

Notice of non-opening of the 2024 Squid (Winter) fishery

Background

The Squid (Winter) fishery (for *Doryteuthis gahi*, commonly known as ‘Loligo’), operated under the X-licence, is open for a period of a maximum of 70 calendar days starting on the last Sunday in July. This period allows for a maximum of 64 fishing days, the remaining 6 calendar days are to allow for compensatory days, to be utilised in circumstances such as bad weather or mechanical breakdown. The period the fishery is open for the entire fleet of 16 vessels is referred to as a season.

The winter Loligo season is primarily managed on the basis of seeking to ensure that the minimum biomass of Loligo in the designated Loligo fishing area (known as the ‘Loligo Box’) is above 10,000 tonnes at the end of the season, as set out in the [2024 licensing advice](#), which states: *“In either 1st or 2nd season the minimum escapement threshold is set at 10,000 tonnes biomass. If in-season depletion models project that calamari biomass will fall below 10,000 tonnes, the fishery may be suspended or stopped before the scheduled end date of the season”*. As this squid species lives only one year, the goal is to maintain a population large enough to reproduce and replace itself.

The Fisheries Department carries out a pre-season survey prior to both the summer and winter Loligo seasons to estimate the total Loligo biomass in and around the Loligo Box. The estimate also includes figures for lower and upper 95% confidence boundaries.

During the season, the Fisheries Department continues to produce regular updates of the estimated biomass based on a depletion model using catch, effort, and squid size data. These estimates are used to take management decisions related to the fishery, alongside other factors such as the maturity and size of Loligo being caught.

Relevant legislation

Under section 11 of the Fisheries (Conservation and Management) Ordinance 2005, the Director of Fisheries (the Director of Natural Resources) may set sustainability measures for a stock, taking into account the effects of fishing on the stock, existing controls and the natural variability of the stock. Measures may include changing the total allowable effort or catch, the size/sex/state of stock allowed to be taken, the areas from which stock may be taken, the methods by which stock may be taken, and the period for which fishing may take place in a fishery.

For the purposes of the Loligo fishery, in practice this allows the director to take measures including closing part of the Loligo Box to fishing, temporarily closing the fishery, issuing a final closure notice for a season, or not opening a season at all.

Section 12 of the ordinance requires that prior to setting or varying a sustainability measure, the director (so far as is reasonably practicable) must consult with the Fisheries Advisory Committee and other persons or organisations that it would be desirable to consult with, who are representative of persons having an interest in the stock or effects of fishing. For the Loligo fishery, in practice this means the Loligo Producers Group.

However, section 12 also allows the director to set or vary measures without carrying out the aforementioned consultation in cases of urgency.

Should the director take any decisions, section 12(3) requires them to publish the reasons for their decision as soon as reasonably practicable.

2024 Squid (Winter) season

In 2024 the last Sunday in July fell on 28 July, giving a season end date of 6 October. However, no vessel in the fishery is granted a licence for more than 64 days, meaning in practical terms the fishery was due to close on 29 September, unless compensatory days had been allowed.

The pre-season survey carried out between 11 July and 22 July estimated the total biomass at 13,138 tonnes (95% credible interval 7,230 to 19,239 tonnes). The fact that the lower credible interval was significantly below 10,000 tonnes raised concerns.

A meeting was held with the Loligo Producers Group on 26 July to discuss the survey findings. The Group were presented with two options for proceeding; delaying the start and carrying out a second survey or opening as planned on 28 July with a rolling 24-hour closure notice in effect. The Group opted for the former. This was agreed by the Fisheries Department, with the Head of Fisheries Management stating that the decision to open or not open the season would be dependent on the lower credible interval being above 10,000 tonnes. The second survey subsequently took place between 4 and 14 August and produced an estimate of the total biomass of just 6,889 tonnes (95% credible interval 4,258 to 12,504 tonnes).

Closure decision

Following the second survey, a meeting was called with Loligo Producers Group members (including the relevant ITQ Holding and Qualifying Companies), which was held on 16 August. At this meeting the Group was informed that the season would not be opened.

Rationale

The decision not to open the season was taken as the lower credible limit of the biomass estimates from the second survey was significantly below 10,000 tonnes (as was the main estimate). The Deputy Director took the decision not to open the season for reasons of stock conservation and long-term sustainability of the fishery. The early closure of the same season the previous year was also taken into consideration, with the Deputy Director determining that these issues required taking a precautionary approach to the fishery.

This decision was taken without consultation with Fisheries Advisory Committee on the basis that an urgent decision was required to give industry certainty regarding the season, allowing them to make alternative plans for their fleets. However, the Loligo Producers Group were consulted throughout the decision-making process and agreed with the decision not to open the fishery, as noted in a press release agreed with FIG and issued later on 16 August.