

Hastings Dover Sole, Herring and Mackerel



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SPECIES Dover sole (*Sole solea*), herring (*Clupea harengus*) and mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*)

FISHING METHOD Demersal trawl, gill-net, trammel-net and drift-net

COUNTRY United Kingdom

LOCATION



Eastern English Channel, between Beachy Head and Dungeness, and offshore to the six-mile limit

FISHERY TONNAGE 72 tonnes Dover sole, 10 tonnes herring and mackerel

“WHEN THE WIND is southwesterly, we push the boats off the shingle with a bulldozer,” says Paul Joy of the Hastings Fishermen’s Protection Society (HFPS), explaining the *modus operandi* of Britain’s only beach-launched fleet. “It’s like Bondi Beach when the weather is rough, except it’s a lot colder. The boats are really surfing. When they come back in, you hook into them with a winch and pull them out of the sea before the next wave smashes them up.”

Environmental best practice

The 24 vessels – all less than 10m long – use different gear types depending on the species targeted. For Dover sole, fixed trammel nets anchored at both ends are left out overnight (“because sole swim in the dark”, says Joy), then cleared of fish the following day. Their 100mm mesh size is 10mm wider than the legal requirement, meaning it catches fewer juveniles – an example of voluntary best practice. At the bottom of the net is “a very light leadline,” Joy explains, “that does little or no damage to the flora and fauna of the seabed.” Off Hastings, these include soft corals, starfish, urchins, crabs and small fish such as dragonets and dabs that would otherwise be disrupted.

The drift nets used for mackerel and herring, too, have a weighted bottom line that brushes the seabed only occasionally so inflicts little damage. “Our families have fished this way for generations,” says Joy, who can trace his lineage all the way back to before the Norman Conquest. “The way we fish has always been sustainable, but we wanted to portray ourselves as an environmentally-friendly fishery. MSC certification was the way to do that.”

As expected, few modifications were needed to pass – so any ecological gains from joining the programme are hard to quantify. To begin with, there were no economic gains either. “For two years, we didn’t make one penny from MSC,” says Joy. “We were getting the same price as everybody else.”

Then, in 2007, the fishermen set up a not-for-profit Community Interest Company (CIC) to market their catch as MSC-certified and gain a price advantage in the marketplace. Any premium paid would go back to the fishermen themselves, rather than be absorbed by processors or merchants.

Market benefits

“That strategy paid off,” says Joy, “because now we are getting premiums. Our Dover sole goes to Holland, which is pushing for MSC in a big way. The premium there is 10 per cent, that’s what we’ve been insisting on.” In France, the giant Casino retail group has offered him up to 15 per cent more for MSC fish sold in certain stores. “The MSC has put us on the map where exports are concerned,” Joy reckons. “Without them, we couldn’t have achieved this.”

Political strength

In subtler ways, too, there have been benefits. “Politically, it makes us stronger,” Joy maintains. “We use the MSC as a badge to stand behind, a lobbying tool if you like. If we are proven to be a sustainable fishery, we then have a stronger, better argument for a fair proportion of quota, for example.”

More than anything, the Hastings fishery is “proud to be MSC” to guarantee the future of fishing. “We’ve got very healthy stocks now,” says Joy, “and that’s how we want to keep it. I want to make sure we still have a fleet in 100 years’ time. Each boat has a crew to sustain, and that in turn sustains the fish market, which provides jobs. There is a whole infrastructure built around us.”

“ Working together with the Hastings Dover sole fishery made me even more aware that this is the only way forward. That is why Fishes works only with MSC certified sustainable fisheries. By doing this and communicating the message to consumers in order to educate them, we take our responsibility in conserving our oceans ”

Bart van Olphen, Managing Director, Fishes Wholesale BV



“ I don’t want to get rich by taking everything out of the sea, only for my son to go fishing and not catch anything at all. Fish stocks, damage to the seabed, bycatch... the MSC looks at the whole picture ”

Paul Joy, Chairman, HFPS