



BLUE MARINE
FOUNDATION

The Lyme Bay Fisheries and Conservation Reserve



Executive Summary

Background

In 2008, around 60 square miles of Lyme Bay were closed to scallop dredging and bottom trawling to protect the rich reef habitats and their rare corals and sea fans. This area is currently thought to be in the process of recovery from damage sustained from mobile fishing. Despite the closure, there has been a near doubling of static fishing gear, including pots and nets, within the closed area. An area that was allegedly being fished destructively by mobile gear is now in danger of becoming overfished by other means. This is because there is no ecosystem approach to management and there is a lack of data documenting the fisheries of Lyme Bay. In an attempt to solve the problem, Blue convened informal meetings with fisherman, regulators and conservationists and, as a result, together they formed a new body, the Lyme Bay Working Group. This is its report.

The 2008 Closure

A survey carried out for Devon Wildlife Trust in 1991 and 1992 found that about 10pc of Lyme Bay's reefs, which are three miles wide and 15 miles long, had been altered by dredging. Until the late 1980s, scallop dredges (steel cages which are dragged along the bottom 12 or so at a time) were adapted to fishing only on the sand and gravel. Eventually, as the other beds were exhausted, fisherman perfected spring-loaded dredges and rock-hopper trawls that jumped over the rocks and made it possible to fish where only pots and static nets had been before. The technological development gave the case for conservation immediate urgency. This began a debate about the kind of protection Lyme Bay should enjoy that concluded with ministers issuing a Statutory Instrument banning scallop dredges and bottom trawls in 2008. However, issues have since arisen as the vision behind the closure was never properly articulated.

Current Challenges

While mobile fishing gears, particularly scallop dredges, are the most likely to cause damage to reefs, it has to be established what level of fishing with static gear is sustainable. Although biological disturbance has reduced considerably as a result of the closure, advice from Natural England stated that: "...removal of fish species and larger molluscs and crustaceans can have significant impacts on the structure and functioning of benthic communities over and above the physical effects of fishing methods". Natural England concluded that the vulnerability of reef sub-features within the Poole Bay to Lyme Bay area to biological disturbance is considered to be "moderate to high".

It appears from Blue's research that, if this area is supposed to be a sustainable use marine protected area, there is insufficient monitoring of the impacts of static gear fishing. The impact of the extraction a number of species, including more than 600 tonnes of whelks in a single year, is not monitored. With no monitoring being undertaken at present, local regulators have no data to make a judgment from on these non-quota species.

Blue's Vision and proposed solutions

Blue believes that the model of a terrestrial national park, where multiple uses are encouraged as long as none are damaging to the landscape or natural conservation designations, would be ideal for Lyme Bay. While Blue has enabled the creation of no-take zones in other areas of the world, the organisation believes Lyme Bay is best managed on an ecosystem basis. The area needs to be monitored to ensure that the various uses of the bay do not conflict with the conservation objectives.

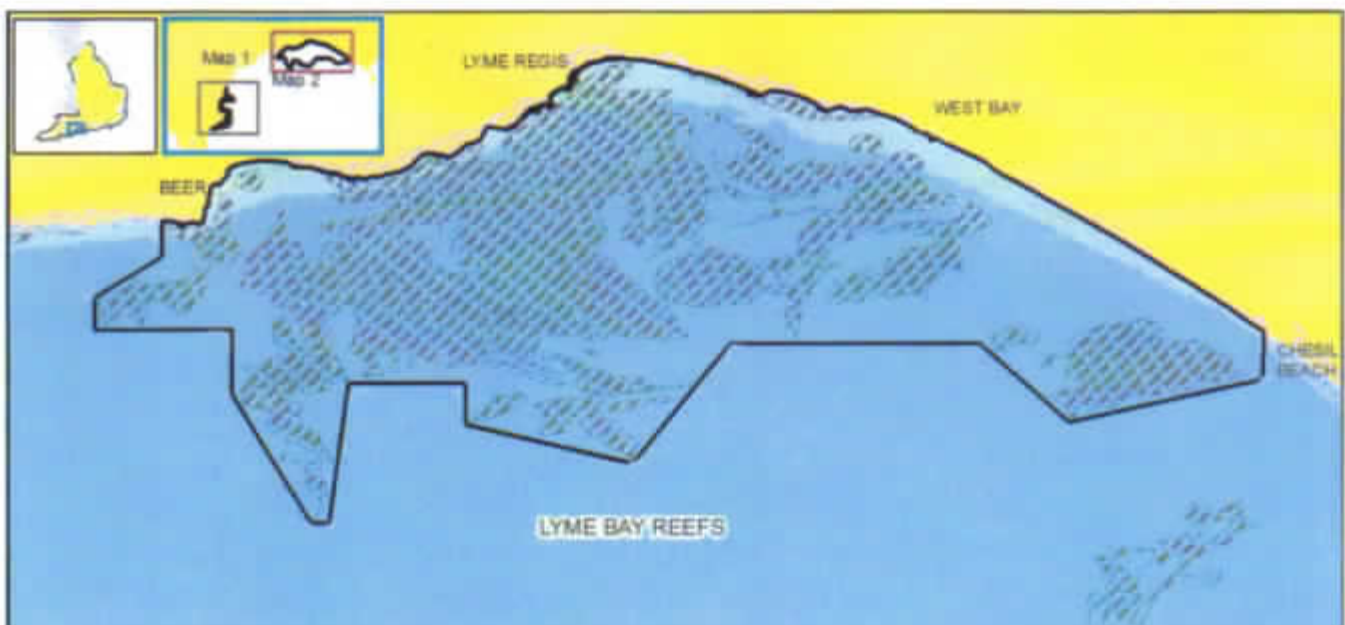
Blue has identified a number of problems preventing Lyme Bay back from becoming a widely respected multi-use national park. It has found models in California and Sweden which have benefitted fisherman and conservationists alike. In an attempt to achieve similar success at Lyme Bay, Blue spent months researching possible measures, alongside Defra, the Crown Estate, Natural England and fishing organisations, among others. However, Blue concluded that the process of creating marine protected areas seemed very one-sided, with government proposing areas to be protected but fishermen standing to gain little from practising conservation.

Blue turned to looking at a package of support which might actually benefit fisherman who adopted prudent practice and act as a model for management within protected areas around the coast. Its proposals were taken up by the Lyme Bay Working Group and are enshrined in a Memorandum of Understanding. This sets out to achieve three “wins” – for the environment, for fisheries and for coastal communities. We believe that achieving these three “wins” is eminently practicable and would be a first in UK.

The Working Group has agreed a voluntary Code of Conduct which will apply to all fishermen operating in the protected area. The next step in demonstrating that the inshore fisheries of Lyme Bay are fully sustainable will be a world class scientifically-based management project, designed with the input of fishermen, which will test the sustainability of potting techniques. Fishermen have agreed to a trial including sixteen 500m x 500m plots, some intensively fished, some moderately, some not at all. This will provide reassurance to the public that the most selective and least harmful methods are being used in this important area.

In tandem with that, the project aims to create special value for fishermen who sell catch from this area by various approaches, including helping facilitate the local use of seafood which is normally sent abroad, such as crab, spider crab, velvet crab and cuttlefish; organising a demonstration stall at the Weymouth Seafood Festival; identifying a flagship restaurant that would be willing to promote Lyme Bay seafood; the formation of co-operatives for fishermen in the area; promotional websites; and branding initiatives.

In addition to the implementation of a fisheries management plan, Blue is also proposing the creation of public attractions to both educate the public about the marine ecology of Lyme Bay and to provide direct benefits and legacy funding for the Lyme Bay Fisheries and Conservation Reserve. These



The Lyme Bay cSAC

include: the creation of a **Lobster Hatchery and Exhibition Centre**, which would be opened to paying public - preliminary discussions have already been held with the owner of Lyme Regis Aquarium; **Information boards**, which would illustrate the area's wildlife, marine species and explain the fishing techniques adopted, would be erected in tourist car parks overlooking the bay. Through these, we aim to give fishermen a new confidence and pride in what they are doing and make them local heroes for engaging in this pioneering project.

The intention at all times has been that the lessons learned in Lyme Bay will be scalable, documented and usable throughout the inshore marine protected areas now being created in Britain. We estimate that once the one-off research and assessment model costs have been absorbed in the Lyme Bay management plan, any implementation of the basic template elsewhere will cost less than £100,000 per annum for a 3 year project and this would also be sufficient to fund groups of MPAs in the same geographical area.

As well as hoping to contribute to that wider legacy, the intention is to create a management body and funding mechanisms which will live on in Lyme Bay after the project ends in three years' time. We have achieved more in six months than any individual member of the group believed possible. What we will achieve in three years, we firmly believe, could help change marine conservation in Britain.



Some, but not all, members of the Lyme Bay working group, plus guests