

Velvet Crab on all Coasts

(Sub-areas VI and VII)

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Fisheries Science Services

FSS – ADVICE

FSS advise that effort in the mixed crustacean pot fishery which takes this species as a by-catch, should be capped with a view to stabilising exploitation.

STATE OF THE STOCK

Unknown.

CURRENT MANAGEMENT

None

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

1. Velvet crab is usually taken as a by-catch in the course of potting for the larger crustacean species but there are some small directed fisheries targeting it. Although its landings are small it is a valuable species in the Irish Sea where brown crab landings are very small (Fig 1).
2. 227 t of velvet crab worth €0.455 million were recorded in 2005 (Fig 2). Landings have remained stable over the past decade, after an abrupt decline from almost 500 t in 1995. Three phases are discernible in the landings: a growth of interest in the species in the 1990s culminating in a peak of exploitation in 1995 and an apparently stable period after that, although a downward tendency might be discerned in its later landings history.
3. The species occurs very close inshore. There are some, limited, instances of directed winter fishing for it. Landings are probably a reflection of fishing effort for large crustaceans generally, larger catches being made in the earlier part of the fishing year. When, in the later summer and autumn, fishing effort moves offshore, landings of velvet crab decline.
4. Velvets suffer high mortalities in storage and this may militate against their retention everywhere. This species is more likely to be discarded than any of the other large crustaceans with which it is captured.
5. Processors report the loss of larger size grades from the landings and surveys indicate that carapace width frequency distribution of landings is variable (Previous Stock Books have contained some details of this).

Fig 1 Landings and first sale value of velvet crab (t), 1990-2005: Source, DCMNR.

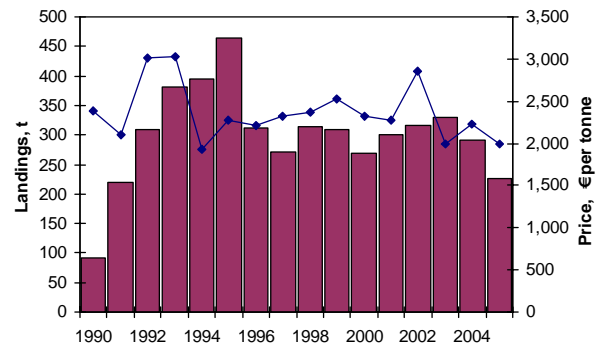


Fig 2 The distribution of 227 tonnes of velvet crab around the Irish coastline in 2005. The 6 nm limit is shown. The vast majority of landings are harvested inside this line.

