

EASTERN SEA FISHERIES JOINT COMMITTEE

Matthew Mander
Clerk and Chief Fishery Officer

Over 100 years of Fisheries Management

Established 1894



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Patrick Cotter
Defra
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3-8 Whitehall Place
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8th November 2006

Dear Mr Cotter

Consultation on proposals for increasing the minimum landing size of lobster

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Defra consultation on measures to increase the minimum landing size of lobster.

The members of the Joint Committee considered the proposals at the Statutory meeting held on 25th October 2006. The Officers of the Joint Committee had previously consulted with commercial interests and their views and opinions raised were reflected in the Officers' supporting paper for the Statutory meeting (enclosed).

Members were provided with the background to this item. The members were informed that Defra had consulted on a national ban on the landing of berried lobsters and had chosen not to proceed with the legislation as they felt it would be difficult to enforce. As a result of this, DEFRA had then gone out to consultation regarding an increase in the Minimum landing Size (Min.LS.) of lobster and a possible introduction of a Maximum Landing Size (Max.LS). The Clerk and Chief Fishery Officer Mathew Mander stated that he was optimistic that in the very near future the Committee's Research Officers would be in a position to announce that an inexpensive method of proving that berried lobsters had been scrubbed at sea prior to landing was available.

The members of the Joint Committee considered the four options in the consultation at length. It was acknowledged that the principle of increasing the minimum landing size of lobsters to allow the female lobsters an increased opportunity to spawn was desirable. However members held great reservations in the manner in which an increased Min.LS would be introduced and the implications this would have on the inshore fishing industry within the Eastern Sea Fisheries Joint Committee district. I draw your attention specifically to the enclosed economic analysis that looked at the financial impact on North Norfolk fishermen that each of the options suggested in the consultation would have. I feel that this will be useful to you when scaled up nationally. It is clear that the financial impact on fishermen in the Anglian region (determined by Defra in the consultation document) significantly underestimates the economic impact that these measures will have.

It was recognised that a combined option of increasing the Min.LS in stages and also introducing the Max.LS was not an option. It was felt that this would be the best way of introducing any change to legislation. If the increase in Min.LS were introduced on its own prior to the introduction of a Max.LS then fishermen would simply increase their effort to target those larger lobsters within the fishery through the deployment of greater numbers of pots or the alteration of pots to increase their fishing specificity for larger lobsters. If this were to occur, then the proposed benefits of having an untouchable brood stock would not result and that this brood stock would not be augmented in the future by lobsters surviving from the Min.LS and reaching the Max.LS increased effort in the fishery targeting this 'slot' i.e. 90mm to 120mm would occur. Therefore it was widely accepted that any introduction of a Max.LS

should be introduced simultaneously with any increase in the Min.LS. The protection of both male and female lobsters was discussed as there were concerns that the large females would require large males mate successfully, therefore a Max.LS applying to female lobsters only would not be advantageous to the fishery in the long term.

The fact that the measures would only impact on UK vessels and in particular English vessels caused the most concern. All members were in agreement that whatever measures were adopted in England should be applied across all EU states. To this end the UK Government should push for these changes at an EU level. Despite these reservations, members believed that there were benefits to be had by introducing the proposed measures as laid out in the consultation. It was argued that the long-term sustainability of the lobster stock justified the short-term reduction in lobster landings.

The members agreed that the Officers' recommendations provided sufficient safeguards to the fishing industry whilst at the same time, potentially providing a significant boost to the local lobster stocks. The Officer's proposal was carried unanimously.

It was Resolved that the Committee should recommend to Defra that the increase to the minimum landing size for lobsters to 90mm should take place over a period of three years with a 1mm increase each April. By introducing this legislation in this manner the financial impact of these proposals would be lessened and spread over three years, making them more acceptable to the industry. A maximum landing size of 120mm should be introduced at the same time as the initial increase in the minimum landing size and applied to the entire population (not just females).

I look forward with great interest to the findings of the Consultation and the recommendations. In the meantime, please do not hesitate in contacting the office if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

Duncan Vaughan
Deputy Clerk & Fishery Officer

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