

Advice note to DAFM

1 of 2025

June 20th 2025

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Subject: Dundalk cockle fishery

Advice for 2025 fishery

Biomass of cockles in Dundalk Bay in late May 2025 was estimated from survey to be 811 tonnes. Biomass of commercial size cockles, over 22mm shell width, was 497 tonnes.

The 5 year Fishery Natura Plan (FNP) 2021-2025, for this fishery, specifies the annual total allowable catch (TAC) is set at 0 if biomass is less than 1,000 tonnes. At a biomass between 1,000-1,500 tonnes the TAC is set so that post fishery biomass is at least 1,000 tonnes and where biomass is >1,500 tonnes the TAC is 33% of biomass. The zero TAC at biomass <1,000 tonnes is to protect food sources for overwintering oystercatchers and to provide spawning stock for the following Autumn and Spring spawning seasons.

The survey biomass estimate in 2025 of 811 tonnes provides for a **TAC of 0 in 2025**.

Cockle biomass trends

The 2025 cockle and benthic survey in Dundalk Bay was undertaken in late May over a survey area of 30.35 km². Biomass in 2025 was 811 tonnes which was significantly lower than in 2024 and is the lowest since 2010. However, significant recruitment of cockle seed was recorded in the 2025 survey. The biomass in 2025 was concentrated in the northern half of the Bay (Figure 1).

Recruitment was low in the years 2019-2021 and 2023-2024. Significant recruitment, from an Autumn 2021 settlement, was detected in the 2022 survey. As there was no fishery in 2022 growth of this cohort led to an increase in biomass of over 800 tonnes in 2023 over the previous year. Fishing in 2023, in the absence of significant recruitment in 2023, reduced the biomass in 2024 (Table 1). A November 2024 survey, in part of the area, reported significant reduction in biomass during the summer of 2024 over and above fishery landings of 100 tonnes in that year. This was unexpected as biomass is expected to increase during summer due to growth and in the absence of significant bird predation.

Table 1. Annual biomass and landings of cockle in Dundalk Bay 2007-2025

Year	Survey Month	Biomass		TAC (tonnes)	Landings	
		Mean	95% CL		Vessels	Hand gatherers
2007	March	2277	172	950	668	Unknown
2008	August	3588	1905	0	0	0
2009	June	2158	721	719	108	0.28
2010	May	814	314	0	0	0
2011	May	1531	94	510	325	0.25
2012	May	1234	87	400	394	9.40

2013	June	1260	99	416	343	0
2014	June	972	188	0	0	0
2015	June	1032	100	0	0	0
2016	July	1878	87	616	410	0
2017	May	2316	95	772	772	0
2018	June	1644	257	542	446	0
2019	July	3789		600	595	0
2020	June	3420	870	1128	1150	0
2021	May	1926	537	642	638	0
2022	May	1826	360	608	0	0
2023	May	2603	578	867	867	0
2024	May	1500	397	500	100	0
2025	May	811	244	0	-	-



Figure 1. Distribution and density (kgs.m^{-2}) of all cockles (left) and commercial cockles (>22 mm shell width) (right) in Dundalk Bay in May 2025.