

PE2110/A: Protect wild wrasse stocks

Scottish Government written submission, 22 July 2024

Wrasse are an important cleaner fish for many aquaculture companies in Scotland and the fishery for wrasse has developed since the late 1980s. In 2018 the Scottish Government and Salmon Scotland introduced voluntary management measures to the previously unregulated fishery. Following consultation in 2020, the measures were made mandatory in 2021 by introduction of a licence condition prohibiting all Scottish vessels from fishing for wrasse unless they successfully apply on an annual basis for a Letter of Derogation from Scottish Ministers.

The mandatory measures include restrictions on creel numbers and minimum and maximum landing sizes for each species of wrasse, as well as the use of otter exclusion devices. One of the mandatory measures is part of a data-collection exercise which requires fishers to submit weekly scientific data return forms (in addition to the statutory FISH1's and paper logs) to the Marine Directorate, reporting the number of wrasse landed by species for all pots deployed and more detailed information on the catches from the first 20 pots hauled for each fishing trip, including number of wrasse (by species) retained within the permitted landing size and the number returned to the sea, both within and outwith the permitted size range per ICES statistical rectangle. The report summarising the results from the data collected for 2021/22 fishing season is published online (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/wild-wrasse-fishery-2021-22-report/>) and the data collected over 2023 fishing season is currently being analysed.

The UK Fisheries Act and UK Joint Fisheries Statement contain a statutory commitment for the production of 43 Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs), of which the Scottish Government is the lead coordinating authority for 22. We are unable to confirm or commit to the production of additional FMPs beyond those currently in development, however, we will keep this under review and where appropriate and necessary will consider the need for additional FMPs in the future. We have also commissioned the Sea Fish Industry Authority to undertake some initial scoping work to help inform our approach to non-quota species (which includes Wrasse) FMPs in Scotland.

The Scottish Government keep the management measures introduced in 2021 under review and will introduce additional measures if the evidence suggests this is necessary. We continue to work with NatureScot, Scottish Ministers' independent statutory advisors, to ensure due process is being followed.

In addition to the data already being collected, the Scottish Government has recently consulted on inshore tracking and monitoring for the inshore fleet, which wrasse fishers are a part of. The consultation responses are currently being analysed and depending on the outcome, this could present a good opportunity to gather additional data from the fishery. We have also committed to consulting on a broad package of proposals to improve inshore fisheries management, informed by the Fisheries Management and Conservation (FMAC) Inshore sub-group, supporting our co-management approach. Whilst these measures are not specifically directed towards the wrasse fishery we do envision them to have a positive impact.