. The CEO stated that the Defra funding was not specific to the implementation phase of FMPs but covered all stages of the process and was aligned with set deliverables which have not always been forthcoming on an annual basis. The CEO outlined that Southern IFCA have defined this delivery through the Annual Strategy and RPT Team Plan each year to show the contributions to all stages of the FMP process through delivery across the District and at a national level.

Members discussed the progress of the FMP programme and concerns over delays with implementation and prioritisation, with a feeling that this was being compounded by required conversations with the EU over relevant fisheries and policy. It was discussed that currently Members feel there is not a clear plan for wider implementation across the FMPs and that increasingly constraints on resources are being referenced at a national level as a challenge to implementation.

57. District Wrecks – An Overview

DCO Birchenough provided Members with an overview that a report has been produced by the AIFCA Law Group on the 'Exploitation of Fisheries Resources in IFCA Districts & Heritage Asset Protection'. The report considers the duties of IFCAs under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 in relation to the management of sea fisheries resources, and the extent to which those duties require IFCAs to consider the protection of heritage assets within the District. DCO Birchenough noted that the report highlights that IFCAs are not responsible for policing heritage wreck sites but considers how such sites interact with the duties to manage sea fisheries resources. Members were informed that, at present the report has been provided for information and awareness, and therefore, to provide an initial understanding of known wrecks in the District, the status of these and how they overlap with various aspects including MPAs and current management, IFCO Perrins has undertaken a mapping exercise to give an overview that could be utilised in the future to further Southern IFCA's knowledge in this area.

IFCO Perrins presented the results of the mapping exercise to Members, outlining that 19 wrecks had been identified within the District that are mapped with positions publicly available from the Historic England website. Of these 19 wrecks, 15 are protected or scheduled wrecks and have certain statutory protections. It was identified that positional data in some cases was not accurate and that there are additional scheduled wrecks to be mapped, however the provided location data does not currently enable this without conversions which are being explored. IFCO Perrins outlined that 17 of the 19 wrecks are located within Marine Protected Areas in the District, 15 of these being protected wrecks and 2 being scheduled wrecks. IFCO Perrins outlined that 6 wrecks are within prohibition areas under the Southern IFCA Bottom Towed Fishing Gear Byelaw 2023, 5 of those being protected wrecks, 2 wrecks are within areas managed under the Net Fishing Byelaw and 5 wrecks are within the Solent Dredge Permit Byelaw management area. Finally, IFCO Perrins outlined overlap between wrecks and fishing activity, outlining that a 250m zone had been mapped around each wreck and compared with fishing data for the past 5 years. IFCO Perrins outlined that no fishing activity had been documented over the wreck sites, and 4 wrecks had very low levels of activity (1-2 instances) within the 250m zone primarily attributed to rod & line or pot fishing.

Mr M Roberts asked if IFCO Perrins had any data on the age of the wrecks. IFCO Perrins confirmed that data on when the wrecks were first discovered had been collated as part of the data gathering exercise as this was available from Historic England.

Ms E Bussey-Jones offered assistance with checking or verifying any wreck locations, noting experience with maritime archaeology groups and policy and access to additional sources of

information to that available through Historic England. Ms Bussey-Jones also suggested Professor Dave Parham at Bournemouth University as a useful contact.

Dr A Jensen raised that there is a causeway in Poole Harbour between Round Island and the mainland which was the subject of archaeological investigations a number of years ago and although not a wreck, may need to be included on the database. Dr Jensen also stated it might be worth reviewing some of the literature around the Valentine Tanks and that, more generally, there is a lot of online and published scuba diving wreck information should that be of use. Dr Jensen informed Members that the Royal Navy is changing its view on protection of wrecks in regard to recreational diving which would look to exclude recreational divers from going inside of wrecks.

The CEO commented that there have been instances of fishing nets interacting with wrecks in other areas and that this had raised uncertainty over relevant jurisdictions. It was anticipated that further information may be sought in the future from IFCAs to understand roles and management within the marine environment and that it is therefore beneficial to have done this initial exploration of the available information for the District.

Ms E Bussey-Jones stated that although it is not within Southern IFCA's remit there are areas of overlap with fishing activity and therefore, there could be the potential for Officers to help provide information to the fishermen about the location of protected wrecks.

Mr M Roberts queried whether there was any indication that IFCAs would be required to monitor damage to wreck sites. The CEO confirmed that Southern IFCA would not be required to monitor damage, but there may need to be consideration incorporated into relevant processes in the future if proposed management is in an area of a known protected wreck site.

Dr A Jensen confirmed that traditionally wrecks are seen as places where net fishing is undertaken and that there can be concerns over ghost fishing. Dr Jensen commented that wrecks do provide valuable habitats and can act as artificial reefs, however at this stage collating information and having an awareness is an appropriate step. The CEO stated that this exercise was designed to provide an overarching awareness of wrecks in the District and prepare Southern IFCA for any potential future information requests.

58. Date of Next Meeting

To confirm the date of the next meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee on the 5th of November 2026 at Southern IFCA, Unit 3 Holes Bay Park, Sterte Avenue West, Poole, Dorset BH15 2AA.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 17:02.

Chairman: **Date:**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Solent Dredge Permit Fishery 2026-2027
Progress Report

Report by IFCO Churchouse & DCO Birchenough

A. Purpose

For Members to receive a progress report on the Solent Dredge Permit Fishery, as managed under the Solent Dredge Permit Byelaw (SDPB), prior to the start of the 2026/2027 season on the 1st November 2026.

1.0 Background

- The SDPB manages the harvesting of bivalves using a dredge within the Solent. The SDPB has been in place since 2021, and permits are issued on an annual basis; a Category A Permit authorises the use of a dredge to fish for or take bivalves of any species except native oyster (*Ostrea edulis*).
- Under the Category A Permit the fishing season starts on 1st November. The harbours (Southampton Water, Portsmouth Harbour, Langstone Harbour) which form the main fishing grounds for Manila clam, are open until the final day of February, and the scallop fishery is open until 31st March each year.
- Ahead of the 2025/26 fishing season, a review of permit conditions was undertaken, in consultation with Permit Holders, based on best available evidence leading to the development of key drivers suggesting a need for effort reduction in the scallop fishery to maintain sustainable stocks. The result of this review was a reduction in fishing hours from 08:00-16:00 to 08:00-14:00 when fishing for scallops under a Category A Permit.

2.0 Summary of Key Points

Fishery Performance Indicators – Fishery Participation

- The application period for a 2026-2027 Category A Permit ran from 10th August to 30th September 2026.
- During this period 39 applications were received, 25 of these were from annual applicants who had fished at least 30 days during the 2025-2026 season and 14 were from new entrants, who had either fished in the previous season but not met the 30 days annual access criteria or were new entrants to the fishery.
- Of the applications received, there were 39 applicants eligible to hold a Category A Permit for the 2026-2027 season. This is a reduction of 10 on the number of eligible applicants for the 2025-2026 season. Permit Holders are able to pay for and take out their Permit at any time during the season.

Fishery Performance Indicators – Solent Scallop Survey 2026

- The Solent Scallop (SCE) Survey for 2026 took place over three days in February (mid-season), April (post-season), and September (pre-season).
- Key outcomes from the 2026 dataset and comparisons to previous years' data were:
  - For the whole fishery, median CPUE increased in Autumn 2026 compared to Autumn 2025 for the Total sampled population and the Under MCRS sampled population, with the increase for Under MCRS found to be significant.
  - Five sites saw an increase in median CPUE between Autumn 2025 and Autumn 2026 for the Over MCRS sampled SCE, while 7 sites saw an increase in median CPUE for Under MCRS sampled SCE.
    - At two sites the increase in Under MCRS SCE sampled was significant. One site saw significant decreases between Autumn 2025 and Autumn 2026 across both portions of the population.
  - The median width for the whole fishery in Autumn 2026 was below the MCRS, at 103mm. Only one site in the Autumn 2026 survey had a median width above the MCRS.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fishery Performance Indicators – Solent Bivalve Survey 2026

- The Solent Bivalve Survey for 2026 took place over three days in Southampton Water, Portsmouth Harbour, and Langstone Harbour in March and October.
- Data on bivalves including Manila clam, common cockle, and American Hardshell clams is collected – information on the analysis results for Manila clam, as the main commercially targeted species, is presented here.
- Key outcomes from the 2026 dataset and comparisons to previous years' data were:
  - **In Southampton Water:**
    - No significant differences were found for either the Over MCRS or Under MCRS portions of the sampled population between Spring 2026 and Autumn 2026.
    - For the Over MCRS sampled population, median CPUE of Manila clam in Autumn 2026 was lower than Autumn 2025 but higher than Autumn 2024.
    - For the Under MCRS sampled population, median CPUE of Manila clam in Autumn 2026 was lower than the previous two autumn surveys.
    - Two sites saw an increase in median CPUE between Autumn 2025 and Autumn 2026 for both sampled Over and Under MCRS Manila clams.
    - The average length of Manila clams was above the MCRS (35mm) for both the Spring 2026 and Autumn 2026 surveys.
  - **In Portsmouth Harbour:**
    - No significant differences were found for either the Over MCRS or Under MCRS portions of the sampled population between Spring 2026 and Autumn 2026.
    - For both the Over and Under MCRS sampled population, median CPUE of Manila clam in Autumn 2026 was higher than Autumn 2025 but lower than Autumn 2024.
    - Three sites saw an increase in median CPUE between Autumn 2025 and Autumn 2026 for Over MCRS sampled Manila clams, while two saw an increase for Under MCRS clams.
    - The average length of Manila clams was above the MCRS (35mm) for both the Spring 2026 and Autumn 2026 surveys.
  - The survey of **Langstone Harbour** is still to be completed at the time of writing – a verbal update will be provided at the TAC meeting on 5th November.

3.0 Key Considerations for the 2026-2027 Season

- Southern IFCA reviewed all best available evidence ahead of the 2026-2027 season, including the Fisheries Performance Indicators for fishery participation, and the two stock surveys.
- **Based on the key outcomes from the best available evidence, it has been determined that no further management intervention is needed ahead of the 2026-2027 season and therefore no review of permit conditions is required.**
- The introduction of effort reduction in the Solent Scallop Fishery ahead of the 2025-2026 season, reducing the daily fishing hours from 08:00-16:00 to 08:00-14:00 will be maintained during the 2026-2027 season. Having reviewed the outcomes of the Solent Scallop Survey in 2026, the data does not suggest a significant improvement to the point where a return to longer fishing hours could be considered.
- Current management in the fishery includes numerous controls, which collectively seek to support sustainable stocks and a viable fishing industry:

	Solent Scallop Fishery	Fishing for Other Bivalves (not Native Oyster)
Fishing Season	1st Nov to 31st Mar	1st Nov to the final day of Feb (harbours)
Temporal Measures	Mon-Fri only	06:00-18:00 fishing hours
	08:00-14:00 fishing hours	
Gear Construction	No more than two dredges	Minimum bar spacing
Catch Reporting	Aligned with BMA and Solent SCE Survey	Aligned with BMA and Solent Bivalve Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MCRS Byelaw	Minimum size applied throughout the supply chain	
Other Measures	Scallop Fishing Byelaw 2019 – gear construction	Fishing for Cockles Byelaw – MCRS and fishing season
National Measures	MCRS on vessels	
	Scallop Order	
	VMS	

- Southern IFCA is committed to reviewing the best available evidence associated with the Solent Dredge Permit Fishery and to undertake any reviews of management as indicated by that evidence to support a sustainable fishery and the participants in that fishery.

Permit Holder Engagement

Officers attended Portsmouth and Warsash on 22nd October for pre-season quayside engagement sessions with Permit Holders. Permit Holders were invited to book a slot either individually or in small groups to engage with Officers on survey results, management of the fishery and any other aspects of the fishery they wished to discuss pre-season. This also provided an opportunity for early engagement on some potential aspects of the wider review for the Solent Dredge Permit Fishery which is currently ongoing and Permit Holders provided valuable insights into their fishing operations and thoughts on the current management of the fishery. Officers will continue to engage with Permit Holders throughout the season.

4.0 Ongoing Work in the Fishery & Next Steps

- Southern IFCA will continue to delivery monitoring in the Solent Dredge Permit Fishery for the 2026-2027 season through the Solent Scallop Survey, Solent Bivalve Survey and the Mid-Season Observer Programme.
- Additional research activities are also being undertaken to support furthering understandings of the Solent Scallop Fishery, through the Solent Scallop Research Project. Updates and improvements to the Solent Scallop Survey methodology have been implemented and continue to form part of the data collection at the tri-annual sampling points. In addition, the Scallop Gear Trial Research was carried out in October 2026 to seek to compare the operations of Newhaven and N-Viro dredges in the fishery across several parameters including proportions of King scallop above and below Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS), King scallop condition and bycatch. Data from this project is in the process of being analysed with a full report to follow in due course.
- A wider review of management of dredge fisheries in the Solent is underway, the intention being to take account of changes in species composition and the development of the fishery since the introduction of the Solent Dredge Permit Byelaw. The aim of the review is to, using best available evidence, including from monitoring and stakeholder engagement, inform & deliver a long-term management plan to achieve sustainable management of the fishery alongside the marine environment. This review will span the 2026-2027 and 2027-2028 Financial Years with the aim of any updates to the management of the fishery being in place ahead of the 2027-2028 fishing season.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Establishment of a Recreational Fishing Forum Decision Paper

Report by IFCO Mullen & DCO Birchenough

A. Purpose

For Members to consider the establishment of a Recreational Fishing Forum for the Southern IFCA District to provide a stakeholder engagement group for recreational fishing interests across all relevant activities.

B. Recommendation

1. That Members agree the establishment of the Recreational Fishing Forum.
2. That Members agree to dissolve the current Recreational Angling Sector Group, the representatives of which are to be included in the new Recreational Fishing Forum.

1.0 Introduction

- The Southern IFCA District is an important inshore coastal area for recreational fishing activities, including recreational sea angling, pot fishing, spearfishing, shellfish hand gathering, shellfish diving, bait collection and participation in charter fishing.
- Recreational fishing is important from an economic, social, cultural and community perspective with both residents and visiting tourists participating in recreational fishing activities. Economic benefits include input into coastal businesses and support for charter vessel owners, whilst the integration of recreational fishing into local communities provides focal points, continues long-held traditions and provides an opportunity for wellbeing and health benefits.
- Improvements in recognising the importance of recreational fishing and initiatives to engage and improve evidence bases have been implemented and remain ongoing at national, regional and local levels, for example with recreational fisheries being included in Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) and engagement initiatives in the Southern IFCA District actively encouraging recreational fisher participation. There remains, however, a general disparity in the evidence and data available on recreational fishing activities due to there being no mandatory catch reporting and a more dispersed range of participants.

The Recreational Angling Sector Group

- The Recreational Angling Sector Group (RASG) was developed in 2015 as part of the Southern IFCA's Recreational Sea Angling Strategy.
- The group is attended by members of the angling and charter community and serves as a mechanism through which Southern IFCA promotes effective communication between the recreational sea angling sector throughout Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Dorset and Southern IFCA.
- Levels of participation and stakeholder representation on this group in the last few years have been limited and, although the level of input on recreational sea angling and charter fishing matters from those who have attended is recognised and valued, it is felt that there is an opportunity to expand the reach of a recreational stakeholder group to enhance participation, improve the diversity of activities and geographic coverage represented and broaden stakeholder engagement across the recreational sector.

The Southern IFCA Mission 2026-2027

- In the Southern IFCA Annual Strategy 2026-2027, Southern IFCA is committed to the Mission **to foster empowered engagement that gives stakeholders a voice, builds confidence, drives meaningful actions & creates ownership.**
- Under this Mission, there are several specific actions which would be supported by the establishment of a Recreational Fishing Forum:
  - **Give a Voice**
    - To rejuvenate sector group meetings and formats to increase stakeholder opportunities to raise community interests with the IFCA and other relevant regulators

- **Build Confidence**
  - To address common themes raised during 2025-2026 Community Drop-In Surgeries
- **Drive Meaningful Action**
  - To improve feedback loops following changes in fisheries or conservation management
- **Create Ownership**
  - To demonstrate where stakeholder engagement has shaped management decisions and explain where this has not been reflected and why
  - Demonstrate how fishers are collectively driving stewardship via shared accountability

- In addition, a Recreational Fishing Forum would support the Southern IFCA Vision to champion prosperous inshore fisheries founded upon thriving marine environments, utilising the key themes of partnership working, co-development and industry collaboration to support the recreational fishing sector and facilitate a pathway to active engagement and participation in Southern IFCA's delivery across the District.

Recreational Fishing Forum

- Considering the combined objectives to maintain collaborative engagement with the recreational sea angling sector, whilst re-defining the expanding the reach of the current Recreational Angling Sector Group. It is recommended that the **Recreational Fishing Forum** be established, to bring together a wider range of perspectives, interests, knowledge, expertise and evidence on the recreational fishing sector, across all relevant activities, to support an inclusive and representative approach to engagement.
- The intention of the Recreational Fishing Forum would be to:
  - Have representatives from all recreational fishing activities and spanning the geographic range of the District
  - To allow engagement on recreational fisheries to reflect the distinct characteristics, practices and needs associated with different recreational fishing methods
  - To provide a shared discussion forum between representatives and a range of regulators/authorities, including Southern IFCA, the MMO, Natural England, the EA and potentially other bodies such as Defra and Cefas, as well as partner organisations including, but not limited to, the Angling Trust, the Professional Boatman's Association and the British Spearfishing Association
  - To support the development of an increased understanding of recreational fisheries in the District to help inform sustainable management
  - To participate in specific initiatives to increase opportunities to raise interests, contribute expertise, provide feedback and drive stewardship
- It is suggested that the Forum would meet twice annually, supplemented by additional engagement methods as required to maintain communication and facilitate continued involvement.
- In addition to providing a mechanism for engagement and consultation, Southern IFCA aims to establish practical objectives and deliverable outputs for the Forum, for example the potential for effort mapping of important areas in the District for different activities and the potential development of a district-wide recreational fishing guide, incorporating best-practice guidance and fish handling techniques, alongside other relevant information to support responsible and sustainable recreational fishing practices.

2.0 Next Steps

- If Members resolve to establish the Recreational Fishing Forum, Officers will undertake engagement with recreational fishing stakeholders across the District to establish interest in membership of the Recreational Fishing Forum, with an agreed number of representatives from each recreational sector appointed to ensure balanced and inclusive representation.
- The first meeting of the newly established Recreational Fishing Forum will aim to take place in April 2027.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Whelk Population Survey Report 2026
Paper For Information

Report by IFCO Mullen

A. Purpose

For Members to receive the survey report from the Whelk Population Survey 2026

B. Annex

- **Annex 1**- Southern IFCA Whelk Population Survey 2026 Report
- **Annex 2**- Southern IFCA Non-Technical Summary Report- Whelk Monitoring Programme 2026

1.0 Introduction

- The Southern IFCA Whelk Population Survey has taken place annually since 2023, to assess the population of the common whelk (*Buccinum undatum*) across the Southern IFCA District.
- The survey is carried out during key months of the whelk fishing season and utilises local commercial fishing vessels within areas of the Southern IFCA District: Lyme Bay, Weymouth Bay, Poole Bay and the Solent.
- Data collection contributes to the Southern IFCA Whelk Monitoring Programme, to establish a robust evidence base to inform and support future management, including the review of pot fishing management in the District which is currently underway.
- Analysis involved calculating Catch Per Unit Effort Data above and below MCRS, as kg/pot/day to account for variation in soak times. The length distribution profile of each area was also analysed by measuring the total shell length (TSL) and widest shell width (WSW), in mm.

2.0 Summary of Key Results

- Due to recent constraints surrounding fuel prices and cost of living, vessels in areas of Poole Bay and the Solent who were undertaking the sampling did not engage in whelk fishing, meaning that the 2026 sample collection was only able to occur in the West of the district, in Lyme Bay (LB) and Weymouth Bay (WB).
- It is recognised that the sampling methodology is inherently size-selective, due to fishing practices intended to reduce the retention of whelk below the Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS, 45mm) in pots and consequently minimises the requirement for post-capture sorting. Variation may also be introduced through the use of subtly different pot designs between sampling locations to ensure that the gear was appropriate for the environmental conditions at each site.
- The methodology is repeatable which allows for comparisons to be made between sites over time to ascertain any changes in CPUE or size frequency. It is noted that, over time, noting the relative infancy of this survey and recognising that the whelk fishery has experienced changes in participation and the targeting of this species, different vessels have been used between sampling years, which may contribute to observed variation in CPUE and length-frequency data and should therefore be considered when comparing results between years.

Length Distribution Data

- Analysis from previous years has revealed variations in whelk populations across the District, indicating that there is the potential for subpopulations with differing characteristics. Areas to the west generally show larger samples predominantly consisting of over MCRS individuals, whereas east of the District shows an average of smaller sized whelks.
- In 2026, the TSL size-class distribution in Weymouth Bay was more evenly distributed across the sampled size classes, whereas Lyme Bay was characterised by a greater proportion of larger individuals. Statistical analyses using the Welch two sampled t-test showed average TSL and WSW was significantly higher in Lyme Bay than Weymouth Bay in the 2026 sample population at 63.88mm (LB) and 59.38mm (WB) ($P<0.01$), and 39.75mm (LB) and 38.16mm (WB) ($P<0.05$) respectively (Figure 1A).
- In Lyme Bay, 78% of sampled whelk were ≥65 mm in 2026, an increase of 48% compared with 2025. Statistical analysis also showed average length and width data was also significantly higher in 2026 than 2025 at 63.88mm compared to 58.46mm ($P<0.01$) for length and at 39.75mm compared to 35.16mm ($P<0.01$) for width.
- In contrast, the proportion of whelk ≥65 mm in Weymouth Bay decreased from 58% in 2025 to 37% in 2026. Kruskal Wallis statistical testing, followed by a post hoc Dunns test with holm adjustment showed a significant difference in average length between years, showing a progressive decline from 2024-26 from 63.13mm (2024) to 61.20mm (2025) to 59.38mm (2026) (all $P<0.0.1$), while in contrast, average width

data showed no significant difference in Weymouth Bay between 2026 (38.16mm) compared to 2024 (38.16mm) and to 2025 (40.05mm) (p=0.168 and p=0.0974, respectively).

CPUE Data

- 1268 individual whelks were sampled from Weymouth Bay in 2026, totalling at a weight of 38.03kg. 616 individuals were sampled in Lyme Bay totalling at a weight of 22.07kg.
- Statistical analysis revealed that average total CPUE was significantly larger in Lyme Bay, at 1.49kg/pot/day, compared to Weymouth Bay, at 0.50 kg/pot/day, when accounting for a 24hr soak time in Lyme Bay and a 5-day soak time in Weymouth Bay (P<0.01) (Figure 1B). Similar statistical results were seen between sites across average CPUE over MCRS, 1.42 kg/pot/day (LB) and 0.49 kg/pot/day (WB) and under MCRS, 0.07 kg/pot/day (LB) and 0.01 kg/pot/day (WB) (P<0.01 and P<0.05 respectively).
- Statistical analysis of Lyme Bay showed total CPUE and CPUE above MCRS was significantly higher in 2026 (1.49 kg/pot/day total CPUE and 1.42 kg/pot/day over MCRS CPUE) than 2025 (1.06 kg/pot/day total CPUE and 1.01 kg/pot/day over MCRS CPUE) (P<0.05 for both), while CPUE under MCRS remained similar (0.07 kg/pot/day 2026, 0.05 kg/pot/day 2025) (p=0.553).
- In comparison, CPUE across all parameters showed significant progressive decline in Weymouth Bay in the last 3 sample years, Total CPUE decreasing from 2.69 kg/pot/day (2024) to 0.49 kg/pot/day (2026) (P<0.01).

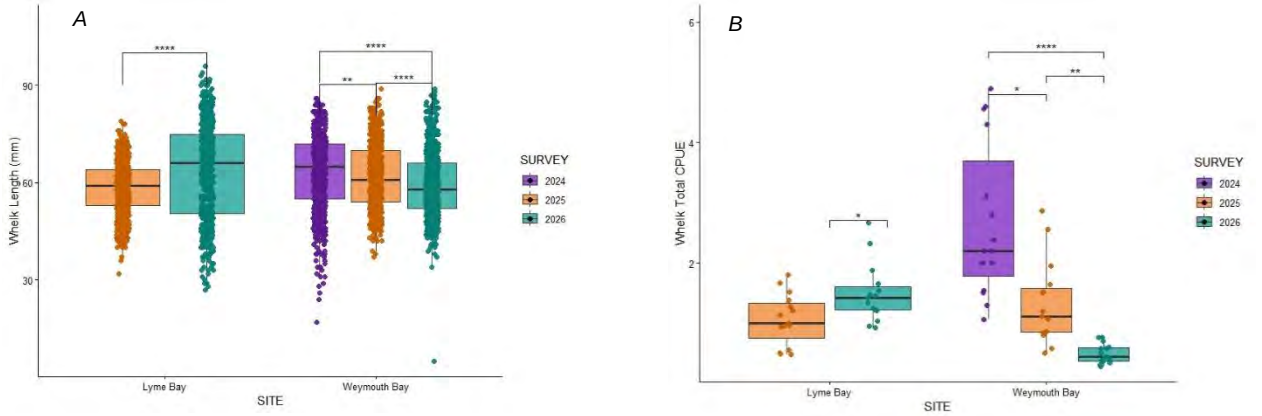


Figure 1 A and B. Box and whisker plots of (A) length distribution of common whelk and (B) total CPUE (kg/pot/day) sampled in the Southern IFCA Whelk Populaiton Survey over the period of 2024-26. Statistical differnces between years are shown by the brackets above using Dunn's test with a 'holm' adjustment, "" representing p<0.05, "**" representing p<0.01, "***" representing p<0.001 and "****" representing p<0.0001.*

Conclusions

- An increase in CPUE over MCRS and larger mean length seen in Lyme Bay in 2026 compared with 2025 may indicate a greater proportion of larger or more mature individuals within the 2026 sample.
- Whilst fluctuations across Lyme Bay and Weymouth Bay have been observed between years, including a notable decline in total CPUE across Weymouth Bay sampled sites between 2024-26, it should be noted when analysing trends that due to the relative infancy of the survey (4 years to date) and a fluctuating fishery in terms of participation and fishing locations, differences in fishing vessels between survey years may have contributed to the observed variation. A different vessel was used in Lyme Bay in each survey year, while in Weymouth Bay, the vessel used changed from 2025 onwards. Differences in vessel characteristics, fishing gear and fishing practices may therefore have influenced catch rates and the comparability of results between years. Furthermore, differences in sample location on a small scale may result in different CPUE and length characteristics, emphasising the complexity surrounding whelk population identification. Increased data collection over time will help identify further potential contributing factors to the patterns being seen and whether fishing practice is likely to be affecting the results seen or whether this influence is less impactful. It is known that whelk populations can be affected by environmental parameters including water depth and temperature therefore these factors and increasing changes in inshore waters as a result of environmental and climate influences, are likely also influencing the patterns being seen.
- The survey findings continue to identify and highlight that features of whelk populations vary across different geographical regions and can exhibit small subpopulation variations over short distances. Continued surveys aim to establish a robust evidence base to evaluate the effectiveness of future management strategies within the Southern IFCA District and contribute to national data collection programs being delivered through the Whelk Fisheries Management Plan (FMP).

3.0 Next Steps

- That Members notes the report.
- The report will be published on the Authority's website.

SOUTHERN IFCA WHELK POPULATION SURVEY 2026

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Whelk Population Survey aims to enhance our understanding of whelk stocks across Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight through the collection of samples from key fishing locations throughout the Southern IFCA District. The survey works collaboratively with fishers completing usual pot fishing practices in Lyme Bay, Weymouth Bay, Poole Bay and the Solent. The 2026 survey report focusses on common whelk (*Buccinum undatum)* gathered from Lyme Bay and Weymouth Bay. The survey forms part of the Southern IFCA Whelk Monitoring Programme, along with the Southern IFCA Whelk LPUE Project, and aims to provide evidence to support the sustainable management of pot fishing in the District, including as part of the current Southern IFCA review of pot fishing. Data will also help contribute to national research efforts and support the implementation phase of the Whelk Fisheries Management Plan (FMP).

Whelks are exempt from EU Total Allowable Catch (TAC) limits as they are classified as a non-quota species. Within the Southern IFCA District, current management practices include the national Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) of 45 mm in shell length, which is applied across the supply chain and to both commercial and recreational fishers under the Southern IFCA MCRS Byelaw[1].

2.0 METHODOLOGY

Fishing areas were chosen in collaboration with local fishers, leveraging their knowledge and experience of commonly utilised fishing grounds (Figure 1). Due to constraints surrouding fuel prices and cost of living, lack of whelking in areas of Poole Bay and the Solent meant that in the 2026, data collection was only able to take place in Weymouth Bay and Lyme Bay. Samples are collected throughout the main fishing season from March-July 2026.

Fishers were asked to conduct their usual fishing practices, utilising their own site-specific whelk pots, which are typically adjusted in height based on sea conditions, tidal ranges, and water flow. This approach ensured a more representative sample of the typical catch in each area, making the data relevant to local fishing practices. It is acknowledged that data analysis will need to account for variations in soak time and, in reviewing survey outcomes, consideration given to the context of variations in fishing practice. Fishers conducted their fishing activities independently under relevant dispensations. Samples were transferred to officers at the conclusion of the fishing trip to be analysed at the lab facilities at Bournemouth University.

2.1 Collection

Date of fishing trip, gear type, bait type, soak time and location (latitude and longitude) were collected from the vessel skipper on the day of sample retrieval. Five whelk pots from each of 3 strings were selected, providing 15 samples from each area. The methodology included:

- Baited whelk pots deployed between 1-5 days before retrieval.
- The GPS position, using the vessel GPS system, was recorded upon retrieval of the first pot and last pot of each string.
- The pots were recovered in-board and all whelks, from each chosen pot, emptied directly into sample bags and labelled according to area, string number and pot number.

[1] SIFCA-MCRS-Byelaw.pdf (toolkitfiles.co.uk)

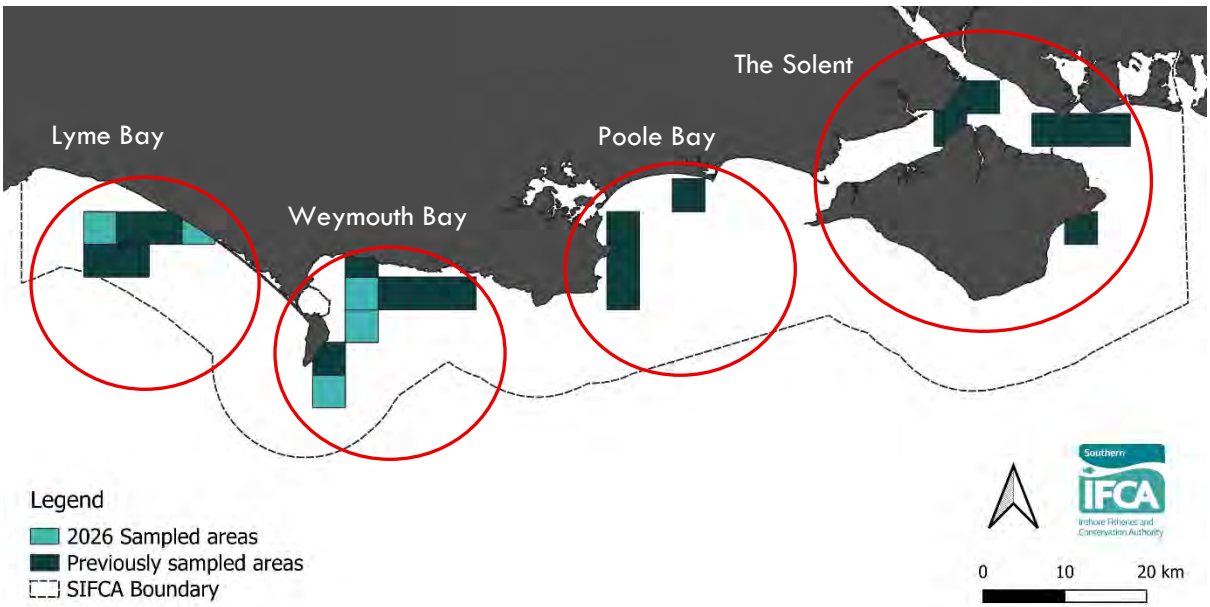


Figure 1. The 4 key whelk potting regions within the District, Lyme Bay, Weymouth Bay, Poole Bay and The Solent, aimed to be covered in the survey, highlighted in red and labelled. Sampled sites within each region are highlighted within a 4km grid system. 2026 survey sample sites are highlighted in light blue, whereas sample sites of the previous 3 surveys (2023, 2024, 2025) are highlighted in dark blue.

2.2 Measurement

- The total shell length (TSL) and widest shell width (WSW) for the first 50 individual whelks were measured using Vernier callipers in mm (Figure 2). Individuals were categorised into the following size groups and weighed (in kg): <45mm, 45-49mm, 50-54mm, 55-59mm, 60-64mm and 65+mm.

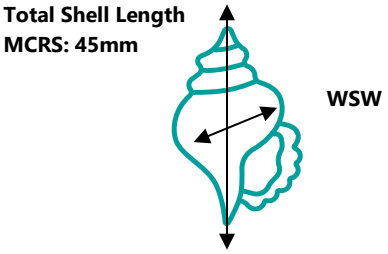


Figure 2. Diagram of the common whelk showing the total shell length (TSL) and widest shell width (WSW).

3.0 RESULTS

The weight data collected was analysed to provide a value for Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE), defined as kilograms of whelk per pot per day (kg/pot/day). CPUE was calculated for total kg of whelk, kg of whelk over the MCRS and kg of whelk under the MCRS. Please note that potting methods used to obtain data for this survey are size selective due to the escape holes for drainage, which also minimise catches of whelk under the MCRS. On this basis the data for CPUE under MCRS will not be fully representative of this size class as it cannot be guaranteed that all whelk under MCRS have been sampled. However, comparisons can be made between sites and over time to look for changes, in the knowledge that the sampling method is consistent.

3.1 CATCH PER UNIT EFFORT

3.1.1 Analysis of the 2026 dataset

Table 1. Relevant whelk weights (kg) and average CPUE values (kg/pot/day) of each region sampled within the 2026 survey.

	Lyme Bay	Weymouth Bay
Total number of whelks sampled	616	1268
Total Weight (kg)	22.07	38.03
Total CPUE kg/pot/day	1.49	0.498
CPUE over MCRS kg/pot/day	1.42	0.492
CPUE under MCRS kg/pot/day	0.0653	0.00607

- In the 2026 survey, a total weight of 38.03kg of whelk was collected in Weymouth Bay and 22.07kg in Lyme Bay (Table 1).
- Lyme Bay displayed the largest average total CPUE across the 15 sampled pots, at 1.49kg/pot/day and the largest average CPUE above MCRS at 1.42kg/pot/day, compared to Weymouth Bay at 0.498kg/pot/day total CPUE and 0.492kg/pot/day for CPUE above MCRS.
- Lyme Bay displayed the highest average CPUE under MCRS at 0.0653kg/pot/day.
- Statistical analysis of total CPUE, CPUE over MCRS and CPUE under MCRS using the Welch t-test, showed the values for Lyme Bay to be significantly higher than that seen in Weymouth Bay in 2026 ($P<0.01$ for total CPUE and CPUE over MCRS, $P<0.05$ for CPUE under MCRS).

3.1.2 Comparison between the last 3 years.

Table 2. The total sampled weights for the last 3 sampled years of the Whelk Population Survey. Please note that in 2024, Lyme Bay was not sampled, and this must be taken into consideration when looking at the total sampled weight.

Survey Year	Lyme Bay Total Weight Sampled (kg)	Weymouth Bay Total Weight Sampled (kg)	Combined Total Weight Sampled (kg)
2026	22.07	38.03	60.1
2025	47.58	40.20	87.78
2024	N/A	40.37	N/A

- In 2026, the total combined sampled weight across Lyme Bay and Weymouth Bay was 60.1kg, representing a decrease of 27.68kg compared with 2025 (87.78kg). This reduction was primarily driven by a decrease in the total sample weight collected in Lyme Bay, which declined from 47.58kg in 2025 to 22.07kg in 2026. In contrast, total sampled weight in Weymouth Bay remained relatively consistent between the last three years, decreasing slightly from 40.37kg in 2024 to 40.20kg in 2025 to 38.03kg in 2026 (Table 2).

Lyme Bay

- Total CPUE and CPUE above MCRS were significantly higher in 2026 (1.49 kg/pot/day total CPUE and 1.42 kg/pot/day CPUE above MCRS) than in 2025 (1.06 kg/pot/day total CPUE and 1.01 kg/pot/day CPUE above MCRS) ($P<0.05$ for both), while CPUE for individuals below the MCRS remained statistically similar between years at 0.0653 kg/pot/day in 2026 and 0.048 kg/day in 2025 ($p=0.553$) (Figures 4-6).

Weymouth Bay

- Kruskal–Wallis tests, followed by post-hoc Dunn's tests with Holm adjustment, indicated that total CPUE and CPUE above MCRS showed a significant statistical difference between years, showing a progressive decline in average Total CPUE from 2024-26 from 2.70 kg/pot/day to 1.34 kg/pot/day to 0.498 kg/pot/day, and in average CPUE over MCRS from 2.59 kg/pot/day to 1.33 kg/pot/day to 1.01 kg/pot/day (all P<0.01) (Figure 4 and Figure 5).
- Average CPUE under MCRS was statistically similar between 2024-25 at 0.11 kg/pot/day and 0.01 kg/pot/day respectively (p=0.751), while 2026 was significantly lower than both 2024 and 2025 at 0.006 kg/pot/day (P<0.01) (Figure 6).

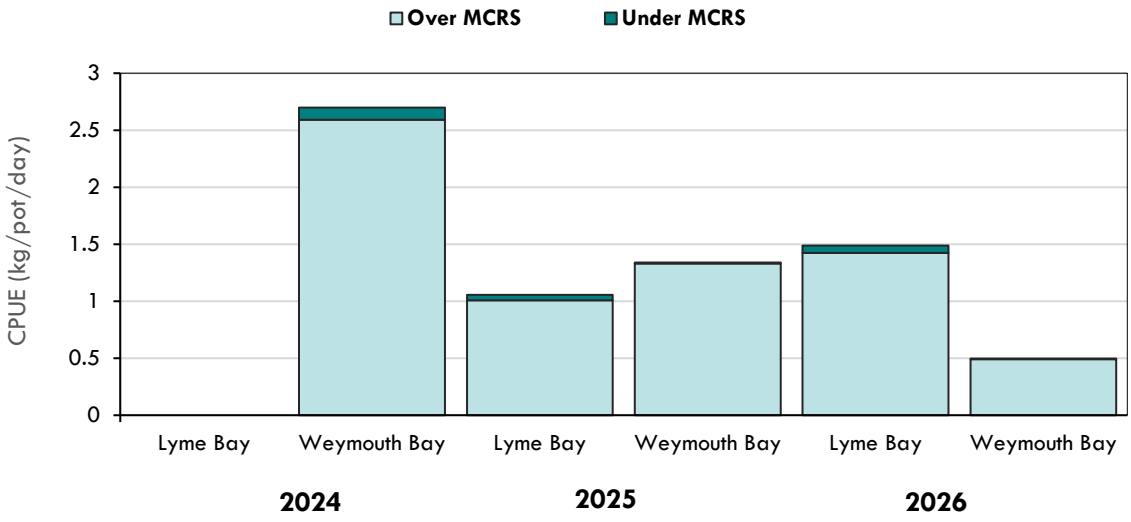


Figure 3. A comparison of Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) (kg/pot/day) of sites surveyed within the whelk survey between 2024-26. Please note Lyme Bay was not surveyed in 2024. Above MCRS CPUE (above 45mm) is represented by light blue and under MCRS CPUE is represented by dark blue.

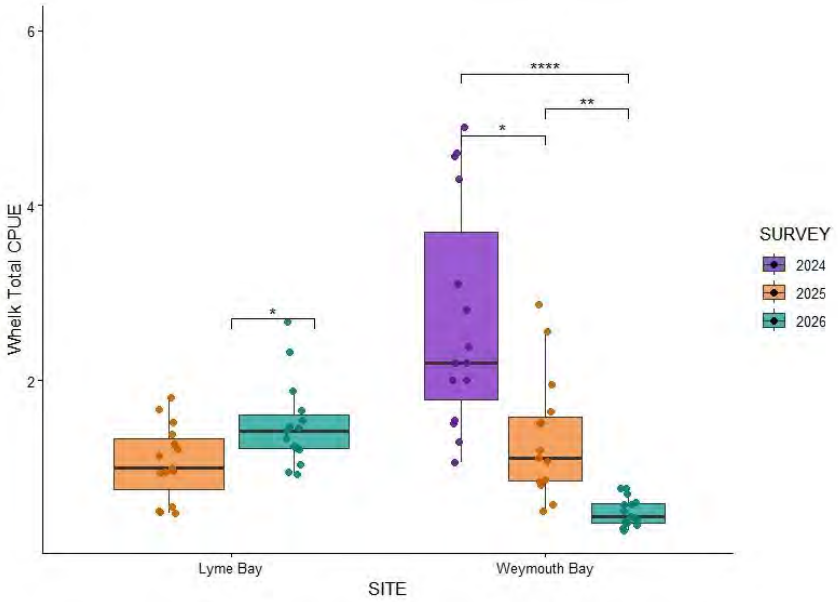


Figure 4. A boxplot comparison of total Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) (kg/pot/day) of Lyme Bay and Weymouth Bay within the whelk survey between 2024-26. Please note Lyme Bay was not surveyed in 2024. Statistical differences between years are shown by the brackets above and are as follows Lyme Bay 2025-26 P<0.05 (*), Weymouth Bay: 2024-25: P<0.05 (*), 2024-26 P<0.01 (****) and 2025-26 P<0.01 (**)

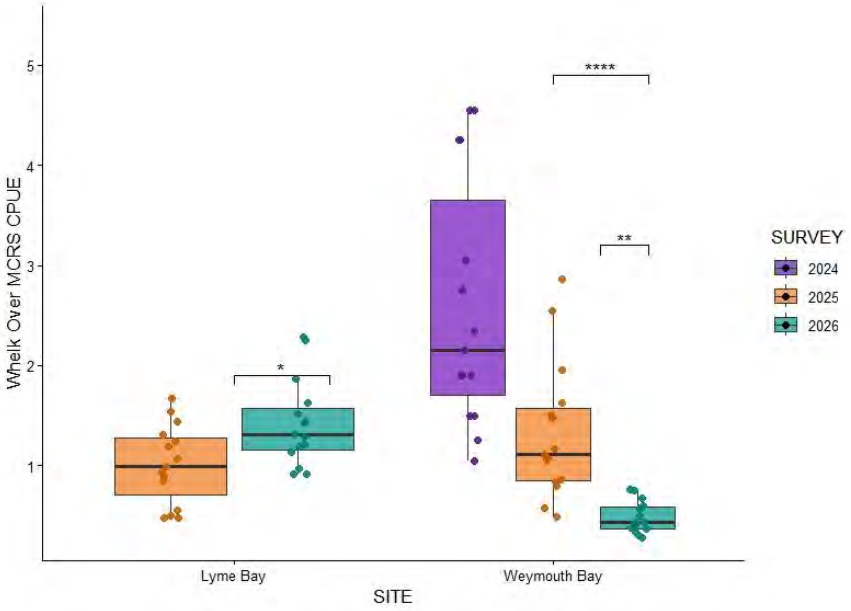


Figure 5. A boxplot comparison of Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) over MCRS (kg/pot/day) of Lyme Bay and Weymouth Bay within the whelk survey between 2024-26. Please note Lyme Bay was not surveyed in 2024. Statistical differences between years are shown by the brackets above and are as follows Lyme Bay 2025-26 P<0.05 (*), Weymouth Bay: 2024-25: p=0.0558 (ns), 2024-26 P<0.01 (****) and 2025-26 P<0.01 (**)

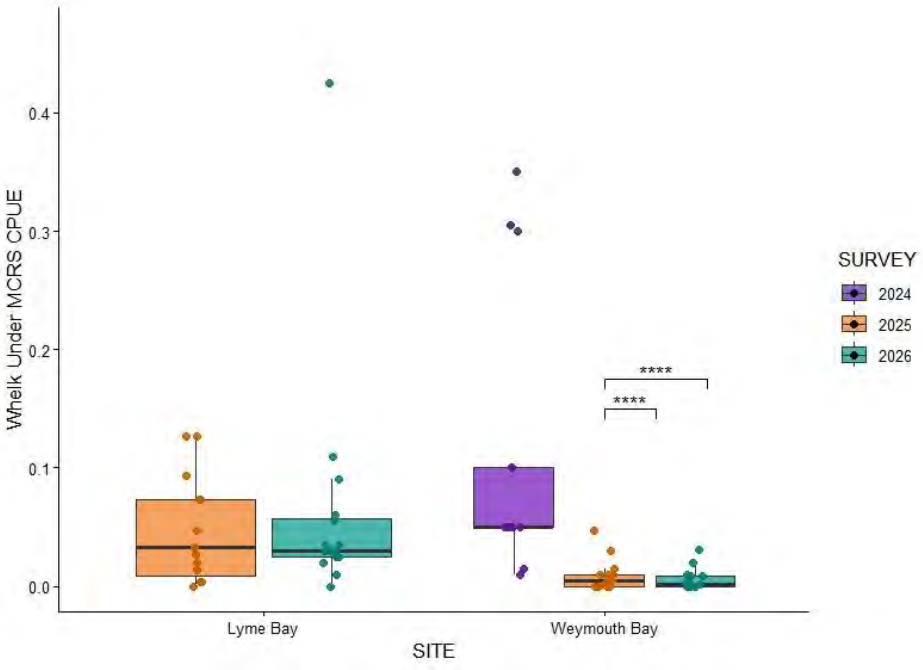


Figure 6. A boxplot comparison of Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) under MCRS (kg/pot/day) of Lyme Bay and Weymouth Bay within the whelk survey between 2024-26. Please note Lyme Bay was not surveyed in 2024. Statistical differences (P<0.05) between years are shown by the brackets above and are as follows Lyme Bay 2025-26 p=0.553 (ns), Weymouth Bay: 2024-25 p=0.751 (ns), 2024-26 P<0.01 (****) and 2025-26 P<0.01 (****).

3.2 LENGTH DISTRIBUTION PROFILE

3.2.1 Analysis of 2026 dataset

- In the 2026 survey, length frequency distributions for sampled sites were skewed towards being above the MCRS (Figure 7).

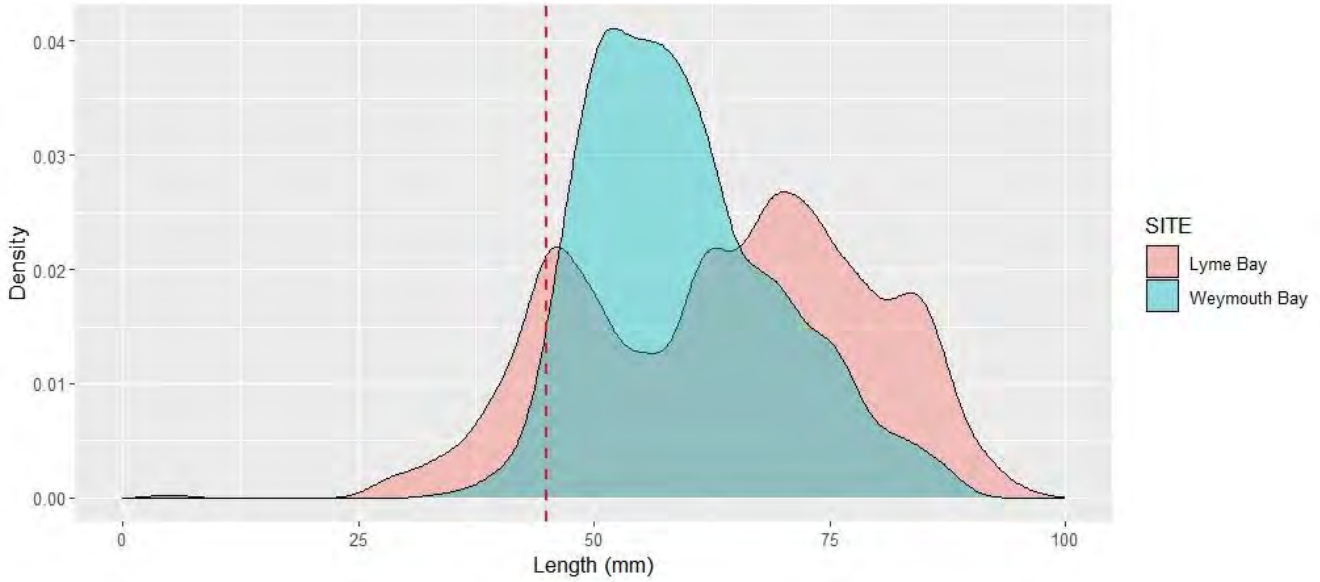


Figure 7. The length distribution of the 2026 dataset. Lyme Bay is represented in pink while Weymouth Bay is represented in blue. The minimum conservation reference size of 45mm is represent by a vertical dashed red line.

Table 3. Length and width data, expressed as mm, for Weymouth Bay and Lyme Bay from 2024-26.

Site	Year	Mean Length (mm)	Maximum Length (mm)	Minimum Length (mm)	Mean Width (mm)
Weymouth Bay	2026	59.38	89	5	38.16
Lyme Bay	2026	63.88	96	27	39.75
Weymouth Bay	2025	61.2	89	37	40.05
Lyme Bay	2025	58.46	79	37	35.16
Weymouth Bay	2024	63.13	86	17	38.16
Lyme Bay	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

- Lyme Bay displayed the largest sampled whelks, with a maximum size of 96mm in length and a mean length of 63.88mm (Table 3).
- Lyme Bay displayed the largest width averaging 39.75mm (Table 3).
- Statistical analysis of length data showed that average length and average width was significantly higher in Lyme Bay (63.88mm length, 39.75mm width) than in Weymouth Bay (59.38mm length, 38.16mm width) ($P<0.01$).

3.2.2 Comparison within the last 3 years

Weymouth Bay

- Length distribution data of whelk in Weymouth Bay showed significant differences between the last 3 years. While this is expected due to the variety of whelk sizes sampled across the 3 survey years, the average size

shows a progressive significant decline since 2024, from 63.13mm in 2024 to 61.2mm in 2025 and 59.38mm in 2026 (P<0.01) (Figure 8).

- Kruskal Wallis with post-hoc Dunns testing with holm adjustment revealed that average width in 2026 (38.16mm) was statistically similar to that of 2024 (38.16mm) and 2025 (40.05mm) (p=0.168 and p=0.0974, respectively).

Lyme Bay

- Statistical analysis using the Welch two sampled t-test revealed that the average length and width of whelk was significantly larger in 2026 (63.88mm length, 39.75mm width) than that seen in 2025 (58.46mm length, 35.16mm width) (P<0.01) (Figure 8).

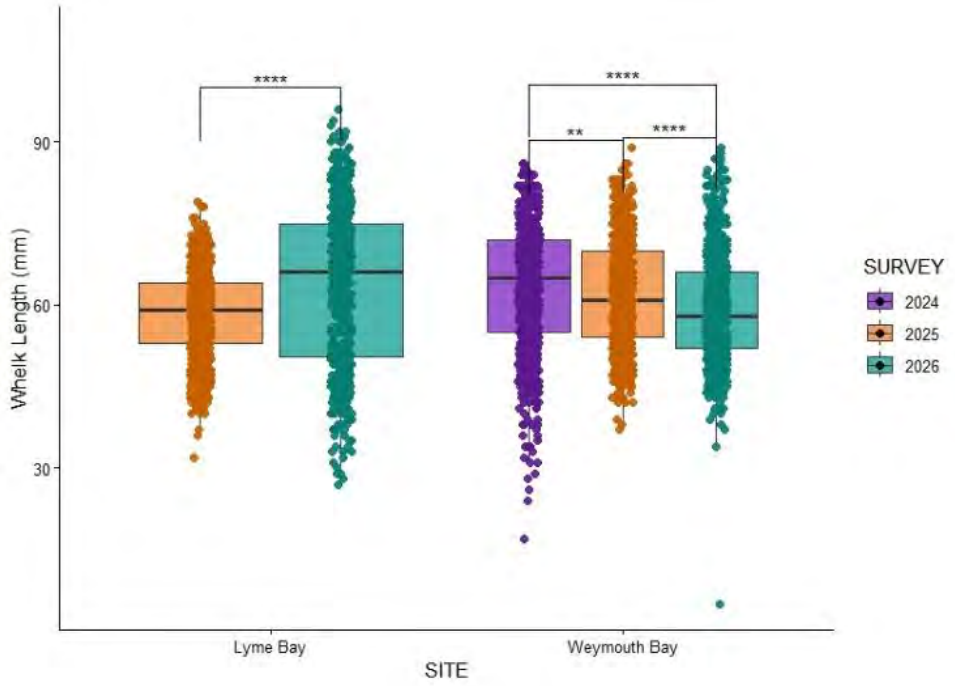


Figure 8. A boxplot comparison of sampled length data in Lyme Bay and Weymouth Bay within the whelk survey between 2024-26. Please note Lyme Bay was not surveyed in 2024. Statistical differences between years are shown by the brackets above and in all cases represent P<0.01.

3.2.3 Size Class Distributions

- Whelks were divided into five size classes and weighed.
- The proportion of whelk within the 45–49 mm size class (MCRS=45mm) was 5% in Lyme Bay and 7% in Weymouth Bay (Figure 9). The size-class distribution in Weymouth Bay was more evenly distributed across the sampled size classes, whereas Lyme Bay was characterised by a greater proportion of larger individuals. In Lyme Bay, 78% of sampled whelk were ≥65 mm in 2026, representing an increase of 48% compared with 2025. In contrast, the proportion of whelk ≥65 mm in Weymouth Bay decreased from 58% in 2025 to 37% in 2026. These differences indicate contrasting changes in size structure between the two areas, with the 2026 Lyme Bay sample containing a substantially greater, and increasing, proportion of larger individuals than the Weymouth Bay sample which is seeing a change towards smaller size classes.

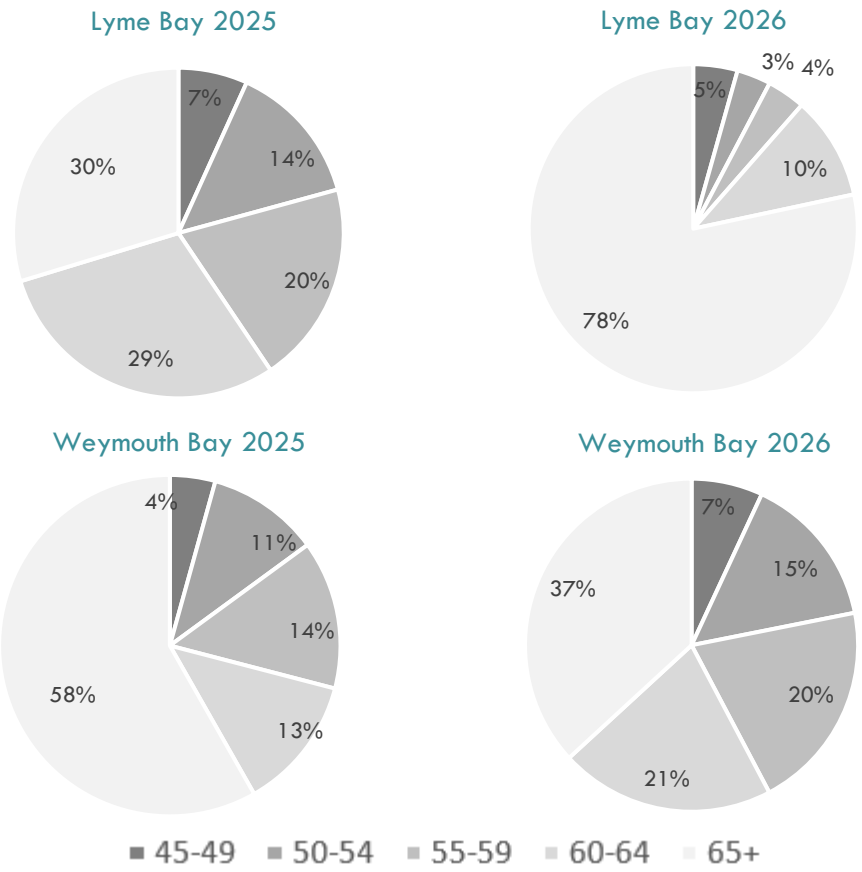


Figure 9. Pie charts representing the length distribution of whelks at each location surveyed in 2025 and 2026, categorised by size above MCRS: 45-49mm, 50-54m, 55-59mm. 60-64mm 65+mm. The colour varies through a gradient from dark grey to represent the smaller whelks to light grey, the larger sized whelks.

4.0 DISCUSSION

- The survey contributes to the development of a comprehensive data series for whelk populations within the Southern IFCA District as part of the Whelk Monitoring Programme. The aim is to conduct annual surveys to build a robust dataset that establishes characteristics of the whelk populations in key whelk fishing areas in the District. This dataset will help identify trends and patterns in whelk stock abundance across different sampled areas and over multiple years. The ongoing survey efforts will enable the analysis of long-term trends to inform an evidence base for this species.
- In Lyme Bay, total CPUE and CPUE over MCRS increased in 2026 compared with 2025. Similar observations were seen across the length distribution data indicating an increase in whelk size. This may indicate a greater proportion of larger or more mature individuals within the 2026 sample.
- Previous years' survey analysis has revealed variations in whelk populations across the District, indicating that there is the potential for subpopulations with differing characteristics. Areas to the west show higher catch levels predominantly consisting of over MCRS, whereas the east of district shows an average of smaller sized whelks. Over the last three years, samples from Weymouth Bay have displayed statistically significant declines in both mean whelk length, total CPUE and CPUE over MCRS, as well as a significant decrease in CPUE under MCRS between 2025 and 2026, indicating a reduction in the average size of sampled whelks and the Catch Per Unit Effort. However, these results should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of a decline in the overall whelk population, as observed changes may also reflect differences in a number of conditions including sampling vessel, sample location (Figure 1) and environmental factors, as well as potential variation in local population structure and distribution. Given that the survey is still in its infancy (4

years) and an observed fluctuating fishery in recent years, different vessels were used for sampling across the analysed 3-year period. A different vessel was used in Lyme Bay in each survey year, while in Weymouth Bay, the vessel used changed from 2025 onwards. Differences in vessel characteristics, fishing gear and fishing practices may therefore have had some influence on catch rates and the comparability of results between years.

- Increased data collection over time will help identify further potential contributing factors to the patterns being seen and to what degree fishing practice may be influencing the results seen. It is known that whelk populations can be affected by environmental parameters including water depth and temperature therefore these factors and increasing changes in inshore waters as a result of environmental and climate influences, are likely also influencing the patterns being seen.
- The survey enables an understanding of the whelk population against different size classes, which is helpful in developing an evidence base related to MCRS. The data indicates an increase of whelks in the ≥65 mm size class in Lyme Bay in 2026 and a decrease in Weymouth Bay. In both areas over 50% of the whelks sampled were above 60mm and over 75% over 55mm. This helps understand how any future changes in MCRS may impact different areas of the District and different fisheries. Noting there is no data from Poole Bay or the Solent for 2026, historic data has shown that for the Solent 73% and for Poole Bay 63% of whelks were 54mm or below and 43% (the Solent) and 29% (Poole Bay) were 45-49mm. This shows that there is significant variation in the proportion of whelks in each size class between areas of the District, which is likely to not have changed significantly in 2026. There therefore remains the need for a careful consideration regarding any future changes to MCRS, taking account of these changes across the District and how this may link to the occurrence of subpopulations.
- It is recognised that the sampling methodology is inherently size-selective, due to fishing practices intended to reduce the retention of whelk below the Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) in pots and consequently minimise the requirement for post-capture sorting. Some variation may also be introduced through the use of subtly different pot designs between sampling locations. However, this was considered necessary to ensure that the gear was appropriate for the environmental conditions at each site and reflected the fishing practices used by individual fishers to maximise catch efficiency under local conditions. As the survey is relatively novel (4 years) and has been undertaken within a changing fishery, different vessels have also been used between sampling years. This may contribute to observed variation in CPUE and length-frequency data and should therefore be considered when comparing results between years.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

- The results observed in the 2026 survey highlight the complexity surrounding whelk populations at relatively small spatial scales and may be consistent with the presence of distinct localised population within the District.
- These findings emphasise the importance of continued, standardised data collection over a longer time series to distinguish changes in whelk populations.
- Further evidence will aid the development of a robust understanding of local whelk population dynamics, which can be used to inform appropriate management strategies that support the long-term sustainability of whelk fisheries.

WHELK MONITORING PROGRAMME 2026

The District Whelk Monitoring Programme collects data through the year on catch and landings of whelk across the district. **This document summarises the findings of the 2026 Whelk Population Survey.**

Southern IFCA
Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

WHY WE SURVEY...

To improve understanding of whelk populations and main fishing areas

Monitor trends and changes between years

Helps inform management of whelk fisheries at local, regional & national levels

2026 KEY FINDINGS...

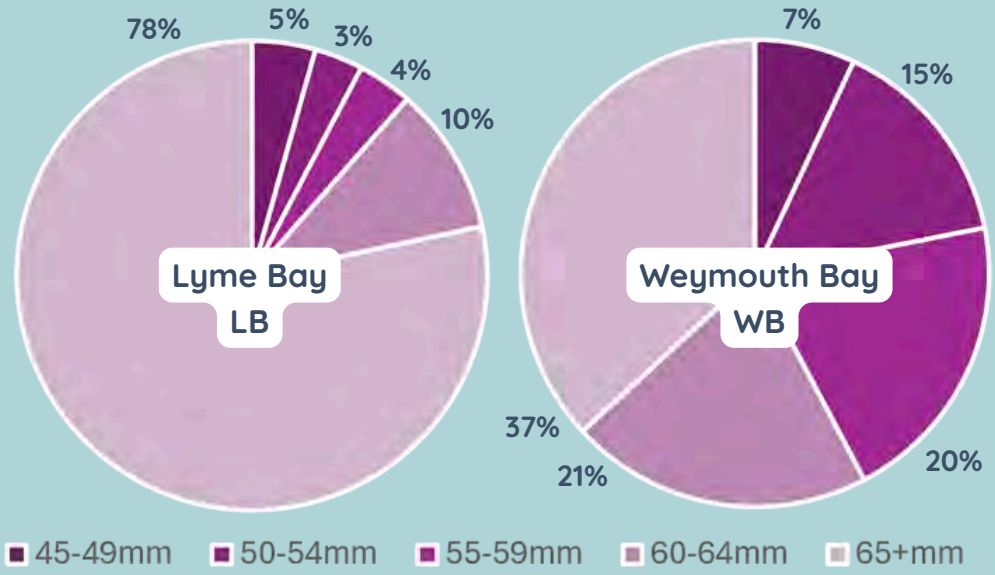
Due to a lack of Whelk fishing activity this year, resulting from fuel prices & cost of living, samples were only able to be taken from Lyme Bay and Weymouth Bay.

The average shell length & width for whelk in Lyme Bay has increased in 2026 compared to 2025. For Weymouth Bay average length has decreased across the last three years.

Total Catch per unit effort (kg/pot/day) of Whelk and that over the Minimum Conservation Reference Size of 45mm has increased in Lyme Bay and decreased in Weymouth Bay, compared to previous years.

2026 SHELL LENGTH DISTRIBUTION...

Whelk from Lyme Bay had a greater proportion of larger mature individuals, whereas Weymouth Bay had a more evenly distributed size range. The average shell length and width were larger for Lyme Bay (64x40mm**) than Weymouth Bay (**59x38mm**).**



LB - average shell size has increased compared to 2025.

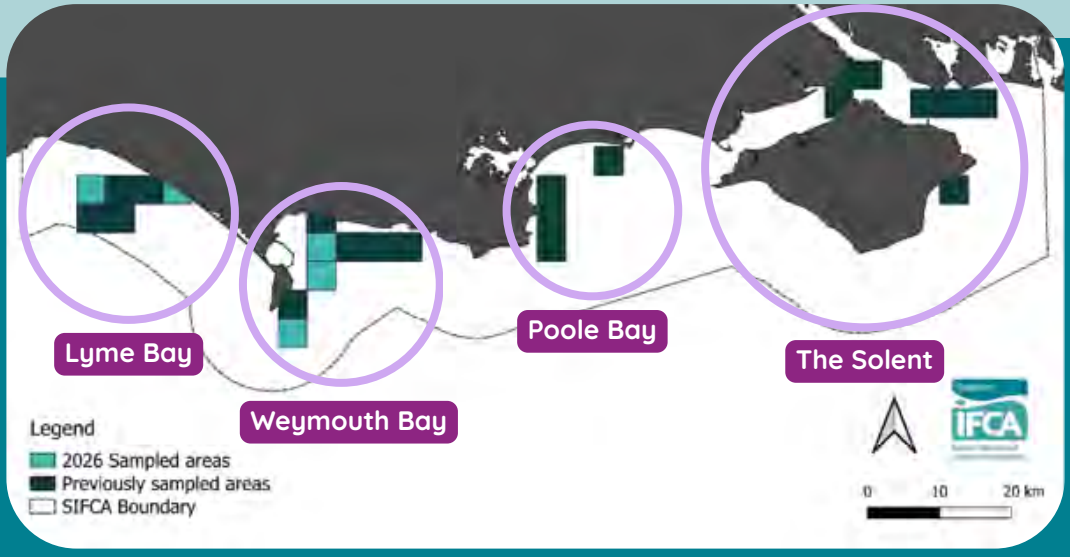
WB - average shell length has decreased compared to previous years.

Total Shell Length & Shell Width

2026 CATCH PER UNIT EFFORT...

Weymouth Bay - 1,268 Whelk collected (38.03kg)

Lyme Bay - 616 Whelk collected (22.07kg)



Total Catch per unit effort (CPUE) was significantly higher in Lyme Bay (1.49kg/pot/day) than in Weymouth Bay (0.50kg/pot/day) on average. For Whelk above MCRS (>45mm), CPUE has significantly increased from last year for Lyme Bay and decreased for Weymouth Bay.

Southern IFCA Collaborate with bournemouth university to use lab facilities for sample analysis

The results of the 2026 survey, combined with data from previous years, highlights the complexity surrounding whelk populations in the district and the changes that can be seen over relatively small spatial scales.

This is consistent with the potential occurrence of sub-populations across the district with differing characteristics.

WHELK LPUE PROJECT

The Whelk LPUE (Landings per Unit Effort) Project is a data-collection workstream which, alongside the annual population survey, contributes to the Whelk Monitoring Programme that informs and supports future management.

This project works with commercial fishers to provide data during the Whelk season. This includes:

- weight of whelks landed (kilograms)
- number of pots used
- duration pots were in the water (soak time)
- location where the pots were hauled from

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

To express interest in data contribution to our Whelk LPUE Project, please reach out to Southern IFCA directly:

Phone: 01202 721373
Email: enquiries@southern-ifca.gov.uk
Website: www.southern-ifca.gov.uk/contact-us

For more information contact Southern IFCA at enquiries@southern-ifca.gov.uk
To view the full techinical report, please visit www.southern-ifca.gov.uk/district-pot-trap-fisheries

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Marked E

Fisheries Management Plans Updates
Paper For Information

Report by PO Wright

A. Purpose
For Members to receive updates on the development of Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs).

B. Annex
1. Southern IFCA response to consultation on Scottish Led Joint UK Pelagic FMPs for North Sea Herring, Northern Shelf Mackerel and Northern Shelf Blue Whiting

1.0 Introduction
- FMPs, developed under the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) aim to carry out the objectives of the Fisheries Act 2020 by ensuring the continued provision of a shared natural resource for future generations, through the management of fish stocks, geographic area and fishing methods.
- Each FMP is developed by a delivery partner which, to date, includes Defra, the MMO, Seafish, the AIFCA and industry bodies.
- The development process includes collaborative engagement between delivery partners and stakeholders and each FMP will be monitored, reviewed and adapted every 6 years.

The FMP Program

	Tranche 1 & Tranche 2	Tranche 3	Tranche 4
No. of Plans:	6	5	4
Relevant to SIFCA:	6	4	4
Development:	2021-2023	2023-2025	2023-2026
Publication:	Dec 2023 (*)	Dec 2025	*Intended 2026*
Implementation:	2024 - ongoing	2025 - ongoing	*Intended 2026*

(*) Mixed Flatfish FMP published in October 2024

2.0 Summary of Key Updates

Tranche 1 and Tranche 2 FMPs

- **Channel Demersal Non-Quota Species FMP**
  - There are several ongoing work streams regarding octopus in relation to the bloom that occurred in the South West in 2025 and 2026. Southern IFCA are continuing to stay aware of developments happening with this work by attending online events such as *The UK octopus bloom: what does it mean for sustainable seafood?* Along with keeping up with the outputs of events such as the Defra Octopus Conference. Whilst there hasn't been the explosion of the octopus population in the District to date as seen in the South West there have been increases in the observed occurrence of octopus in the District this year and Southern IFCA are ensuring that meetings of relevance are attended to keep up to date with national work on this species, and continue to engage on the coast with stakeholders to understand the occurrence of octopus and relevance to different fisheries.

Tranche 3 FMPs

- **Southern North Sea and Channel Skates and Rays FMP**
  - The Shark Trust and Defra have teamed up to highlight some of the species in the Skate and Ray FMP. This plan supports sustainable fishing of vulnerable species by providing some clear identification information to assist with more accurate species identification resulting in: more accurate catch reporting, better information on stock health and stronger evidence for future management decisions. The species covered in the guides are: thornback ray, blonde ray, cuckoo ray and undulate ray.

Tranche 4 FMPs

- There are no updates on the Tranche 4 FMPs at this time.

Scottish Led Joint UK Demersal FMPs

- There are no updates on Scottish Led Joint UK Demersal FMPs at this time following the close of the public consultation.

Scottish Led Joint UK Pelagic FMPs

- There are five Scottish Led Joint UK Pelagic FMPs which have recently undergone public consultation, closing on **14th October 2026**. Three of these FMPs cover part or all of the District, they are for North East Atlantic (NEA) Mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*), North Sea Herring (*Clupea harengus*) (relevant to North Sea Autumn Spawning [NSAS] stocks) and Northern Shelf Blue Whiting (*Micromesistius poutassou*).
  - **North Sea Herring FMP** – covers ICES Area 4 and 7d which includes the eastern part of the District.
  - **Northern Shelf Mackerel FMP** - covers ICES Area 2a, 4, 5b, 6, 7a, 7d-7h, 7j and UK waters of 12b which includes the whole of the District.
  - **Northern Shelf Blue Whiting FMP** – covers ICES Area 2a, 4, 5b, 6, 7a, 7d-7h, 7j and UK waters of 12b which includes the whole of the District.
- Southern IFCA submitted a combined response to all three FMPs as part of the public consultation a copy of this response can be found in **Annex 1**.
  - A number of similar points were raised in this consultation response to those raised by Southern IFCA for the Scottish Led Joint UK Demersal FMP consultation. Southern IFCA have continued to highlight the importance of considering all aspects that make up the relevant fisheries to provide a complete picture and ensure all relevant evidence is included. This relates to ensuring all sectors, all geographically relevant fisheries and the inshore sector in addition to the offshore sector are considered and referenced. The importance of considering that inshore fisheries are often mixed is also emphasised, where the same species may be more likely to be directly targeted in larger offshore pelagic fisheries, and that the mixed nature of inshore fisheries goes hand in hand with the need for fishers to be able to diversify their fishing annually and seasonally. Southern IFCA also highlighted the need for clarity over how proposed research and the delivery of actions could be implemented outside of Scotland, and an additional specific section on mackerel was included to represent direct feedback received from industry.
- A second round of Scottish lead Pelagic FMPs have entered public consultation, closing on **11th November 2026**. Out of the three FMPS being consulted on, one of them is relevant to the District.
  - **North Sea Horse Mackerel FMP** – this FMP covers two separate horse mackerel (*Trachurus trachurus*) stocks:
    - horse mackerel in UK waters of ICES Division 4a, which forms part of the Western horse mackerel stock
    - horse mackerel in UK waters of ICES Divisions 4b–c and **7d**, which form part of the Southern and Central North Sea (SCNS) and Eastern Channel horse mackerel stock.
- Southern IFCA will be submitting a formal response to the North Sea Horse Mackerel FMP, this is the second FMP covering horse mackerel within the District. The Scottish Led Joint UK FMP covers 7d, the eastern portion of the District while the Celtic Sea and Western Channel Pelagic FMP (Tranche 4 Defra led FMP, currently awaiting publication) contained horse mackerel as one of the species and covers 7e, the western part of the District.
- As with each of the other Scottish Led Joint UK FMPs there are a number of familiar points that will be raised in the response to the North Sea Horse Mackerel FMP including relevance to English waters and the application of the FMP and associated actions in England.

3.0 Next Steps

- That Members note the report.
- The Southern IFCA FMP webpage continues to be updated with all new developments in the FMP program - Fisheries Management Plans : Southern IFCA (southern-ifca.gov.uk).

Marked E – Annex 1

Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

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14th October 2026

Fisheries Management Plans
Consultation - Proposed Pelagic Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs)
Victoria Quay
Area 1B North
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ

Dear Fisheries Management Plans Team,

RE: Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority consultation response to the consultation on the proposed Joint UK Fisheries Management Plans for Pelagic Fish Stocks

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the proposed Joint UK Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) for Pelagic Fish Stocks. The Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA) have identified that three of the proposed FMPs have an overlap with part or all of our District waters, these are:

- **North Sea Herring FMP** – covering ICES Area 7d which includes the eastern part of the Southern IFCA District
- **Northern Shelf (North East Atlantic) Mackerel FMP** – covering ICES Areas 7d & 7e which includes the whole of the Southern IFCA District
- **Northern Shelf Blue Whiting FMP** – covering ICES Areas 7d & 7e which includes the whole of the Southern IFCA District

Southern IFCA District Application

The species herring and mackerel are subject to fishing activity within the Southern IFCA District ("the District") by both the commercial and recreational fishing sectors at low levels. Fishing for blue whiting within the District is more limited and Southern IFCA currently do not know of any blue whiting landings for District ports, however data is not collected specifically on this species (or for herring and mackerel) therefore landings into relevant ports from commercial fisheries would be best obtained from landings data held by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) for both >10m and <10m fishing vessels.

Considering relevant fishing gear types, for herring and mackerel, these would be commercial fishing using static or drift nets, and for the recreational sector rod & line, with the potential for limited commercial activity also using this gear type.

The number of charter vessels and private recreational sea anglers operating in the District cannot be quantified, however there are significant ports for charter vessels including Weymouth, Swanage, Poole, Christchurch, Southampton, Portsmouth and ports on the Isle of Wight, all of which are also common ports where resident or visiting recreational sea anglers may be based.

Southern IFCA Management

Under the Southern IFCA **Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) Byelaw**[1], the removal from a fishery, retention on board, transhipping or landing of mackerel under the national MCRS (200mm) is applied to any method of capture other than under the authority of a fishing vessel licence issued by the MMO or other devolved UK fishery administration. This regulation therefore applies the MCRS for this species to the recreational sector as well as throughout the supply chain. The Southern

[1] SIFCA-MCRS-Byelaw.pdf

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IFCA also has powers to enforce the MCRS for this species for commercial fishers under Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on the conservation of fisheries resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures.

Southern IFCA also has other measures in place which would apply to the gear types that may potentially fish for herring, mackerel or blue whiting the District:

- **Net Fishing Byelaw**[2] – creates net prohibition, restriction and permit areas for net fishing within harbours and estuaries
- **Vessels Used in Fishing Byelaw 2012**[3] – limits the overall length of commercial vessels within the District to 12m

Having reviewed the three relevant FMPs to the Southern IFCA District, it is identified that the Policies and associated actions are similar for all three FMPs, therefore comments have been provided below which are applicable to all three FMPs. Where comments are specific to an individual FMP this has been detailed.

Response Points for FMP Policies

- Southern IFCA is supportive of the general approach across the Policies for all three FMPs for sustainable harvesting and the use of best available scientific evidence to support management decisions for sustainable fisheries. In addition, it is welcomed that, through the range of Policies, consideration is given to sustainable fisheries, understanding the harvesting of species as quota species, the marine environment, impacts of climate change and socio-economic and cultural benefits of fisheries, looking at all of these as important factors in informing appropriate management.

- Under Policy 1, under the ongoing actions to work with coastal State partners (mackerel and blue whiting) and trilateral partners (herring) in supporting sustainable harvesting, it would be beneficial to understand how smaller-scale, inshore fisheries would be able to feed into this process. Collective working across multiple partners is beneficial in understanding the full scope and evidence of the stocks of the relevant species and the relevant factors for the fisheries targeting these species, however these fisheries cover scales from larger offshore vessels down to small inshore vessels and across both the commercial and recreational sectors. In carrying on this ongoing action through the implementation of the FMP, it would be helpful to understand how the work with coastal State or trilateral partners may be able to gather and account for the scale and scope of relevant fisheries in joint working for sustainable fisheries.

- Under Policy 2, it is welcomed that best available scientific evidence will be used to support management decisions relating to the setting of sustainable fishing opportunities. At present, it is noted that there are mainly Scottish research programmes referenced in the FMPs in relation to continuing and developing future research and survey programs. For herring and mackerel this is the Scottish Pelagic Industry Science Data Collection Programme (SPISDCP), and for just mackerel the UK-Norway Science/Industry Mackerel Collection Programme. Both of these programmes are based solely in Scottish waters. For mackerel, currently the only

[2] Southern-IFCA-Net-Fishing-Byelaw.pdf
[3] Vessel-Used-In-Fishing-Byelaw.pdf

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research programme referenced for English waters is the action to 'develop evidence base on SW mackerel fishery' with this being specific to the extent of the handline fishery. Whilst this is welcomed, it would be beneficial if further detail could be provided on the type of research that this programme would seek to collect and how this could be delivered. Mackerel is a species of particular importance to both the commercial and recreational fishing fleets in the Southern IFCA District, with stocks having been noted to decline or be more fluctuating in numbers than historically seen. To help support understandings of this species and potential influencing factors on species presence, distribution and risk factors, as well as the associated fisheries for this species, the development of an evidence base would be widely supported. However, it would be beneficial for the aim of this evidence base to cover a wider area than just the SW given that other evidence gathering and research referenced in the FMP is limited to Scottish waters, and to extend to other gear types including net fishing. Mackerel are of importance to fisheries across the breadth of the Southern IFCA District which includes a small area of the SW and then the central south coast towards the SE, it would be beneficial if the short-term action to develop the evidence base for this species also encompass evidence gathering in both inshore and offshore waters (inside and outside 6nm), so that evidence is collected for all stocks and fisheries in English waters, to both ensure that the resulting evidence is as robust as possible and to account for any differences at a regional or local level in both stocks and related fisheries to inform management.

- Also relevant to Policy 2, for both herring and blue whiting, there is no specific reference to new evidence gathering programmes outside of Scotland. It would be helpful if the FMPs could reference how additional data will be collected outside of the Scottish data collection programmes for these species, covering English waters, as at present, a reliance under the short-term actions to use additional data only from the SPISDCP risks missing variations in biological data which may occur in other stocks in waters outside of Scotland.

- With regard to using the best available scientific evidence to support management decisions, the reference to the use of REM is noted under Policies 1 and 3 across the FMPs. Southern IFCA are currently delivering a REM Project within the District and are also part of the National REM and AI Strategy which sets out a national pathway for integration REM and AI technologies across England's inshore fleet to help fill data gaps and strengthen the delivery of FMPs and the Joint Fisheries Statement. A copy of the National Strategy can be accessed online here - IFCA REM and AI Strategy.

- Under Policy 4, for all three FMPs, there is currently a short-term action to work with UK experts to consider the ecological role of pelagic species in the North Sea and West of Scotland, and how an ecosystem-based approach could be integrated into fisheries management. For all three FMPs, the geographic coverage extends into the English channel, with both the FMPs for mackerel and blue whiting covering the whole extent of the District which extends into SW waters. On this basis it is suggested that this action should be updated to consider the ecological role of pelagic species across the geographic scope of the FMP instead of being limited to the North Sea and West of Scotland. This would ensure that the role of these pelagic species can be considered across all areas where any potential future management resulting from the FMP could apply ensuring that the appropriate evidence is in place to inform those

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management decisions, taking account of any regional or local variation which may mean that stocks and/or the relevant fisheries would be impacted differently based on differences in that ecological role and function within an ecosystem.

- Under Policy 5 across all three FMPs, the short-term action to gather and use evidence on economic aspects of the fisheries to ensure management decisions are informed by best available evidence is welcomed. It is recommended that this be widened to include the collection of social, cultural and community information on the fisheries in addition to economic information, noting the importance of species such as mackerel to recreational fisheries, and the intrinsic links which exist between the small-scale, inshore fishing sector and local coastal communities as well as historic heritage. Impacts to these fisheries will potentially occur across all these aspects and therefore expanding understandings beyond just economic aspects would ensure that this is considered and accounted for in assessments of potential management. In addition, it will be important to ensure that there is a process for gathering this data from all relevant fisheries across the entire geographic scope of the FMP and from all sectors, including both the inshore and offshore commercial sectors, recreational sector and the charter vessel sector. This will ensure that the best available evidence on socio-economics accounts for the variations in potential impacts and the scale of those potential impacts from different management measures on different sectors.

- The medium to long term action under Policy 6 for each of the FMPs, to collaboratively collect evidence and undertake analysis to understand the impact of climate change on each species and develop options for how the fisheries may adapt to climate change impacts in the future is welcomed. Changes in species distribution and abundance are already being seen in the District, with climate change a likely driver for some of these changes. Understanding how species may change in response to climate change and how that may impact fisheries, including understanding how shifts in fishing patterns and movements between target species both seasonally and annually may change, will be key in future proofing management measures and providing support to the fishing sector. It would be beneficial if this action could be prioritised for evidence collection as the earlier this evidence base is developed, the more proactive and aligned any additional evidence gathering and management proposals can be to the impacts of climate change. It is also welcomed that there is an action in all three FMPs to explore the implications of any additional information which becomes available in relation to climate change. Early establishment of a process for doing this would be beneficial, as outlined above, changes are already being seen and having a process for identifying and exploring the implications of climate change information will allow for a more proactive approach ahead of potential species or fishery shifts.

Stakeholder Comments - Northern Shelf (North East Atlantic) Mackerel FMP

Mackerel is an important species in the District for both commercial and recreational fisheries. Southern IFCA has received representation from the commercial inshore fishing sector regarding mackerel which is provided here as part of the consultation response.

- Declines in species targeted by the small-scale inshore sector have been observed over the years. Mackerel is one of the stocks that has been noted to decline dramatically, particularly in recent years.

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- Mackerel was a common species in inshore coastal waters in the spring, between mid-April to early May, occurring in numerous large shoals. The fish were reliably targeted using rod & line or nets during the summer period and provided both good income and sport through to the autumn.
- This is no longer seen to be the case and there are fewer fish reaching coastal areas. When shoals do arrive, they are smaller in number and less frequent. A notable change has been that they no longer reliably arrive in the spring, with the previously observed 'season' for mackerel having disintegrated into sporadic, short periods of occurrence when a flurry of fish arrives and then disappears again. This can happen at any time of year, including during the winter which was not previously associated with the presence of mackerel.
- There is concern that both environmental factors and overfishing offshore may be contributing to the change in species abundance and distribution being seen. Concerns over the quantity of mackerel harvested in the offshore zone are held by inshore fishers, with concerns also held over the changing attitudes to mackerel in supermarkets which is impacting marketability across all sectors, even down to the small-scale operations which are viewed as being a more sustainable harvesting method.
- A view held in the District is that a reduction in the quantity of mackerel allowed to be caught offshore would support sustainable fishing for this species in the inshore coastal zone and potentially allow the abundance of mackerel in inshore waters to return to previous levels, noting the economic and cultural/heritage importance of the species to local coastal ports and the role the species plays as a prey species in the wider inshore ecosystem.

General Response Points

Southern IFCA would like to raise the following general response points as part of this consultation.

- Southern IFCA acknowledges that while the majority of herring and mackerel fisheries in Scotland are target fisheries, in the District these species can both be targeted and caught as part of a mixed species net fishery or as part of fishing trips targeting multiple species. For the commercial inshore sector in particular, it is key that fishers are able to access multiple fisheries to allow for diversification, both on a seasonal basis and in response to changes in fisheries over time, and therefore it is important that mixed fishery interactions are considered alongside targeted fisheries. The implementation of management to account for mixed fisheries will need to consider how management in relation to one particular gear type may impact fishers targeting both the relevant FMP species and other species to prevent disproportionate impacts. This consideration is also required for charter and recreational anglers who will often target multiple species during a season or single fishing trip. As one example, in relation to these FMPs, mackerel is caught commercially within the District by rod & line, as well as being targeted by charter vessels and recreational sea anglers to be used either as bait or to be retained at the end of a fishing trip. This species is therefore subject to multiple fisheries, at different scales, and with different end uses, all of which would need to be considered and accounted for in any proposed management either for the species or the relevant gear type.

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- At present, it is felt that there is a lack of clarity in the FMPs as to how the identified policies might be delivered outside of Scottish waters, including any management associated with the delivery of those policies. It is noted that there are supporting documents related to advice on the marine environment covering each respective area (Scotland, England, Wales) which is welcomed, and that the advice from Natural England and JNCC notes that the relevant assessments and resulting management has or is being implemented by the Marine Management Organisation and IFCAs. However, it would be beneficial to understand further how the implementation of the FMPs may be delivered in English waters outside of MPAs, noting that IFCAs are currently not referenced when other 'fisheries enforcement authorities' are referred to in relevant documents, the list currently limited to the Marine Directorate of the Scottish Government, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, the Welsh Government and the Marine Management Organisation. IFCAs will also carry out enforcement that is intelligence-led and risk based for their respective Districts, enforcing relevant legislation, utilising a range of assets to support this process.

- Within the FMPs and supporting documents, it is currently felt that there is limited inclusion of or reference to commercial inshore fisheries, recreational and charter fisheries. Southern IFCA acknowledges that the majority of landings and value associated with these pelagic fisheries are associated with larger offshore pelagic vessels, however these species are not exclusively part of offshore fisheries, with both herring and mackerel commonly caught within the District through net and rod & line fisheries, as well as in recreational fisheries. It would be welcomed if these sectors could be referenced more within the FMPs to provide a more complete picture of current fisheries and fishing effort. It would also be beneficial to understand how the delivery of actions under these FMPs may be aligned or different if considering inshore and offshore fisheries, and how the nuances for each sector and area would be evidenced and assessed to help inform understandings and potential future management.

- Southern IFCA have noted that the engagement on these FMPs has been limited during the public consultation with no in-person or online engagement events offered. From experience with previous tranches of FMPs, it has been observed that these events are used by stakeholders to help further understandings of the FMP and the proposed actions as well as providing an opportunity to offer additional feedback to any written consultation responses. Southern IFCA attended the public event held during the drafting stage of these FMPs, however felt that there was limited information provided at this point as to the proposed content of the FMPs which did not provide sufficient detail to enable early feedback to be provided.

Defra Led FMPs

- The Defra Led FMPs include the Celtic Seas and Western Channel Pelagic FMP, applicable to English waters within ICES Areas 7e. This FMP includes herring as a named species. It would be beneficial if it could be identified where common policies, actions and evidence gathering objectives exist across the relevant Scottish Led Joint UK Pelagic FMPs and the Defra Led Pealgic FMP. As previously outlined, within inshore fisheries the need for diversification is integral to the success of businesses and individual operators, and in allowing fishers to operate year-round and adapt to changing conditions. Understanding at an early

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stage how these FMPs will be reviewed jointly at the implementation stage, and how considerations on evidence gathering and potential management requirements could be made collectively across the wider geographic area covered by both FMPs would be beneficial in ensuring that future management is aligned. The Southern IFCA District includes both ICES areas 7d and 7e, which are covered by these two different FMPs for herring, and therefore Southern IFCA would seek to understand the alignment between the two relevant FMPs to ensure that any future actions and potential resulting management is applied equally and does not create a disparity in approach within the District.

- Fishing using similar gear types for species across a range of FMPs will occur within the inshore area and therefore outputs based on a single species or a species in relation to a specific geographic area which is next to a separately managed area risks disproportionately affecting the ability for fishers to diversify. Where there is overlap, potential impacts and evidence needs should be considered on this basis, identifying any required evidence gathering or potential management measures in recognition of the potential for a cumulative impact. A general example of joined up evidence gathering is under The Benthic Impact Group which is referenced in Defra Led FMPs including Queen Scallop and King Scallop, providing a good example of a proposal to combine efforts where similar gear types are involved, the additional benefit being to promote collaboration and most efficient use of resources to address multiple evidence gaps through a single process. As the CSWC Pelagic FMP contains a common species, herring, with the Scottish Led Joint UK Pelagic FMP along with similarities in gear use for species such as mackerel in the Scottish Led Joint UK Pelagic FMPs and other Defra led FMPs, a clear understanding of the overlap for either species or gear types and how this could be managed would add clarity to the complicated management landscape.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the Scottish Led Joint UK Pelagic FMPs.

Yours sincerely

Dr Sarah Birchenough
Deputy Chief Executive Officer – Research & Policy Team
Southern IFCA