

Fisheries Research & Management Plan

Summary of Recommendations and Next Steps for



**Common Whelk (*Buccinum undatum*)
in the North of Devon & Severn IFCA's District**



European Union
European Structural
and Investment Funds

Fisheries Research & Management Plans

As part of the [North Devon Marine Pioneer](#), the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (D&S IFCA) and the North Devon Biosphere have produced an initial series of innovative Fisheries Research & Management Plans (FRMPs) for five commercially important species/ species groups in the north of D&S IFCA's District.

The FRMPs use existing information and stakeholder engagement to investigate whether a localised, ecosystem-based approach to management is possible and beneficial for each species. Each plan makes a series of research and management recommendations that need to be addressed to facilitate a transition to the most appropriate management approach for the fishery.

Common Whelk

Whelk fisheries have existed for centuries across the North Atlantic and have expanded rapidly over the course of the past few decades. There is cause for concern because of increasing levels of exploitation driven by the growing demand from Asia and a lack of fisheries regulation. Further management measures are needed to regulate UK whelk fisheries to ensure they remain sustainable.

Before the appropriate measures can be identified and introduced, information is required about whelk populations and life histories at local to national scales. In the meantime, fishing effort needs to be regulated to prevent overexploitation. Some IFCAs have implemented additional management measures such as potting limits and gear restrictions to regulate fishing effort for whelk, but there are still many unregulated fisheries across the UK. Fishers in North Devon are concerned about the sustainability of the Bristol Channel whelk fishery because of its rapid development and would support additional management measures to safeguard it for the future.

Recommendations

Recommendations have been grouped into 'research' and 'management'. Many of the recommendations are interconnected and would need to be delivered as a whole for them to be effective. In general, it is likely that funding will need to be sought by relevant parties to enable the research. Specific details should be discussed early in project development.

The detail of each recommendation and the supporting evidence are available in the full FRMP. The research recommendations are also available on D&S IFCA's website and will be shared periodically with interested parties to encourage collaborative research between fishers, scientists and managers that is relevant to management and policy.

RESEARCH

Establish detailed knowledge of whelk stock structure – *High Priority*

Whelk stocks need to be identified and clearly defined so that fisheries managers are able to assess and monitor them and create an effective management plan. A lack of information on

the stock structure of whelk at a regional and European level is preventing further management measures being developed to protect the sustainability of fisheries.

Next steps:

- IFCAs and other researchers should collaborate with fishers to build on existing whelk research and begin local- to regional-scale investigations of whelk stock structure.
- Collaborative projects could be developed and communicated through the Shellfish Industry Advisory Group (SIAG) and the IFCA Whelk Working Group
- Any future monitoring or research should be designed in collaboration with appropriate organisations (e.g. MMO, Cefas, Defra and ICES) to ensure the data is suitable for input to larger scale stock assessments and Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) when appropriate.

Involve fishers in the planning of future research – *High Priority*

Fishers' expertise and local knowledge has been invaluable in investigating local whelk fisheries and arriving at the recommendations in this FRMP. Management should work with fishers to co-plan and co-deliver future research.

Next steps:

- D&S IFCA is well-placed to facilitate fisher/researcher collaboration and will investigate what is needed to make this standard practice (for example, collaborations will require standardised protocols and terms of reference, including for shared use of vessels and research equipment).

Investigate sizes of maturity for Bristol Channel whelk populations – *Medium priority*

Data on the size of maturity (SOM) of whelk populations are needed to determine whether the current Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) measures are protecting the stocks from overexploitation. Existing research shows that the SOM varies between whelk populations, including between populations in close proximity to one another. Finer-scale research may show that national or IFCA District MCRSs are not yet in place at an appropriate scale to protect whelk populations.

Next steps:

- Build on the body of evidence for a more appropriate MCRS for whelk across the UK by iteratively investigating SOM for different whelk populations on a smaller scale (e.g. in the Bristol Channel). This research could be a collaboration between IFCAs, fishers, other researchers, and higher management such as the MMO or Defra.
- Projects can be developed and communicated through the Whelk Working Groups and be used to inform FMPs by Defra and the MMO. This work would also support delivery of the sustainability objective of the Fisheries Act 2020 and feed into discussions with Cefas and ICES on how to best assess whelk stocks.

Investigate impact of climate change on whelk populations – *Low Priority*

It is likely that climate change will cause major shifts in whelk distributions because of their low mobility and high sensitivity to temperature. Investigating the potential effects of climate change on whelk and feeding this into management will better protect stocks and help the fishing industry adapt to changing seas.

Next steps:

- There are opportunities for researchers to explore the viability and distribution of future fisheries under scenarios of stock health, climate change and management approaches.
- Research collaborations with fishers can be facilitated by the IFCA's and Whelk Working Groups.
- This research would help inform stock assessments and sustainable fisheries management and FMPs, and contribute to delivery of the scientific evidence, climate change, sustainability, and ecosystem objectives of the Fisheries Act 2020.

MANAGEMENT

Improve integration between fisheries management and marine planning – *High Priority*

Fisheries and environmental management need to be better integrated and more appropriately considered within marine spatial planning, licencing, and permitting processes. This is particularly important in the Bristol Channel and Severn estuary due to high levels of commercial interest, for example in aggregate extraction and renewable energy development.

Next steps:

- Findings from the recommended research in this FRMP should be incorporated into regional Marine Plans through discussions with D&S IFCA and the MMO.
- This would aid delivery of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and Fisheries Act 2020 objectives, including utilising an ecosystem approach and prioritising sustainability.

Trial limits on days at sea and potting for the Bristol Channel whelk fishery – *Medium Priority*

Days at sea and potting limits were both raised by the fishers in FRMP interviews as potential management measures for the whelk fishery. These measures should be trialled to see which is the most appropriate approach for the sustainability of the fishery and safety of the fishers.

Next steps:

- Trials of effort limitations for whelk fishing require careful planning and collaboration between Defra, IFCA's, fishers and most likely NGOs/ public bodies aiming to help the fishing industry such as the Blue Marine Foundation.
- Trialling the viability of effort limitations can feed into future whelk fisheries management and contribute to the delivery of the evidence and sustainability objectives of the Fisheries Act 2020.

Improve communication and engagement with fishers to establish stronger fisheries enforcement presence in the north of D&S IFCA's District – *Medium Priority*

To enable enforcement officers to better tackle non-compliance and illegal fishing in the north of D&S IFCA's District there needs to be comprehensive reporting of illegal activity from fishers in the area and improved communication between officers, fishers, and other local stakeholders.

Next steps:

- D&S IFCA will improve collaboration and engagement through activities such as virtual roadshows for ports, sectoral meetings and future FRMP interviews. More information about planned activities is available in the D&S IFCA's Annual Plan and Communications Strategy, accessible via the D&S IFCA website.

Implement appropriate regional MCRSs across UK and Europe – *Medium Priority*

Once local-scale SOM information for exploited whelk populations is available appropriate MCRSs should be introduced to prevent overexploitation (see research recommendation on SOM). There have been a small number of regional increases in the MCRS of whelk in the UK and Europe but whelk populations across large regions of the UK and Europe remain vulnerable to overexploitation. The MCRS for whelk in North Devon has been increased but this may need to be reviewed if different stocks of whelk with different SOM are identified in the region.

Next steps:

- Next steps for this recommendation will depend on the findings of the recommended research. Management can stay informed on research and the best course of action through expert groups such as the Whelk Working Groups.
- It may be necessary to extend management measures out past the six nautical mile boundary in areas where high levels of whelk fishing occur to protect offshore populations from overfishing. This would ensure that the inshore fishing fleet are not disadvantaged by a difference in management measures and would contribute to the delivery of the sustainability objective of the Fisheries Act 2020.

Additional information

You can download the full FRMP here –

<https://www.devonandsevernifca.gov.uk/Environment-and-Research/Fisheries-Research-Management-Plans/FRMP-Documents>

If you would like to speak to someone about the information in this plan, please get in touch using the details below:

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D&S IFCA is developing a second series of FRMPs for a range of species across the D&S IFCA's District. More information is available from the Fisheries Research and Management Plan Officer, or at <https://www.devonandsevernifca.gov.uk/Environment-and-Research/Fisheries-Research-Management-Plans>