

Boosting livelihoods and conservation practices among small-scale fishermen

April 19 2018, by Alan Williams



For the past decade, the Lyme Bay project has proved it is possible to deliver conservation gains while benefiting small-scale fishermen. Credit: University of Plymouth

Around the UK, there are hundreds of coastal communities supporting the livelihoods of hard-working small-scale fishermen.

Enabling them to secure a sustainable income has always been a major

challenge, even without endeavouring to meet national and international conservation goals.

Now a major new research project led by the Blue Marine Foundation (BLUE) and the University of Plymouth's Marine Institute aims to identify the tools through which fishermen across the country can contribute to those dual aims.

The research is being funded thanks to a generous donation made to BLUE from Superdry co-founder, Julian Dunkerton. It will build on the existing project in Lyme Bay, on the south coast of Devon and Dorset, which for the past decade has proved it is possible to deliver conservation gains while benefitting small-scale fishermen.

BLUE and the University have worked together on that project, and it was also featured in the [25-year Environment Plan](#), the Government's long-term vision for protecting the environment for future generations.

The new project will aim to use the blueprint developed at Lyme Bay to potentially support other [coastal communities](#) while addressing some of the many and complex challenges being faced by policy makers.

Tim Glover, Chief Executive of BLUE, said: "This is the perfect time to be doing research of this nature, as Brexit presents us with opportunities to think again about how we fish in this country. Up until now, the story of small-scale fishermen has been one where they tend to be very conservation minded but are struggling to earn a living. However, they have never had a voice and an opportunity to be part of research into their industry, and through this project we are seeking to redress that."

In its first year, the research will be based at four sites around the UK - St Abbs and Eyemouth Voluntary Marine Reserve and the Solway Firth in Scotland, North Devon and Jersey.

The partners will work with local scientists and the fishermen themselves, to harness their experiences of the unique challenges faced in each location, while pursuing five initial research goals:

- Survey the health of species and habitats across UK sites against which changes can be recorded;
- Instigate annual monitoring of key fish stocks in partnership with fishermen;
- Create best practice codes of conduct for commercial and recreational fisheries within sites to manage pressures. This could include gear limits, vessel monitoring and closed areas;
- Champion small-scale sustainable fishermen through improving port infrastructure to enhance quality and value to local fleets;
- Create a sustainable, traceable and high-quality fishery to allow the fleet access to BLUE's Reserve Seafood Scheme , thereby generating higher prices for fishermen protecting their livelihoods.

Martin Attrill, Professor of Marine Ecology at the University of Plymouth, said: "Our work over the past decade in Lyme Bay has shown that fishermen are keen to protect the environments in which they live and work. It has provided a real blueprint for how we can have a positive impact on marine systems, helping us to identify local concerns but at the same time begin to explore a series of national problems. We know that every coastal town and village has its own unique identity and challenges, but we want to provide more opportunities to support our [fishermen](#), providing them with the opportunities to earn a strong and sustainable livelihood."

Provided by University of Plymouth

Citation: Boosting livelihoods and conservation practices among small-scale fishermen (2018,

April 19) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-04-boosting-livelihoods-small-scale-fishermen.html>

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