

Wild Wrasse Fishery – 2021/22 Report

July 2024

Report on the Scottish Wrasse Fishery 2021-2022

1. Summary

Wrasse are an important cleaner fish for many aquaculture companies in Scotland. The fishery for wrasse has developed since the late 1980's and the Scottish Government and Salmon Scotland introduced voluntary controls in 2018. Following consultation in 2020, mandatory controls and data collection for the fishery were introduced in 2021. Sixty-one derogations were issued for the 2021 wrasse fishery and sixty-three derogations for the 2022 wrasse fishery. Total landings were 68.0 tonnes in 2021 and 78.6 tonnes in 2022. Ballan wrasse is typically the most common species of wrasse landed and accounted for 73.0% of the reported landings (by weight) in 2021 and 80.6% in 2022. The control measures are regarded as a first step to improve management of the wrasse fishery in Scotland. The Marine Directorate of the Scottish Government intends that the measures for the Scottish wrasse fishery will be kept under review and subject to refinement as more evidence becomes available.

2. Introduction

Since the 1990's, wrasse have played an important role in aquaculture as cleaner fish. Sea lice infestation in farmed fish species can pose a serious problem and wrasse provide a solution without the use of chemical treatments, which can have adverse effects on the natural environment. However, it is important that wild-caught wrasse are fished sustainably, with effective management measures in place.

Voluntary arrangements were introduced in 2018 jointly by the Scottish Government and Salmon Scotland because of concerns for the sustainability of the wild wrasse fishery. The Scottish Government reviewed these measures in 2020, proposed control measures as mandatory and introduced new measures relating to access to the fishery and data reporting. These were subsequently put out to consultation in the paper 'Wild Wrasse Harvesting: Consultation on Proposed New Mandatory Fishing Measures'. The consultation invited views on whether the Scottish Government should introduce mandatory measures to control the harvesting of live wrasse for the salmon farming industry. The consultation ran from 11th March 2020 to 10th May 2020 and attracted 154 responses from a range of interests including fishers, salmon farm operators, environmental groups, industry representative groups and members of the public. In total there were 116 individual responses and 38 organisational responses.¹

3. Development of Fisheries Management for the Scottish wrasse fishery

¹ [Wild Wrasse harvesting - proposed mandatory fishing measures: consultation analysis - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/wild-wrasse-harvesting-consultation-analysis/pages/11.aspx)

Current fishing pressure combined with competing uses of Scotland's inshore waters mean that wrasse now represent an important and valuable diversification opportunity for commercial fishing businesses in some areas which predominantly deploy creels targeting crab, lobster and *Nephrops*. Enabling diversification opportunities for inshore fishers is considered a key aspect of the Marine Directorate's 2020-2030 Fisheries Management.²

For the Marine Directorate to capture data of sufficient granularity to enable effective management decisions, mandatory controls were introduced following consultation in late 2020. These measures were brought into effect from commencement of the fishing season on 1st May 2021.

The wrasse fishery season runs from 1st May - 30th November each year. Fishers wishing to target wrasse must apply for a derogation to their domestic fishing licence and supply proof of an appropriate contract with an aquaculture business. Sixty-one derogations were issued for the 2021 wrasse fishery and sixty-three derogations were issued for the 2022 wrasse fishery.

Once derogated to access the wrasse fishery, vessels are required to adhere to additional regulations and reporting requirements.³ These include minimum and maximum landing sizes (Table 1), pot limitations (a maximum of 250 wrasse traps within any 24-hour period) and submission of weekly data sheets as follows;

- All licenced commercial fishing vessels of 10 metres and under are required to submit a FISH1 landing form to their local Fishery Office on a weekly basis. This details dates and positions of fishing operations, weight of catch retained onboard, and date and location of landing.
- All licenced commercial fishing vessels (from 10 to 12 metres in length) are required to keep a logbook and submit each landing. The paper log contains information on dates, positions of fishing operations, weight of catch retained onboard, and date and location of landing.
- Fishers derogated to catch wrasse are required to submit science return forms which report the number of wrasse landed by species for all pots deployed and more detailed information on the catches from the first 20 pots hauled for each fishing trip, detailing the number of wrasse (by species) retained within the permitted landing size and the number returned to the sea both within and outwith the permitted size range (Table 1).

² [Future fisheries: management strategy - 2020 to 2030 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/future-fisheries-management-strategy-2020-to-2030/pages/1-introduction.aspx)

³ [Fishing - wild wrasse: application for a letter of derogation](#)

Table 1. Minimum and maximum landing size (cm) for small and large wrasse species as permitted for the Scottish wrasse fishery (1st May- 30th November).

Wrasse Species	Minimum and Maximum Landing Size
Goldsinny (<i>Ctenolabrus rupestris</i>)	Small wrasse species (12cm – 17cm)
Rock Cook (<i>Centrolabrus exoletus</i>)	Small wrasse species (12cm – 17cm)
Corkwing (<i>Symphodus melops</i>)	Large wrasse species (12cm – 24cm)
Ballan (<i>Labrus bergylta</i>)	Large wrasse species (12cm – 24cm)
Cuckoo (<i>Labrus mixtus</i>)	Large wrasse species (12cm – 24cm)

The control measures and data collection are regarded as a first step to improve management of the wrasse fishery in Scotland. The Marine Directorate intends that the measures for the Scottish wrasse fishery be kept under review and subject to refinement as more evidence becomes available.

4. Summary of data gathered on the Scottish wrasse fishery (2021-2022)

Sixty-one derogations were issued to fish for wrasse in 2021 with 51 vessels reporting landings (via FISH1 forms and paper logs).

In 2022, sixty-three derogations were issued to fish for wrasse and 47 vessels reported landings (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of fishing activity for wrasse (2017-2022) including the number of derogations issued each year, active fishing vessels with landings reported (FISH1 forms and paper logs).

Year	Derogations issued	Vessels reporting landings of wrasse
2017	NA	33
2018	NA	43
2019	NA	51
2020	NA	63
2021	61	51
2022	63	47

Based on the reported data (FISH1 and paper logs), the total landings recorded for wrasse (all species combined) increased between 2017 and 2022. In 2017, wrasse landings were 40.1 tonnes and increased over the following two years to a peak of 87.7 tonnes in 2019 (Figure 1). During 2020 and 2021 the landings decreased slightly but increased again to 78.6 tonnes in 2022.

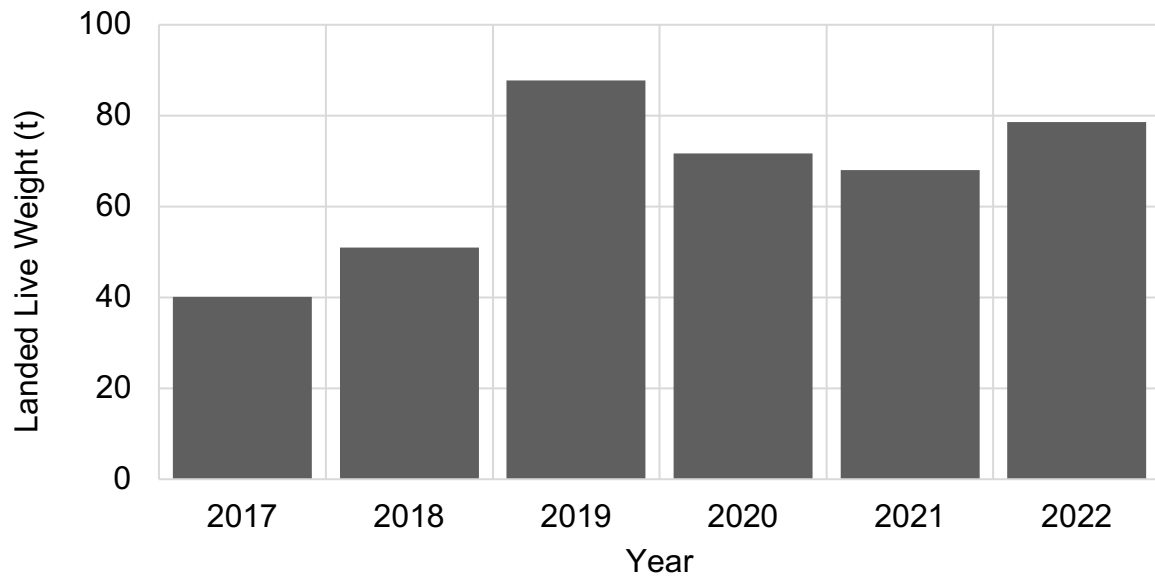


Figure 1: Total landings (tonnes) reported for all wrasse species from the FISH1 forms for 2017-2022.

The wrasse fishery takes place between May and November. In 2021 and 2022 wrasse landings were highest in quarter three (July-September; Figure 2). The very small quantity of wrasse reported to be landed outwith the fishery season was due to incorrectly reported landing dates.

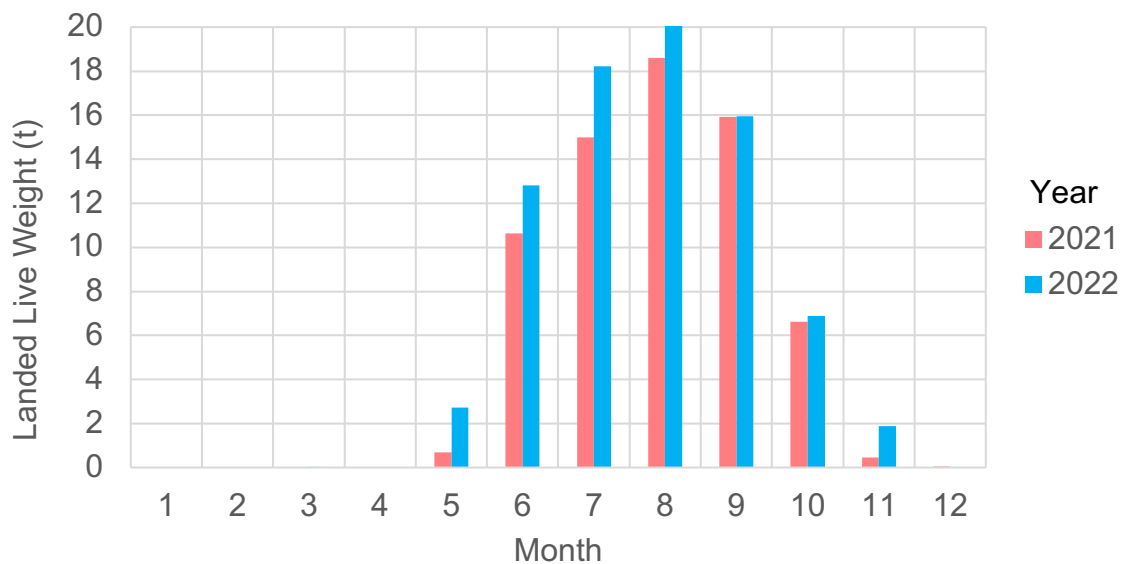


Figure 2: Total monthly landings (tonnes) reported for all wrasse species from the FISH1 and paper log forms for 2021 and 2022.

The highest landings of wrasse (by weight) were reported for the West Coast of Scotland (in 2021 and 2022), with some fishing activity also recorded around Orkney Islands (Figure 3) and to a lesser extent in the Moray Firth and Shetland Islands. ICES rectangles with landings reported from fewer than 5 vessels to that square are not displayed on the map. Further information regarding landings by ICES statistical square from 2017-2022 can be found in Appendix 1 – Table A1.1

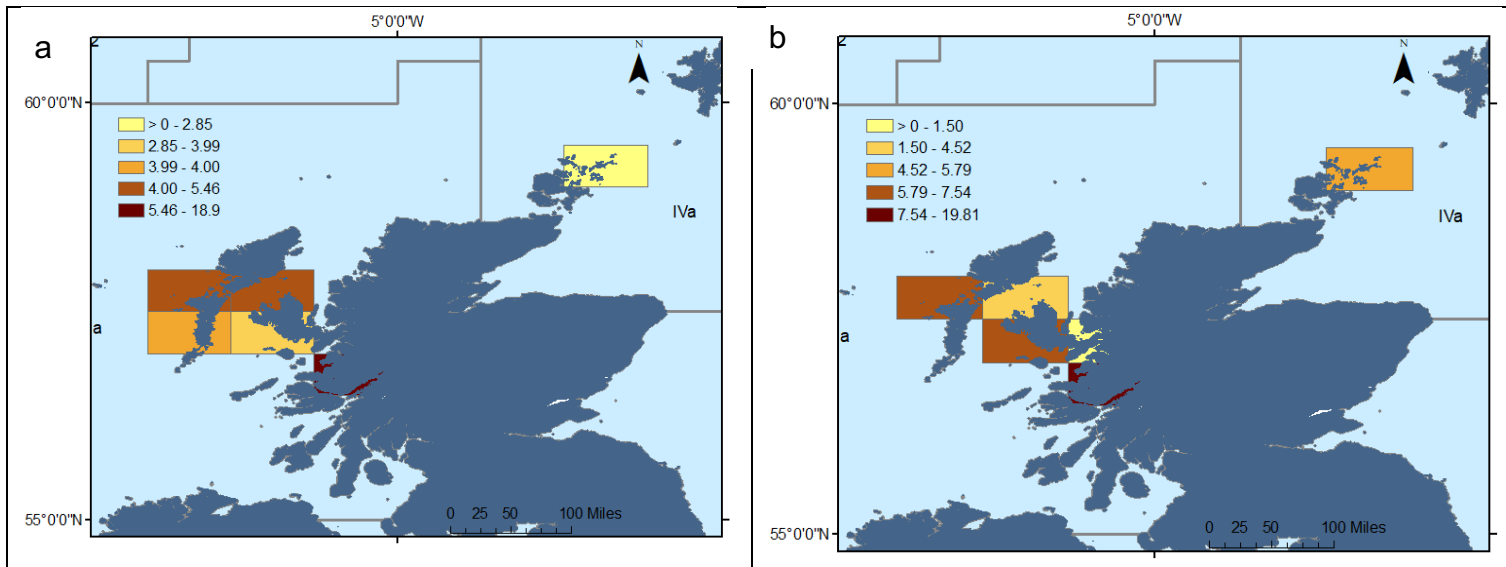


Figure 3. Annual total landings (tonnes) by ICES statistical rectangle reported for all wrasse species from FISH1 forms and paper logs for (a) 2021 (b) 2022. ICES rectangles with landings reported from fewer than 5 vessels to that square are not displayed on the map.

Ballan wrasse are typically the most common species of wrasse reported and contributed between 39.3% and 80.6% of the landings (by weight) between 2017 and 2022 (Table 3). Corkwing wrasse contributed to 14.6% of the landings in 2021 and 11.6% of the landings in 2022. For detailed information on the number and percentage of wrasse landed by species during 2021 and 2022 please refer to Appendix 1, Table A1.4.

Table 3. Percentage wrasse species composition in annual landings by weight as reported from FISH1 forms and paper logs for 2017-2022.

Species	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Ballan	74.5	74.6	39.3	60.8	73.0	80.6
Corkwing	6.3	8.6	12.5	14.7	14.6	11.6
Goldsinny	14.4	10.8	34.8	7.7	7.8	4.3
Rock cook	0.9	2.5	1.2	6.0	2.0	1.2
Wrasses	3.9	4.4	12.2	10.8	2.7	2.4

To provide an approximation of the retention and return rates, fishers also provided counts from the first 20 pots lifted on each fishing trip. Fishers report the number of

fish retained of permitted size, and fish returned to the sea (under, over or permitted size) for each species. The total percentage of wrasse of permitted sizes and retained (landed) was 51.5% for 2021 and 40.0% for 2022 (Table 4, numbers reported in Appendix 1 Table A1.2). Of the 60% of the fish that were returned in 2022, 30.3% of the wrasse were undersized, 5.7% were oversized and 24.1% were of permitted size.

Table 4. Percentage of wrasse species reported by fishers in the first 20 pots lifted during the 2021 and 2022 wrasse fishing seasons and either returned to the sea or retained (based on numbers of wrasse reported by the fishers). Table 1 shows minimum and maximum landing sizes for each wrasse species.

Species	Ballan	Corkwing	Cuckoo	Goldsinny	Rock Cook	Total
Returned (%) undersize 2021	10.5	30.2	36.2	39.6	55.2	26.8
Returned (%) undersize 2022	12.3	27.1	24.0	39.0	56.8	30.3
Returned (%) oversize 2021	6.0	7.7	9.0	5.5	2.2	5.7
Returned (%) oversize 2022	13.5	3.6	3.8	0.5	0.3	5.6
Returned (%) permitted 2021	2.9	22.2	33.7	34.4	14.3	15.9
Returned (%) permitted 2022	4.4	35.6	56.7	38.0	22.3	24.1
Retained (%) permitted 2021	80.5	40.0	21.2	20.5	28.3	51.5
Retained (%) permitted 2022	69.8	33.8	15.6	22.5	20.6	40.0

5. Discussion and Next Steps

The increased number of vessels reporting landings in 2020 may relate to the live wrasse consultation for new management measures, and because of fishers seeking to establish a track record. The control measures introduced for 2021 have improved confidence in the accuracy of data, compared to earlier years of the wrasse fishery. Not all vessels submitted science return forms, so the data reported here (number of wrasse by species) are an underestimate. This has been rectified so going forward all vessels should submit science return forms.

In 2021 and 2022, not all vessels derogated to fish for wrasse reported landings. Access to diversification opportunities or emergent fisheries are often applied for by established fishing businesses as a method of safeguarding future fishing

opportunities. Introducing a licence condition prohibiting the landing of wrasse may have artificially increased the interest in applying for a derogation.

The salmon aquaculture companies play a significant role in this fishery, driving demand and imposing requirements on species, fish health and price paid. Prices in 2023 were reported to vary between £10 and £17.50 per fish depending on demand and fish condition. Different aquaculture companies may request different species of wrasse, which may explain the differences in the number (and percentages) of wrasse species retained.

The Marine Directorate will continue to gather data on the wrasse fishery to further improve the evidence base. Proposals to extend appropriate vessel tracking to all commercial fishing vessels under 12 metres in length by 2026 will also improve our understanding of the distribution and patterns of fishing activity.

Based on our assessment of the available data, Marine Directorate don't currently intend to introduce new management measures for the 2024 season but will keep this decision under review. Any future developments will be evidence-led. Discussions on possible future management measures will be held with relevant stakeholders, including aquaculture colleagues, through the FMAC group. Possible future options include:

- Limiting the number of derogations available.
- Modifying pot limits.
- Changing minimum landing size.
- Modifying escape panels within the pots.
- Imposing catch limits.
- Altering the requirements to obtain a derogation.
- Enhanced reporting through vessel tracking.

Stakeholder input to the future management of this fishery is vital and the Marine Directorate wishes to actively encourage discussion around fishery control measures, whilst ensuring compliance. The Scottish Government are commissioning scoping work on the best approach for non-quota species Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) in Scotland. It is expected wrasse will be included in these considerations. Any discussions regarding FMPs will be progressed through our Fisheries Management and Conservation Group (FMAC) and where appropriate the Regional Inshore Fisheries Group (RIFG) network ([RIFG](#)).

Appendix 1

Table A1.1 Total landings (tonnes) by ICES statistical rectangle reported for all wrasse species from FISH1 and paper logs for the years 2017-2022. ICES statistical rectangles with fewer than 5 vessels reporting are not reported in this table (*) but are included in the total for each year.

Annual Wrasse landings (tonnes)

ICES Statistical Rectangle	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
39E4	*	*	0	0	0	0
40E3	0	0	0	*	0	0
40E4	*	*	*	2.2231	*	*
40E5	0	0	0	0	0	0
40E8	0	0	0	0	0	*
41E2	0	0	*	0	0	0
41E3	*	*	*	*	*	0
41E4	*	*	*	*	*	*
41E5	0	0	0	0	*	0
41E7	*	0	0	0	0	0
42E2	*	*	*	*	0	*
42E3	*	*	*	*	*	*
42E4	*	*	12.603	*	18.917	19.818
42E7	*	0	0	0	0	0
43E2	*	*	*	*	4.006	*
43E3	8.965	11.435	10.461	10.206	3.992	7.541
43E4	5.803	1.490	*	1.009	*	1.505
43E5	0	0	*	0	*	0
44E2	*	*	34.610	*	5.461	7.306
44E3	*	*	*	8.574	4.857	4.520
44E4	*	*	*	2.499	*	*
44E5	0	0	*	*	*	0
44E6	*	*	*	*	*	*
44E7	0	*	0	*	0	0
44E8	0	*	*	0	0	0
44E9	0	*	0	0	0	0
45E3	*	*	*	*	*	*
45E4	*	*	*	*	*	*
45E5	0	0	0	*	0	0
46E4	0	0	0	0	0	*
46E6	0	*	2.049	3.686	*	*
46E7	0	*	0	*	*	*
47E3	0	0	0	*	0	*
47E6	0	*	*	3.245	*	*

47E7	0	*	2.010	3.145	2.851	5.796
48E8	0	0	0	*	*	0
48E9	0	0	0	*	0	0
49E8	0	0	0	0	*	*
49E9	0	0	0	0	0	*
Total	40.137	51.030	87.750	71.734	68.011	78.571

Table A1.2. Number of wrasse species caught by fishers in the first 20 pots lifted during the 2021 and 2022 wrasse fishing seasons and either returned to the sea or retained. Reported through science return forms. Table 1 (main report) shows minimum and maximum landing sizes.

Species	Ballan	Corkwing	Cuckoo	Goldsinny	Rock Cook	Total
Returned (%) undersize 2021	1798	1239	412	3926	2453	9828
Returned (%) undersize 2022	1264	1688	256	2966	3119	9293
Returned (%) oversize 2021	1028	317	102	547	97	2091
Returned (%) oversize 2022	1387	223	40	36	17	1703
Returned (%) permitted 2021	501	910	384	3403	635	5833
Returned (%) permitted 2022	447	2221	604	2889	1224	7385
Retained (%) permitted 2021	13718	1641	241	2026	1257	18883
Retained (%) permitted 2022	7158	2108	166	1711	1131	12274
Total 2021	17045	4107	1139	9902	4442	36635
Total 2022	10256	6240	1066	7602	5491	30655

Table A1.3. Number and percentage of total wrasse (all species combined) reported landed by ICES statistical rectangle during the 2021 and 2022 seasons as reported by fishers (science return forms) and part of the derogation to fish for wrasse. ICES statistical rectangles with fewer than 5 vessels reporting are not reported in this table (*) but are included in the total for each year.

ICES statistical rectangle	Number landed 2021	Percentage (%) 2021	Number landed 2022	Percentage (%) 2022
40E4	*	*	0	0
41E4	*	*	*	*
42E3	*	*	*	*
42E4	198211	32.3	372540	49.9

43E2	54725	8.9	*	*
43E3	52148	8.5	59001	7.9
43E4	*	*	4391	0.6
44E2	39907	6.5	44983	6.0
44E3	92985	15.1	17694	2.4
44E4	*	*	*	*
44E6	*	*	*	*
44E7	0	0	*	*
45E3	*	*	*	*
46E6	*	*	*	*
46E7	*	*	*	*
47E6	*	*	*	*
47E7	53465	8.7	80973	10.8
6a	940	0.2	0	0
Total	613993	100	746974	100

Table A1.4. Number and percentage of total wrasse reported (landed) by species during the 2021 and 2022 seasons as reported (via science return forms) as part of the derogation to fish for wrasse.

Species	Number landed 2021	Percentage (%) 2021	Number landed 2022	Percentage (%) 2022
Ballan	360896	58.8	488267	65.4
Corkwing	73758	12.0	120051	16.1
Cuckoo	5879	1.0	6009	0.8
Goldsinny	71115	11.6	70233	9.4
Rock cook	52820	8.6	62414	8.4
Wrasse (undefined)*	49525	8.1	N/A	N/A
Total	613993	100	746974	100

*In 2021, reporting at species level was not always possible. In 2022, that issue was addressed.



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Edinburgh
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