

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of a crab inside a creel. The crab is positioned in the lower-left quadrant, with its legs and claws visible. The creel is made of dark, heavy-duty material, and teal-colored metal chains are draped across the scene, creating a grid-like pattern. The lighting is somewhat dim, highlighting the textures of the crab and the creel.

# Working together to support a sustainable Solway creel fishery

Two projects are underway to help protect the long term sustainability and profitability of the Solway creel fishery: a **lobster v-notching** study and the introduction of **creel escape panels**. Both initiatives are voluntary and are intended to help increase valuable commercial crab and lobster stocks and shorten the time it takes fishermen to sort their catch.

# Lobster v-notching

A scoping study is being carried out in the Solway to explore the potential local benefits of v-notching which is a way of harmlessly marking breeding lobsters by cutting a notch in the tail. Because there is no restriction on landing berried (egg-bearing) lobsters in Scotland, there is a loss of potential recruitment whenever one is taken. By v-notching berried females, and preventing landing of notched animals, we can ensure that eggs are protected and recruitment is improved.

Reproductive lobsters produce eggs after each moult and v-notches can take two or three moults to grow out. With each hen producing thousands of eggs, v-notching can substantially increase egg production per individual and recruitment to the overall population. Practical and scientific studies in places including Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic and North America have shown that v-notching can result in considerable increases in reproduction in local lobster fisheries.

Collecting the notches can also provide information about lobster genetics to improve understanding of local populations. Better information can lead to improved management of the fishery and can offer the potential for fishery certification in the future. Establishing local provenance and sustainability can provide marketing opportunities to increase the value of the catch.



Maximising **recruitment** can play an **important** part in achieving a **sustainable** and **profitable** fishery for the long term



# Creel escape panels

Creel escape panels are used in other parts of the UK and abroad and are designed to allow juvenile crab and lobster to escape unharmed. The measure also reduces the time it takes to clear pots so has benefits for both stock conservation and the working practice of fishermen.



Minimising **mortality** can play an **important** part in achieving a **sustainable** and **profitable** fishery for the long term



Escape gaps of 80 by 45mm will typically retain lobster and brown crab above landing size but let those below the minimum size escape. However, catch still needs to be measured to make sure any retained crab and lobster are above the minimum landing size.

Practical and scientific trials have proven the value of escape gaps over many years including work by Cumbria Sea Fisheries Committee, Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority and Bangor University. Retaining juveniles is damaging due to the impact of creel movement, aggression in creels, handling and translocation from refuges so it's better to leave them on the seabed.

## The use of escape hatches:

- reduces damage to, and mortality of, juvenile crab and lobster
- reduces limb damage to saleable lobsters thereby maximising their value
- reduces the time needed to clear creels



## Solway Lobster Fishery Data Collection

The v-notching and escape panel projects are being supplemented with work on more general data collection to improve understanding of the Solway lobster fishery. By collecting evidence of the use of traditional fishing grounds and developing a better understanding of the status of lobster stocks, local fishermen will be able to contribute more effectively to future management of the fishery and to the evolving marine planning process.



### Find out more

Enabled by funding from Marine Scotland and supported by the South West Inshore Fisheries Group, these projects are being taken forward in a partnership between local creel fishermen, scientists and Solway Firth Partnership. Galloway Static Gear Fishermen's Association is the industry body representing most local creel fishermen and is a key partner in the projects.

Inshore Fisheries Groups (IFGs) are non-statutory bodies established recently to improve the management of Scotland's inshore fisheries. There are six IFGs covering the whole of Scotland's coastline with the Solway being part of a larger South West IFG area.

[www.ifg.org.uk](http://www.ifg.org.uk)

Solway Firth Partnership is an independent local charity supporting sustainable use of the coast and sea and helping to protect the distinctive character of the local area.

[www.solwayfirthpartnership.co.uk](http://www.solwayfirthpartnership.co.uk)

***V notch pliers and creel escape panels are being provided free of charge to local fishermen. Project partners are working together on distribution. Please contact Solway Firth Partnership on 01387 251991 for more information.***



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