

Recommendation paper

Title: Finfish Fishery – closure of grid squares

Date: 3rd March 2023

Report of: Sheena Ross

1. Background:

Licence conditions across A, G and W licence, Part 2 state:

If a vessel exceeds the 10% by-catch limit of non-permitted species, the grid square reported as the mid-day position is then closed to that vessel for fishing for 10 days and the vessel must not enter the closed grid square unless all nets and fishing gear are stowed in such a way as to be unavailable for use.

It's also worth noting that if a vessel changes licence type to continue in the same square and we don't believe this is valid, the notification to change will be queried by FISHOPS who will continue to monitor by-catch levels.

2. Presentation and consultations:

2.1 During meetings with overseas visiting partners during the final week of February 2023, Andrea mentioned the possibility that if a vessel exceeds the by-catch limit in a particular grid square, that this should close the grid square for the whole of the fleet fishing under that licence type, for a period of 10 days. The idea appears to have been well received at the time and there was broad agreement that this would be a suitable measure for DNR to propose.

2.2 This approach also goes some way to supporting the letter DNR received from the majority of ITQ 'A' licence holders who expressed their concerns over the high levels of Hake by-catch previously reported in both G and W licence fisheries.

2.3 A discussion email was circulated to industry on 6th March and the issue was also raised at Fisheries Committee at 0900.

During a discussion yesterday at our office, I mentioned an idea that had been suggested some years ago that ultimately didn't come to anything but may be worth considering this year. Would fishing companies that have effort available, wish to consider combining 2 licence types to enable the vessel to continue fishing without the pressure of having to move squares/avoid them for 10 days?

- For example, we could consider a G+A day fishing days and create a dummy code (i.e. 'J') in the database that would allow vessels to fish for Illex and Hake and other permitted finfish species.
- This option may be preferable to vessels continually changing grid squares and remove some of the stress associated with vessels trying to keep their fishing operations 'legal'
- Clearly, no licence type allows vessels to fish for Grenadier, Toothfish, Skate (the latter due to net restrictions) therefore if by-catch levels of these species occur, the grid square closure would continue to apply.

Finer points still need to be finalised but hopefully this email will stimulate ideas and can be discussed either at FFLG or prior to that if preferred. If anyone wishes to make direct representations to us outwith the group, then please feel free to do so.

3. Recommendation:

3.1 We therefore propose that FISHOPS continue to monitor catches on a daily basis and that they will circulate a daily update of grid squares that are closed for a particular licence type and when that restriction would expire. This will take the form of an excel sheet that is updated daily giving details of grid squares that are closed, the licence type/s which they are closed to and the date on which they reopen. These closures will apply to all vessels and would be in effect from midnight on the day that the email has been distributed and remain in force for a 10 day period, as per licence conditions. When a grid square reopens it would reopen from 00:01 on the date stated on the sheet.

Approved

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sheena Ross', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sheena Ross
Fisheries Manager