

Live Wrasse Fishery Frequently Asked Questions.

What is the live wrasse fishery for in Dorset?

Wrasse are used as cleaner fish in Scottish salmon farms to control sea lice populations.

Which species of fish are targeted in the cleaner fish fishery in Dorset?

The primary target species is ballan wrasse, other species taken include rock-cook, corkwing and goldsinny wrasse. The removal of live cuckoo wrasse is restricted.

How long has a wrasse fishery existed?

In commercial fisheries wrasse have been caught off the Dorset coast for decades. Unlike in other parts of the country where they are caught in trawls and nets, they are not usually targeted for market by such methods in Dorset, but instead caught as bycatch in pot fisheries and used directly by fishermen.

The live wrasse fishery is a more recent development, this fishery represents a small part of the total wrasse caught.

Dorset hosts an important recreational fishery for wrasse. Specialist anglers target these fishes and novice anglers often catch the fish, as such it is an important part of the angling experience in the District.

How is the fishery managed?

The live wrasse fishery for cleaner fish is concentrated in the Weymouth and Portland area.

The live wrasse fishery in the Southern IFCA district is managed by way of Fishery Guidance measures available here; <https://secure.toolkitfiles.co.uk/clients/25364/sitedata/files/Wrasse-Guidance.pdf>.

Buyers and fishers have agreed to a series of restrictive measures, aimed to protect the sustainability of the fishery, protect important recreational fishing areas and the health of the marine environment.

These measures include Europe's most restrictive species-specific maximum and minimum sizes which are informed by best-available evidence and are designed to provide fish with the opportunity to reproduce at least once before capture.

A wrasse fishing closed season provides additional protection for wrasse during peak breeding periods.

There are large No Take Zone (NTZ) areas and no potting areas have been developed to protect localised populations of wrasse and to protect areas enjoyed by anglers.

Live wrasse fishing is restricted to areas no deeper than 10m in order to enhance the survivability of fish caught, including those returned to the sea.

An 80-pot limit per vessel has been introduced.

Why are such measures necessary?

Research has demonstrated that due to the limited home range of wrasse populations, No Take Zones (NTZs) are an effective tool for managing sustainable populations of the species.

NTZs have been aligned with sections of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), as well as important sea angling areas.

All participants in the fishery are required to submit on a monthly basis, daily live wrasse catch data, including fishing areas, effort levels and total catches. This information is essential to enable the IFCA to monitor the performance and sustainability of the fishery and its management measures.

Is there a stock assessment?

There is no formal stock assessment for the fishery.

How can there be a fishery without a stock assessment?

Many fisheries in England and around the world are managed in the absence of a formal stock assessment. Inshore fisheries managers often manage part of a fish stock (which range outside of their jurisdiction). In these circumstances a 'risk-based approach' is common; such an approach is applied to the majority of inshore fisheries.

Wrasse exhibit complex life history traits; they change sex, they 'nest' and they can be vulnerable to localised overexploitations. They have this in common with other species such as black bream.

How can there be a fishery in a marine protected area?

A formal assessment of the fishery has been undertaken.

Southern IFCA has undertaken a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the fish trap (wrasse) fishery within Studland to Portland Site of Community Importance. Less than 1% of this MPA is fished for live wrasse. This assessment reached the conclusion that the fishery does not adversely affect the reef feature/sub-features of the site.

How many fish are taken?

During 2018 live wrasse removals from the Southern IFCA district are expected to total in the region of 20,000 ballan wrasse and 15,000 other species. This equates to an estimated 11.6 tonnes.

Data from iFISH (2000 to November 2016) indicate that the main ICES Divisions where wrasse were taken from were the west coast of Scotland (Division 6.a; 138 t; 33% of landings, but landings likely underestimated), western English Channel (Division 7.e; 175 t; 42%) and eastern English Channel (Division 7.d; 76 t; 18%).

On the south coast of England, wrasse caught in Divisions 7.d-e were landed into some 70 ports, with the main landing ports being Brixham (16% of Channel landings), followed by Lyme Regis (~12%) and Eastbourne (~12%). The main gears for these landings were gill nets (40%) and otter trawl (30%), whilst potting only accounted for 4% of recorded landings.

Why is a voluntary approach applied?

Defra guidance states that "Byelaws should be seen as one of a range of solutions available to the IFCA and should normally only be considered where other non-regulatory measures have been exhausted." <http://www.association-ifca.org.uk/Upload/About/ifca-byelaw-guidance.pdf>

Southern IFCA is mindful of the scale of the fishery, the willingness of the participants in the fishery to engage in a voluntary approach. If a voluntary approach is not effective then a regulatory approach may be applied.

Southern IFCA recognised that managing a pot fishery alone was likely to push the fishery into other methods or other areas of the country.

How is compliance with the guidance achieved?

Southern IFCA has invested a great deal of time to achieve compliance within the live wrasse fishery. Officers have worked to increase the knowledge and understanding of the rules through holding annual meetings with each fishery participant outlining the guidance measures, improving the understanding of their value and presenting the latest research into the fishery.

Regular checks of landings of live wrasse have been undertaken.

During 2018 no instances of non-compliance with the size guidance measures have been observed. The Authority has received recent intelligence, to suggest two instances of non-compliance with the NTZ areas. Southern IFCA will review current management and demand and consider what if any further management is required to balance the needs of various interests in the fishery and the protection of the marine environment.