Dramatic recovery of over-fished shellfish in Arran marine reserve

Lobsters and king scallops have quadrupled in isle's no-fishing zone

By **ILONA AMOS**
Environment Correspondent

Populations of king scallops and lobsters have quadrupled over the past decade in the first area of Scotland's seas where fishing has been completely banned.

The findings come from the latest surveys of sealife within a pioneering "no take zone" which was set up off the isle of Arran in a bid to combat decades of over-fishing.

A new study by scientists at the University of York shows a dramatic increase in the abundance of marine life inside the 2.67km² site since all fishing was outlawed there in 2008.

Numbers of some species have increased nearly fourfold since the community-backed project began.

The zone, the first of its type in Scotland, was set in force by the Scottish Government after years of campaigning by the Community of Arran Seabed Trust (Coast), a local environmental group that had been charting major declines of fish stocks all around the island.

The study, carried out in partnership with Coast, has revealed there are nearly four times as many king scallops in the area as in 2010.

Bigger adult scallops have also been found, as well as greater numbers of juveniles.

Lobsters in the area have also benefited, with an increasing percentage of larger specimens and evidence of spillover into surrounding areas.

Dive surveys show the seabed is recovering after damage caused by fishing with trawls and dredges, with the growth of structurally complex nursery habitats that provide refuge for marine life.

Results from Lamlash Bay have also been pivotal in the establishment of a larger marine protected area around the south of Arran in 2014.

Award-winning environmentalist Howard Wood, co-founder of Coast, says the project's success is "underpinned by ten years of science".

He said: "We have clear evidence that marine biodiversity in the protected area is improving.

"We have a solid scientific platform which allows other coastal communities, alongside the Scottish and UK governments, to confidently move forward with marine reserve designation and management.

"Coast's most important message is that any environment can benefit from better protection, and every community has the right to a better environment if they want one.

"If that is embraced on a global scale then we truly will see a sea-change in the health of our seas."

As well as influencing national marine protection policy, the project has won several environmental awards.

The researchers say the project has kick-started a national movement to protect UK coastal waters from overfishing and loss of biodiversity.

Dr Bryce Stewart, from the University of York, said: "Arran's conservation success has been recognised internationally and is inspiring greater involvement of local communities around the UK and further afield.

"Evidence from Lamlash Bay has supported the development of strong protection for marine protected areas, at times seeing off lobbyist efforts to weaken management.

"Local communities around the UK have looked at the story unfolding in Lamlash Bay and – like Coast – have decided to take the destiny of their coastal waters into their own hands.

"The lesson from Arran is that, with community support, strong science and political will, we can start to recover our seas."

iamos@scotsman.com

COMMENT

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HOWARD WOOD
Community of Arran Seabed Trust

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