



Scalloping Fact sheet

Overview

The scallop fishery is the third most important sector of the UK fishing industry, worth approximately £120m per year, and employing 600 fishing sector jobs and 750 processor jobs all around the coast. Over 98% of scallops are caught by vessels using dredges, with the balance harvested by divers. Around 60% of scallops are exported to European countries (principally France, Spain and Italy), with UK scallops recognised worldwide for their quality.

Scallops are widely regarded as being fished sustainably with virtually no discards and the industry is proactive in developing a number of initiatives to ensure a sustainable future. With less than 2% of scallops harvested by divers, the scallop dredge sector plays a vitally important role in supplying market demand for scallops that would otherwise have to be met by imports from North America and other areas.

How are scallops caught?

The standard Scallop dredge is effectively a large rake consisting of a 2ft 6in wide metal frame fitted with a row of spaced teeth on the leading edge, which are fitted to a spring mounted bar. The spring means that if the dredge encounters any hard objects or obstructions on the seabed it allows the teeth to hinge backwards preventing the dredge from becoming stuck and to minimise damage to gear and seabed. A number of dredges are attached to two poles which are towed behind the vessel. The number of dredges towed is strictly regulated and can vary from area to area depending on local byelaws.

The dredge is typically used on soft sand or shingle sediments and rakes scallops off the seabed, which are then collected by a collecting bag made of chain mail or netting. The bycatch of other species is low and the mesh collector bag attached to the dredge is designed to prevent the collection of undersized scallops.



What is the environmental impact?

There is concern, particularly from environmental NGOs, that scallop dredging could damage the seabed. Every kind of fishing or farming operation will inevitably have some kind of environmental impact and the key is keeping this to the practical minimum so as not to affect biodiversity. Scallop fishermen need abundant stocks and a healthy marine environment, and this is why the Scallop Association (the representative body for the UK scallop sector and which is affiliated to the Scottish Fishermen's Federation) is engaged in a number of initiatives to reduce the environmental impact of scallop dredging.

For example, the Scallop Association (SA) works closely with the devolved administrations on sustainability issues and fully supports the need for mapping the seabed and the subsequent conservation of ecologically important habitats and species and backed by science. Scallop fishermen tend to avoid areas where there are many of the features or species that Marine Conservation Zones seek to protect because scallops are generally not found in these areas. Scallops

prefer to live in less sensitive habitats such as sand and gravel, which are naturally dynamic environments due to the movement of water on the seabed from currents, tides and waves and this is where scallop fishermen concentrate their efforts. The areas in which scallop dredges can be used are strictly controlled with fragile seabed species and habitats being protected by Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) under the European Natura 2000 and proposed Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) under the UK Marine Act.

The scallop fleet is nomadic and the movements of vessels is dictated by to a certain extent by season (weather conditions), management restrictions (closed areas and effort limitations in Western waters) and the time of spawning, as the quality of the product decreases just after spawning. Due to the nomadic nature of the fleet there is a natural rotation of fishing effort between areas. This allows recovery of grounds between fishing episodes.



What are scallop fishermen doing to ensure a sustainable future?

● The SA recognises the need for healthy and productive marine eco-systems and in recent years has taken great strides to better understand the issues and engage with the Statutory Nature Conservation bodies on these. This dialogue has shaped the publication of the Scallop Good Practice Guide which has been jointly produced by the SA and the Seafish Industry Authority. The Good Practice Guide (CPG) includes the following principles:

- A commitment to work in partnership with fishery and conservation managers, and the Statutory Nature Conservation Agencies to ensure that their fishing activities avoid damage and/or disturbance to sensitive seabed habitats and protected sites.

- Compliance with voluntary and statutory regulations controlling access to fisheries.

- Contribute to science knowledge base and to assist in the long-term maintenance of sustainable scallop stocks.

● Through support from SA, a three-year research programme on the major scallop fishery in the English Channel is currently underway led by a PhD student at Bangor University and supervised by International expert, Professor Mike Kaiser. The research will address key gaps in data regarding the environmental footprint of the fishery, the types of habitats in which scallops are found and the impact of the fishery on such habitats. Genetic relationships between scallop sub-populations will be determined to assess larval dispersal between scallop beds.

● The SA, with the support of the Sea Fish Industry Authority will use the scientific output from the research to inform sustainable

management of stocks and related habitats to support their long-term strategy to attain the Marine Stewardship Council eco-label status for scallops.

● SA members are also working with CEFAS through the Fisheries Science Partnership (FSP) on an innovative fisher self-sampling programme to provide crucial data for the first comprehensive UK scallop stock assessment.

● Members of the South West Inshore Fishermen's Association (SWIFA) who are affiliated to the SA have recently completed a ground-breaking 12-month pilot study on the use of Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) technology on inshore vessels to demonstrate the ability to fish within a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) while avoiding sensitive seabed features.

● SA members have also been proactively involved in a number of gear trials with different styles of dredges designed to improve the selectivity of the gear and mitigate impact on the seabed.

● The majority of scallop vessels now belong to the Seafish Responsible Fishing Scheme.

● Scallop fishermen are committed to engaging in dialogue with environmental NGOs on scallop fishing.

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