Supporting Documentation


**Image:** A black and white photograph of trawlers berthed at St Andrew's Dock in 1935. (© Hull Museums).

Please include the following citation when quoting from this Dataset:

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1. Summary

Dataset Title: North Sea Catch Statistics, 1924-1981

Subject: Wet fish landed in England and Wales from North Sea fishing grounds by first class British fishing vessels, distinguished by species, between 1924 and 1981.

Note: This dataset does not include statistics relating to fishing activity during World War II (1939-1946 inclusive).

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Extent: 8,842 records

Keywords: Historical statistics; sea fisheries; North Sea; fish stocks; Soles; Cod; Haddock; Hake; Plaice; Herring; Mackerel; Demersal; Pelagic; Trawl; Lines; Danish seine; Seine; Pareja.

Citation:  
(a) The dataset: please cite as follows: Barnard, Michaela ‘Wet Fish Landed from North Sea Fishing Grounds, 1924-1981’, in Nicholls, John (comp.) (http://hydra.hull.ac.uk/resources/resources/hull:7293)

(b) Abstract: please cite as follows: Barnard, Michaela ‘Wet Fish Landed from North Sea Fishing Grounds, 1924-1981, Supporting Documentation’, Nicholls, John (comp.) (http://hydra.hull.ac.uk/resources/resources/hull:7293)
2. Research Context and Objectives
This dataset comprises 8,842 records that detail the landings of fish by British first class fishing vessels from Region IV (North Sea) during the period 1924-1981 (exclusive of 1939-1946). Each record is broken-down into the following fields: ID; Record Year; Gear; Propulsion; Hours Fishing; Days Fishing; Species; Size; CWTs Weight; Tonnes Weight (please see below for more detailed field-level information).

The value of such information is encapsulated in the following quotation from the Centre for the Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas):

> Historical fisheries datasets are of key importance for studies of long-term changes in fish stocks and fisheries, and on the possible effects on environmental and anthropogenic factors. Of particular usefulness are datasets collected in a consistent way over a number of decades.¹

This dataset represents a significant contribution to research in the areas of marine environmental history and historical ecology in three main respects:

- First, the possibility for creating a proxy for the abundance of North Sea fish stocks through the formulation of a Catch per Unit Effort (CPUE) figures for the dataset is facilitated by the inclusion of figures relating to effort (Hours/Days Fishing).
- Second, the information contained within the dataset is rendered accessible and useable through the provision of detailed information regarding the primary source material, which places the data in its full historical context.
- Thirdly, the dataset is rendered fully accessible to the international research community through e-publication on the University of Hull Hydra repository (http://hydra.hull.ac.uk)

3. The Primary Source Material

The information contained within this dataset has been extrapolated from the *Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables* - the official government record of fish landings at ports in England and Wales.

The publication of the first *Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables* in 1887 (for the year 1886) marked a watershed in the collation and publication of statistics relating to the commercial fisheries of England and Wales. Statistics had been compiled from a range of sources in preceding years, with the returns of fish conveyed inland by railway representing one of the most significant set of records in this respect. But the inadequacy of such information, particularly in the assessment of fish stocks, had been recognised for a considerable period of time. Indeed, the lack of concerted action on this matter was highlighted by the 1884 *Royal Commission on Trawl Fishing*:

> We cannot pass from this subject without recording our regret at the absence of all official fishery statistics, with the exception of those relating to the herring fishery and the cod and ling fishery in Scotland. The collection of such statistics was recommended by the Royal Commission of 1866, and again by the Commission of 1878. Eighteen years have elapsed since the recommendation of 1866 was made, and yet we are still absolutely without official statistics by which the accuracy of statements as to the decrease of fish might be tested.

As the foregoing quotation suggests, the collection of statistical information on the commercial sea fisheries of England and Wales had gained new impetus as a result of increased concern about North Sea stock levels. Indeed, this concern extended to members of the trawl fishing community. Whereas most trawlermen had expressed scepticism about the notion of stock diminution on North Sea fishing grounds when testifying before the 1866 *Royal Commission on Sea Fisheries*, most were less...

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2 See British Parliamentary Papers (BPP) *Fish Conveyed by Railway. Return of the Quantity of Fish, Conveyed Inland by Railway from each of the Principal Ports of England and Wales, Scotland, and Ireland*, 1878-1892.


4 BPP, 1884-85 [C.4328] *Trawl Net and Beam Trawl Fishing. Report of the commissioners appointed to inquire and report upon the complaints that have been made by line and drift net fishermen of injuries sustained by them in their calling owing to the use of the trawl net and beam trawl, in the territorial Waters of the United Kingdom; with minutes of evidence and appendix, p.xii.*
certain by the time of the 1884 *Royal Commission on Trawl Fishing*. For example, John Sims – a Hull-based smackowner - stated that there had been a ‘gradual falling off’ of North Sea fish since the 1858/1860 period.⁵

Such observations – together with an increased awareness concerning the importance of scientific fisheries research to the understanding of fish populations – culminated in the production of the *Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables*. For the first time, individuals (with dedicated staff at the larger fishing ports) were tasked with collecting information on fish landings, and forwarding that information to the appropriate government body on a regular basis. The methodology, and resulting confidence in the information that was garnered, was outlined in the 1887 publication:

...it will be convenient to notice the means which have been used to obtain the present statistics as to fish landed in England. For this purpose advantage has been taken very largely of the coastguard officers all over England and Wales, while in some of the more important districts special officers have been appointed. In this way the whole coast of England and Wales has been mapped out, and, with the exception of some small places, where it was found that the quantity of fish landed was totally insignificant, every place on the coast of England and Wales practically makes a return. The expense has not been considerable, but there is no reason to doubt, from the care and attention paid to the subject, and from the means of check afforded by the return of fish conveyed by railway and in other ways, that the particulars obtained are substantially accurate. The returns are received at the Board of Trade from each place once a month, and additional means of check will be afforded in future by comparing the returns for each month, as they come in, with those for the corresponding month of previous years, and by making inquiries when any discrepancy appears.⁶

The *Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables* are widely accessible in original form. Hard copies can be obtained from various repositories throughout the United Kingdom, and digital versions of the source have been published online. With regard to digital reproductions of the source material, full collections are available through the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers (HCPP) website and the website of the Marine Management Organisation (MMO).⁷ Copies of the *Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables*

⁵ BPP, 1884-85 [C.4328] *Trawl Net and Beam Trawl Fishing*, p.247 (9101/9102).
⁶ BPP, 1887 (36) *Sea fisheries of the United Kingdom. Statistical tables and memorandum relating to the sea fisheries of the United Kingdom*, p.3.
published through both of these repositories have been used in the compilation of this dataset, together with hard copies of the Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables held at the Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{8} The Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull, Hull, UK holds the Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables for the following years: 1922/24-1937; 1945/46-1986; 1989 (Class number SH 201 M6 S7).
4. Metadata: Explanation of Data Fields

The entries below are outlined as per the field headings of the North Sea 1924-1981 dataset. An explanation is offered for each field in general terms, and where relevant, in dataset specific terms.

**ID**
Unique Identifier code for each entry (e.g. 1, 2, 3, etc.).

**Record Year**
The year that the catch was landed.

**Gear**
The mode of capture by gear: Trawl, Lines, Danish seine, Seine or Pareja.

**Propulsion**
The mode of capture by propulsion: Steam, Motor or Sail.

**Hours Fishing**
A measurement of fishing effort. This return is broken down by Gear and mode of Propulsion. *The number of hours fishing is not available for Line fishing* (see “Days Fishing” below). This return relates primarily to demersal species, but also includes pelagic species caught by demersal fishing methods.

**Days Fishing**
A measurement of fishing effort - “Days Fishing” refers to the number of days absent from port. This return is broken down by Gear and mode of Propulsion. As in the case of “Hours Fishing”, this return relates primarily to demersal species, but also includes pelagic species caught by demersal fishing methods. While the “Days Fishing” measurement was restricted to Line fishing up to 1937, it was broadened out to include other modes of capture in the following year (see Appendix, Figures 1.1 and 1.2 below for a detailed image of this change in information as taken from the original source).

Note: *Both “Hours Fishing” and “Days Fishing” have been included in the Dataset for the years relating to 1965 onwards. These are broken-down by Gear/Propulsion as in previous years. However, as the fish landings are not broken-down by Gear/Propulsion from 1965 onwards, special care must be taken in relating effort and landing figures* (see the field “Species” below for further information).

**Species**
The species of wet fish landed: a total of 34 species (comprising 28 demersal and six pelagic) were recorded on an individual basis in the Statistical Tables up to 1964. Those demersal species not returned separately were placed in a category titled “Other kinds or Mixed”. Each species was sub-divided by Gear/Propulsion (see Appendix, Figure 2.1 for a detailed image of this information as taken from the original source).

From 1965 onwards, the information relating to fish landings as given by Region of Capture was markedly reduced. Returns were restricted to eight species of demersal
fish - Cod, Haddock, Plaice, Redfish, Saithes, Skates and Rays, Soles and Whiting and two pelagic species – Herring and Mackerel. Other species of fish were returned in the category “Other Demersal” or “Other Pelagic”. It should also be noted that these returns were no longer subdivided by Gear/Propulsion (see Appendix, Figure 2.2 for a detailed image of this information as taken from the original source).

Size
The return of five species - comprising Soles, Cod, Haddock, Hake and Plaice - are sub-divided by the sizes “small”, “medium”, “large”, “unsorted” and “total” up to 1938. There is no division of size from 1947 (see Appendix, Figures 3.1 and 3.2 below for an illustration of the change in respect of Cod).

CWTs Weight
The weight of each catch is returned in CWTs (hundredweight) up to 1974.

Tonnes Weight
Figures from 1975 onwards are provided in Tonnes.

Citation
Citation is the field where the formal attribution is shown for users of the North Sea Fishing 1924-1981 dataset to cite; it credits the researchers and editors of a Dataset together with its database compilers. This citation must be quoted whenever records are referenced or employed for any purpose. Please quote the relevant citation when using extracts or details from this dataset:

5. Select Bibliography

Primary Sources

British Parliamentary Papers (BPP) *Fish Conveyed by Railway. Return of the Quantity of Fish, Conveyed Inland by Railway from each of the Principal Ports of England and Wales, Scotland, and Ireland*, 1878-1892.


BPP, 1884-85 [C.4328] *Trawl Net and Beam Trawl Fishing. Report of the commissioners appointed to inquire and report upon the complaints that have been made by line and drift net fishermen of injuries sustained by them in their calling owing to the use of the trawl net and beam trawl, in the territorial Waters of the United Kingdom; with minutes of evidence and appendix*.

Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) *Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office) – published on an annual basis to 1939 (nb: the 1939 publication is for statistics relating to the year 1938)


MAF, *Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office) – published on an annual basis to 1954 (nb: the 1954 publication is for statistics relating to the year 1953)


Secondary Sources

Please find listed below a selection of academic outputs that may prove useful to those using this dataset and/or undertaking research in related fields (entries marked with an asterisk* have used data from the *Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables*).


*Hawkins, Oliver, Sea Fisheries Statistics, House of Commons Library Standard Note


# APPENDIX

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Figure 1.1. Detail from the *Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables* (1937)

![Table from Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables (1937)](image)


Figure 1.2. Detail from the *Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables* (1938)

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Figure 2.1. Detail from the *Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables* (1951)

Figure 2.2. Detail from the *Sea Fisheries Statistical Tables* (1965)


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