

**Advice note to DAFM**

**2 of 2019**

**July 29th**

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**Subject: Dundalk cockle fishery**

**Advice for 2019 fishery**

Biomass of cockles in Dundalk Bay in July 2019 was estimated to be 3,789 tonnes. Biomass of commercial size cockles (22 mm and over) was 1,162 tonnes which is similar to that of 2018. As agreed in the 5 year Fishery Natura Plan 2016-2020, for this fishery, the annual total allowable catch (TAC) is set at 33% of the total estimated biomass, if biomass is greater than 750 tonnes, and 50% of biomass if the biomass exceeds 3000 tonnes. However, as the biomass over 22mm of 1162 tonnes in 2019 is only 30% of the biomass a TAC of 33% or 50% of the survey biomass cannot be realised. A TAC of 33% would involve landing all commercial size cockle, which is not operationally feasible, and a TAC of 50% of biomass would necessarily involve landing cockles below 22 mm.

Given that the biomass of commercial cockles in 2019 is similar to that of 2018 the expected catch per day (based on 2018 fishery data) is 631kgs per boat per day at the beginning of the season and is expected to decline to 250kg per boat per day when approximately 600 tonnes are taken. The catch of 250kg per day is a condition which closes the fishery. Therefore, a **TAC of 600 tonnes is proposed for 2019**. This is approximately 50% of the biomass of cockles over 22 mm with an expected decline in catch rate to just over 250 kg per boat per day when 600 tonnes are taken.

Two closed areas are also proposed to protect undersized cockles from contact with the dredge;

1. Closed south of latitude 53 54.33N (closes the Annagassan area)
2. Closed north and west of 53 57.51, 06 21.45

53 57.51, 06 20.10 (closes upper shore area seaward of Blackrock)

The industry propose that these closures can operate voluntarily as they are unlikely to be fished in any case.

All other conditions set out in the FNP 2016-2020 should apply to the 2019 fishery.

**Cockle biomass (July 2019)**

The 2019 cockle and benthic survey in Dundalk Bay was undertaken between July 1st and 6th over an approximate area of 31.9km2. A total of 379 stations were sampled. The age structure of the stock was dominated by 1+ (75%) with 0+ and 2+ making up 14% and 7% of the cockles sampled, respectively.

The total biomass of cockles in the sampling domain was 3,789 tonnes. This is the highest estimate on record (2008=3,588 tonnes). The biomass over 22 mm was 1,162 tonnes.

Table 1. Annual biomass and landings of cockle in Dundalk Bay 2007-2019

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **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 |  |  |

END