



Social Impacts of Fishing  
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**The Social Impacts of England's Inshore Fishing Industry:  
Executive Summary**

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# The Social Impacts of England's Inshore Fishing Industry

## *Executive Summary*

### **Introduction**

Defined as the fleet of boats under 10 meters in length, inshore fishing employs 3,000 fishermen across 2,599 boats, which have access to a pool of fishing quota administered by government. Inshore fishing is characterized by a wide diversity of vessel configuration, fishing gear used, the ecological areas they fish and the species sought. Many lack the ability to stay at sea for long periods, so are subject to the limitations and opportunities of the locality they operate within. Inshore vessels operate from a wide variety of homeports, ranging from those launched from the beach or anchored in small coves to those who tie up alongside the deepwater vessels. In 2009 there were 570 fishing vessels over 10m registered in England, with 2599 boats under 10m registered, of those 1746 were under 8m in length. Working on all of these vessels were 5358 people, a decline of 22% since 2000<sup>1</sup>. Figures from 2008<sup>2</sup> show that approximately 3000 people worked full time on these boats under 10m in length suggesting that the balance of employment in commercial fishing is provided by the inshore boats.

### **The research**

This research project had five broad aims that sought to document and consider the interactions of the inshore fishing fleet and local communities:

- a. To establish and identify the social and cultural impacts of inshore fishing.
- b. To relate the social and cultural impacts of the inshore fishing industry to broader policy objectives.
- c. To understand how the social and cultural aspects of fishing interact with other constraints to impact differently on people.
- d. To relate the understanding of specific locations and communities to policy and management measures.
- e. To identify examples of best practice in developing positive social impacts of inshore fishing, which may be used as models.

The research took place over seven months and was split into two distinct phases. **Phase 1** involved qualitative research in six case study locations across England, namely Amble, Newlyn, Padstow, Rye, Whitby and Whitehaven. During this phase of the research over 90 individuals were interviewed formally, with researchers speaking to many others informally. In **Phase 2 three scenarios were** presented to five regional stakeholder groups, with more than 40 people consulted to elicit their opinions and experience regarding the possible effects on the wider community of different policy options. Seven tourism managers deemed to have a strategic overview of tourism in their area were also interviewed, to ascertain their understanding of the role and scope of inshore fishing in the regional tourism offer.

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<sup>1</sup> Marine Management Organisation (2010) UK Sea Fisheries Statistics 2009. Pp. 120 in C. Irwin and B. Thomas eds.,(Newport: marine management organisation and Office of National Statistics)

<sup>2</sup> Sustainable Access to Inshore Fisheries (SAIF) Advisory Group (2010) Steps towards sustainable inshore fisheries – proposition paper. Pp. 13 in,(London: Defra, SAIF project)p.3

## Key Findings

### Phase 1 - Social and cultural impacts of inshore fishing

#### *Fishing as a way of life*

**Survivors** - Those who we interviewed for this research who make their living directly from inshore fishing are predominantly older men, many in their late 50s, who have often spent their entire career in fishing and there is reportedly a low level of recruitment of younger men into fishing. They are 'survivors' in a number of senses, not least because they have remained in fishing despite its decline. Their ability to survive reflects a combination of their life stage, 'know how' of fishing and the opportunities open to them. They tend to run their businesses in 'survival mode', as far as possible keeping overheads and business risks low. Generally they are in a position to manage an uneven income and are well networked within the fishing sector. In contrast to a number of the impact studies in the literature we found no dominant pattern of fishing families, rather a diverse pattern of entering fishing as a young man with no family background, starting later in life, sometimes after working part-time in fishing as well as through family ties.

**Masculine occupational culture** - Inshore fishing has a working class masculine occupational culture, by which it is meant that features of it – the physicality, danger, technical competence and determination – are also ideals that fishermen aspire to achieve and which are widely admired in the wider community. It was clear in discussing fishing with fishermen that they found it rewarding because it focused on 'male' concerns. The focus on technicalities and on technical competence is an essential part of this masculine culture. Fishermen have used the determination required for their occupation to survive the decline of the industry - survival against the odds is an affirmation of the fisherman's identity. Living up to this gendered ideal is a source of identity and pride to the fishermen, as well as many others in the local community as it affirms what they hold to be distinctive about their community.

**Social Capital** - Because their working life is dominated by the rhythms of nature – tide and weather – fishermen are often an elusive social group. They demonstrate high levels of solidarity towards one another, cut through by intense commercial competition. As, like many men, their prime social connection is based around their occupation, it is often their families who play the most direct role in the rest of the community. Yet the social networks of fishermen play an important role, both in linking to others in coastal communities and as visible residents, affirming the identity of the wider community.

**Relationship to policy** - Fishing is marked by a great deal of contention, with low levels of trust between those who catch fish and those regulating the industry. These tensions are often about the observations of fishermen regarding fish stocks in contrast to the quota available to them, and what they feel is the inflexibility of the system. The way in which this contention is expressed relates directly to the working culture of inshore fishing as it focuses more on technicalities and the catching of fish rather than on consumers and markets.

#### *Economic and ecological linkages*

**Nature and opportunities** - Inshore fishing remains reliant upon the ecological opportunities and species available locally, which has a pronounced impact on the businesses that fishermen can operate. Our research demonstrated that inshore fishermen have three principal routes to market, the most widespread being to sell their catch to fish merchants who take it to market. In some cases fishermen sell at harbourside auctions, with the less

common route being to sell it themselves through a direct link into the local hospitality trade. The first and second routes generally strip the fish of its provenance, particularly in the case of prawns or other shellfish and are aimed at continental markets where it competes with other fish sold as a commodity, achieving a higher price than it would locally. Whilst this is a traditional supply chain for fish and helps to support fishing incomes, it has a minimal impact on the rest of the community.

Fish sold directly into the local hospitality trade sees the greatest return to the fisherman and the rest of the community, as its value is not only realised locally but also becomes part of the broader tourism 'offer' of the area.

**Tourism economies** - For many of the case study communities, tourism has become the major source of income, and the most immediate route for improving their economic fortunes. This reality is often based on a community development approach of starting from the 'assets' that the area has – a seaside location, a harbour and the heritage to appeal to visitors. Interviewees were proud of their communities, viewing them as generally supportive, with a unique culture and ambience. Many fishermen, together with those who are involved in running the harbour side, report the draw of fishing and its paraphernalia for visitors to their communities. Inshore fishing has a particularly important role because it is possible for people to gain closer access to the sights and sounds of fishing activity working from harbours that the public do not necessarily have to be excluded from. Tourism managers often describe fishing as being 'iconic' of an area – featuring in publicity for a resort - and adding to its attraction whilst people are visiting, a role that is crucial in many communities.

### ***Making places unique***

**Place making and local culture** – Many local people value the presence of fishermen as fishing is often one of the few remaining examples of traditional forms of employment and is perceived as an authentic expression of the traditions of an area. It was found widely that local people not directly connected to fishing, and with very little knowledge of the complexities of the industry, were still very supportive of it and valued the fishing community and industry on a number of levels.

**Fishing as a community emblem** - For most people living in the case study communities, fishing is 'emblematic' of their community; it helps define what makes their communities distinct or unique. Informants defined their town or village as a fishing port or town and as part of that, they viewed fishing and fishermen as being central to the function and character of the place.

## **Phase 2 – Management scenarios**

In the second phase of the project discussion groups were convened to consider three different policy scenarios (see table 1), and the possible social benefits that might arise from each. Participants were recruited from the fishing industry, the food chain, rural, community and tourism development agencies as well as fishermen and their representatives. Five discussion groups were held in different regions across England to help capture the diversity of experiences and conditions. The scenarios were designed to provoke debate about different facets of policy and underlying principles rather than to represent templates that could be acted upon in their entirety. These findings are reflected in the scenarios as they

contrast greater efficiency in the industry with integration in the locality and ways in which it might relate to the rest of the community.

The findings from the stakeholder discussions are set out below. Whilst they did not lead to consensus on preferred management options, they did reveal a number of themes around which the social impacts of future policy scenarios could usefully be considered. The findings are therefore structured in this way. Generally it was found that stakeholders were unable to identify the benefits from policy scenarios because the link between the industry and the wider community is social and cultural, so generally indirect for most people. Future research may benefit from more extended deliberative participatory methods to allow more time for stakeholders to consider the benefits.

### Capacity to engage

To engage with fishermen and other stakeholders the researchers faced the twin phenomena of fishermen's frequent lack of trust in Defra and, amongst other stakeholders, a lack of knowledge of fishing policy. One of the contrasts that became apparent in the stakeholder groups was the grip on the imagination that the status quo of existing policy has for those at the catching end of the fishing industry. Due to their perception of a constant struggle to overcome regulatory hurdles to fish, this grip generally displaces concerns about the market and other wider considerations. The fishermen often felt that they had not been listened to, and had at times been excluded from the policy making process.

**Table 1 - Scenarios used in stage 2 of the research**

Scenario A <b>Restructuring the fishing industry</b>	Scenario B <b>Separate Fishing Zones.</b>	Scenario C <b>Marketing the Catch.</b>
<p>Changing the size of the inshore fleet (through changing the definition from 'under-10m') and re-distributing quota.</p> <p>More efficient boats move into the sector, the 'inshore sector' are those vessels remaining.</p> <p>Organised at Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA)/(regional) level.</p> <p>Opportunities to set management arrangements in ways to maximise efficiency.</p> <p>Goal – to help smaller boats operate more flexibly and profitably.</p>	<p>All boats fishing within 6 nautical miles of the shore being licensed with no 'industrial' vessels allowed or licensed in this zone.</p> <p>Restrictions on when they can fish, for how long, and/or the type and amount of equipment that they would be allowed to use.</p> <p>Management at regional level by a group made of fishers and their representatives working directly with national fishery managers.</p> <p>Goal – to provide smaller vessels with a flexible opportunity to fish, maximizing income and sustainability.</p>	<p>All under 10 metre boats allocated a number of days at sea or individual quotas.</p> <p>County level arrangements for management and monitoring systems.</p> <p>All of the catch landed being marketed through a county level marketing co-op.</p> <p>Marketing group to maximize diversity of income through licensing anglers, payments for data collection and chartering.</p> <p>Goal – to provide fishermen with a better income by securing a higher return.</p>

### **Different paradigms**

Although not explicit, there was a clash of paradigms that directly related to different development approaches. Fishing has been developed along sectoral lines whilst other parts of the rural and food communities have focused on community or territorial development. Implicitly therefore, the fishermen and their representatives were used to debating fishing policy as a sector and were comfortable discussing quota allocation (scenario A), or exclusive fishing zones (Scenario B). In contrast, participants from outside of the fishing sector were more familiar with models of integrated rural development, partnership arrangements and developing a territory, and for them scenario C was appealing.

### **Maximising opportunities means linking to tourism**

Many of those who worked in community and rural development argued that the only route whereby fishing might have any role in influencing the development of their area was through tourism. It was the asset over which they had some control, it could attract development funding and in some instances this was linked to the fate of communities as a whole.

### **Local management**

One of the clear attractions for many who favoured scenario C, and in the South East scenario B, was that it gave a high degree of control back to the community, in that the marketing of fish became an activity that a wider group of people would take part in. One of the attractions for those involved in the fishing industry was that it also created a clear distance from the centralised policy regime.

In tandem with this work we interviewed those **tourism managers** who have a strategic role in guiding tourism at a regional level. This additional survey indicated that the South West is the most integrated in terms of bringing fishing and tourism together. The other respondents' answers also reflect the priorities for their region, which may be to focus landward, as in the North West, or to where activities associated with the sea appear to be of secondary concern. These findings confirm many of the claims made in the stakeholder groups that, although there is a widespread perception of the benefits of linking tourism with fishing, the mechanisms to achieve this are currently under-developed.

### **Policy Implications**

Although inshore fishing may not play a large economic role in the community, the study revealed it to be highly valued by local people and visitors as being part of the social and cultural processes that make places. It often has an important indirect benefit in the tourism industry and when working in tandem with it, inshore fishing can realise significant opportunities for a locality.

Stakeholders generally want to see a fisheries policy that returns control to their communities so that it can reflect their aspirations and particular needs. Many of those in the fishing industry struggle to transcend the mistrust and disappointments of policy whilst many of those outside it look to various third party accredited markets to transform the role of fishing in their communities.

The research revealed a common set of 'measures' – processes and opportunities that most of the case study communities were already engaged with or else were preparing to engage with:

- a. Greater integration of fishing with tourism, for example through festivals, such as in Rye and Padstow, and local sales;
- b. Food branding to add value to fish caught locally based on distinctive features of the area; and
- c. Third party accreditation to gain access to more national markets.

### **Strategic options**

Beyond the above findings we have also identified a range of options that could increase the social integration and beneficial impacts of inshore fishing:

- Establishing local intermediary bodies with a broad developmental brief; designed to build up the local social and economic spin-offs from fishing to match its cultural importance.
- Developing third party accreditation to create a common baseline for sustainability and market access.
- As well as younger people, steps could be taken to aid the recruitment of older new entrants into fishing who will bring new skills and experiences into inshore fishing.
- Improving the social status of fishermen, viewing them as partners in both the policy process and in the collection of scientific data.
- Linking fishing policy to the wider remit and goals of Defra such as those expressed in *Food 2030*, ensuring that it is integrated with rural development, environmental sustainability and food security.

### **A Model of integration – Cornwall**

During our research we found many local projects that looked to improve local returns from inshore fishing, but one area had developed this further and more systematically than any other. Cornwall has a long coastline and an economy dominated by the tourism and food industries that has benefited from strategic development and funding through EU Objective One and Convergence<sup>3</sup>. This means that in several areas, Cornwall has been able to develop the local fishing sector in co-ordination with the wider food economy. Padstow, for example, has been able to benefit as it has developed as a year-round gastronomic tourism destination, based on fish caught in Cornwall. Ports such Newlyn still play a role in commodity sales but also supply the hospitality trade in the county and beyond with fish certified as sustainable. There has been investment in improving fish quality, giving the catch a 'story' and establishing a general brand for Cornish seafood as well as specific projects for traceability and species restoration, as in the lobster hatchery in Padstow. Whenever possible, fishing has been integrated with broader efforts to improve the county's food industry that have followed the same differentiated strategy of addressing mass markets whilst adding local synergies and value through sustainable produce.

Although few other areas could emulate the full range of initiatives that Cornwall has adopted, it does demonstrate the benefits that can be garnered through consistent

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.objectiveone.com/ob1/pdfs/FTF%20STRATEGY%20final.pdf>. Under the Convergence programme Cornwall continues to have continued investment, for example of the £38 million of the European Fisheries Fund allocated to England, Cornwall will receive £8.2million.

investment in developing the marketing of fish and integrating that with the higher value parts of the food chain and the local hospitality trade. This has required not only highly skilled professionals but also the support of the wider community.

## Conclusions

The research found that inshore fishing is generally only of direct economic importance to households who make their living from fishing. Although the wider community is not dependent on fishing, it benefits from it indirectly through how it is used in seaside tourism. This is linked to how local people value fishing as an activity that reflects the traditions of their community, that fishermen represent authentic aspects of the area and, in turn, is part of how local people create their sense of community. Generally the impacts of inshore fishing are social and cultural for most of the community although there can be greater economic impacts when the catch is tied in with the cultural and social offer a resort makes to tourists. The diversity of routes that fish take to the market place and the indirect but valued role it plays in the community confound making easy generalisations.

As indicated above, although there was considerable resistance to, and disquiet about, aspects of existing policy, there was a willingness to discuss alternatives that developed through the discussions.

1. This was in part because the stakeholders shared a loyalty to an area, so immediately shared some commonalities. There was a general desire for greater **local management** to allow local priorities and opportunities to be met, which they felt they were best placed to know and had the clearest stake in their achievement.
2. Within these discussions, those outside of the catching sector were very aware of the possibilities in the wider market regarding sustainability and the **value of provenance**. They were generally content to allow the market, mediated by schemes to protect fish stocks, to govern these operations in return for the relative autonomy that such an approach brought to their operations.
3. There was a widespread **inability to identify any direct social benefits** tied to most of the management options in the policy scenarios. For most participants this was because there is not currently a direct economic linkage between the success of the inshore fishing sector and their local area.
4. As discussions of the potential role of IFCAs as intermediary bodies, community interest companies or certification bodies, and the absence of 'bottom up' groups made apparent, there was an awareness of **a lack of intermediary bodies** to carry out the role of representing the community around fish, developing the fishing sector and linking it to other local actors.