

OPINION

How the Jersey Marine Spatial Plan would allow our fisheries to thrive

Wednesday was World Fisheries Day. Fishing is an important part of Jersey's heritage and it must be safeguarded

Heritage and history of fishing in Jersey

THE fishing industry is part of our island's identity. We have had a long, rich and diverse fishing heritage where practices even date back to prehistoric times. We know this from local archaeological finds such as hunting flints and even tidal fish traps found around our coastline and offshore reefs. When records began, Jersey's fishery mainly consisted of conger eels and mackerel. In following centuries, many Jersey vessels travelled to Newfoundland to fish for Atlantic cod.

Most notably in recent history, Jersey's oyster fishery in the 19th century has arguably been the largest local fishery to date, in terms of employment. The fishery targeted native oysters, mainly located in beds off Jersey's east coast. The fishery started in the early 1800s and proceeded to expand to over 400 vessels, employing numerous crew and thousands of people on land within just a few decades. By 1862, the native oyster stock collapsed due to high intensities of fishing and ten years later, only six vessels remained.

Crab and lobster fishing started to pick up in the late 1960s and significantly expanded towards the end of the century. Fast forward to today, Jersey's fishing industry consists of about 130 registered local commercial vessels, 137 commercially licensed French vessels and a thriving local recreational industry.

The status of Jersey's fishing industry

About 80% of local full-time commercial fishing vessels operate with low-impact, static forms of fishing. These vessels target lobster and crab using pots, which financially account for about 70% of all seafood landed in Jersey. Some vessels use other low-impact, static forms of fishing gears such as scallop diving, hook and line, and netting, which mainly target scallops and wetfish such as bream, mackerel and bass. Scallop



Picture: MATT SHARP

Freddie Watson, Jersey project manager for Blue Marine Foundation

dredgers (approximately seven local vessels) make up the remaining full-time vessels.

Over the years, we have seen declines in landings relative to fishing effort. This essentially means that at the moment, less is being caught in each shellfish pot compared to previous years. Whelk, lobster and brown crab landings are down 42%, 43% and 65% respectively from their peak. As of 2022, Jersey's fishery directly supported around 180 jobs. When

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compared to historic highs of well over 1,000 jobs in the 19th century, the impact of the decline in Jersey's fishery on local livelihoods and the Island economy is clear.

The UK's departure from the EU has resulted in a new trade agreement, which gives Jersey the right to licence and manage all domestic and foreign fishing vessels within its waters. This is the first time that Jersey essentially has had full control over the management of its waters since 1839, when the previous joint fishing agreement with France (Granville Bay Agreement) came into force. Now is the perfect opportunity for Jersey to bring in the correct marine management, much of which is proposed in the recently released Jersey Marine Spatial Plan.

The solution

The benefit of protecting areas of sea where activities are restricted to allow nature and fisheries to recover is well evidenced from around the world and Jersey's government has committed to protecting 30% of Island waters by 2030.

However, there is a lot of confusion as to what you are allowed to do in marine protected areas. Many people are under the impression that you are not allowed to fish at all in these areas. This is absolutely not the case.

Jersey already has a small network of marine protected areas, covering 6.5% of our waters, where commercial and recreational potting, netting, hook and line, and hand-diving are all still allowed. These methods are known as “static” forms of fishing and are considered sustainable if well-managed. The only prohibited activities in protected areas are dredging and trawling, which are more damaging to marine habitats when compared to the static forms of fishing.

From a fishing perspective, local marine protected areas essentially act as “priority areas” for static fishing methods, where gear conflict with trawling and dredging is reduced as well as impacts on the seabed from dredging and trawling. Four years' worth of local monitoring has shown that biodiversity is significantly higher in the protected areas, proving that in Jersey, marine-protected areas work well to resolve conflicts, safeguard sustainable fishing, while also improving biodiversity and fish stocks. The only exception where all fishing and any other extractive activities are not allowed is at Portelet Bay.

One of the notable priorities in the draft Jersey Marine Spatial Plan is to extend marine protected areas from the current 6.5% to 27% of Jersey's territorial waters, across a mixture of inshore and offshore areas. This covers key, sensitive and shallow habitats, particularly kelp, and maerl. These habitats act as key nursery, feeding, shelter and breeding grounds for an array of marine life, such as scallops, cuttlefish, bass, crabs and lobsters to name a few.

By protecting these important marine habitats from dredging and trawling, they will be given the opportunity to recover and thrive, securing their long-term health and resilience. The proposed protection would significantly contribute to their reproductive success and growth, not just improving our marine biodiversity, but also leading to healthier fish stocks on which our fishing community relies on for income and recreation. Protected areas like these, where only low-impact fishing is permitted, have proven on numerous occasions the remarkable benefits they have on local fishing industries.

How you can help

It's clear that fishing has historically been, and remains, a significant part of our island's culture. With the way trends are going, there is a real risk that we could lose this. The serious concerns around the health of our fish stocks, biodiversity loss and impacts of climate change, indicates that change and actions are needed in order to mitigate these threats. Real, large-scale and meaningful marine protection can be delivered that will have a benefit for everyone.

The government's marine spatial plan is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to protect our seas while supporting sustainable livelihoods and local economies. The public consultation is now open until 2 January and it needs your support.

Have your say on the future of Jersey's seas by scanning the QR code below and responding to the online form.



What do you think?

- Do you think the Island's marine protected areas should be extended?
- What else could be done to help the Island's fishing industry?

Send your thoughts to editorial@jerseyeveningpost.com or [#jointhedebate](https://twitter.com/jointhedebate) on social media

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