

Fishing vessel owner and skippers ordered to pay £88,777.60 for fisheries offences

Northern Joy is a 38.75 metre beam trawler owned by North Atlantic Fisheries Company (NAFC) and part of the North Atlantic Fisheries Producer Organisation. The vessel is registered to Hull and operates out of Harlingen in The Netherlands.

The prosecution was brought due to multiple breaches of the vessel's licence conditions, being entry into seasonal closures at speeds consistent with fishing and the retention and landing of bass.

The prosecution explained to the court that the MMO had detected the vessel entering a seasonal closure at speeds consistent with fishing initially in January 2018, in breach of its fishing licence conditions.

Following the initial breach an MMO marine officer telephoned NAFC to alert them to the problem however, following the telephone call, the vessel entered the closure at speeds consistent with fishing on a further ten occasions over the following three months.

In addition to entry into the seasonal closure, between October 2017 and March 2018 the vessel declared catches of sea bass via their electronic log with a value of around £7,500. The Northern Joy has no authorisation to catch bass, which is a particularly vulnerable species and therefore subject to a separate authorisation procedure based upon track record.

Both seasonal closures and bass authorisation procedures are conservation measures put in place to protect vulnerable species from overfishing.

The owner (represented by Matthew Cox) and both skippers pleaded guilty to all charges.

NAFC was fined a total of £67,000 in respect of the offences and an additional fine of £7,400, being the value of the bass that had been unlawfully landed and sold. NAFC was also ordered to pay £3267.60 in costs and a victim surcharge of £170.

Mr Ras was fined £6,000 for the offences, £500 in costs and a victim surcharge of £170. Mr Wezelman was fined £3,600 for the offences, £500 in costs and a victim surcharge of £170.

An MMO spokesperson said:

It is essential that seasonal closures are maintained to allow fish stocks to replenish. Restrictions on bass fishing are also of great

ecological importance to the sustainability of the species and it is vital that these restrictions are followed.

When this is not the case the MMO will always take the appropriate action, including prosecution, to ensure offenders do not benefit from such illegal activity and to protect fish stocks for the wider fishing industry and future generations.