

£37,770 – Record fine for illegal fishing **Master and Owners of fishing vessel J Sea (E333) fined for illegal fishing** **in Lyme Bay**

Prior to trial commencing on 8th December 2016, at Plymouth Magistrates Court, Mr Dominic Welsh and D W Fisheries Ltd as the respective Master and Owner of the fishing vessel J SEA (PLN E333), pleaded guilty to one charge of illegal fishing between 11th and 13th December 2015. The defendants had already pleaded guilty to another related offence at a previous hearing heard in Torquay Magistrates' Courts on 20th September 2016.

Both defendants pleaded guilty to using 16 scallop dredges inside the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority's (D&SIFCA) district, four more than the maximum number permitted and also fishing with the excessive number of scallop dredges within The Lyme Bay and Torbay Site of Community Importance. The case was investigated and prosecuted by D&SIFCA.

Chief Officer Tim Robbins said; "The Marine Protected Area is designated because it contains an array of nationally and internationally rare species and habitats. The magistrates have clearly recognised the conservation importance of The Lyme Bay and Torbay Site of Community Importance and the reasons for prohibiting towed fishing gear within the area".

Deputy Chief Officer (Environment) Sarah Clark said; "Demersal fishing methods can damage habitats and features within the Marine Protected Area. The site contains pink sea fans, sunset and southern cup corals and fragile sponge communities on rocky reef habitats. Many of the reefs are low lying and are friable. In some areas, the reef has been broken up by repeated passes of bottom towed fishing gear so that it is no longer able to support the species and communities it once did'.

The scallop management measures introduced by D&SIFCA were in recognition that the scallop beds could only sustain a limited amount of fishing activity. The introduced measures, vessel size, prohibition of fishing between 1900hrs and 0700hrs and maximum of 12 dredges were all designed to provide a fair and balanced access to the scallop fishery.

Deputy Chief Officer (Enforcement) Matthew Mander said; "The Authority is very pleased with the outcome of this investigation. The case demonstrates that the Authority has the ability to investigate and successfully prosecute serious and complex cases of offending and can help protect important habitats and the interests of the towed gear sector. The introduced control measures were all designed to provide a fair and balanced access to the scallop fishery".

"Most fishermen object to the actions of a small minority that seem to have no regard for conservation and by their actions jeopardise the future for the important local fleet. Illegal scallop fishing has the potential to rapidly reduce the opportunity of other fishers to access the stock and the increased illegal landings also reduce the price paid for the legally caught scallops taken by the rest of the fleet".