

News story: Fishing without a licence costs owner, master and fishing company over £75,000

The master of a fishing vessel, a director of the company that owns the vessel and the company itself were sentenced at North Shields Magistrates Court on Friday 9 November in a case brought by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO).

E&J Shellfish Limited, which owned the vessel Catatonia, company director Ewan Inglis and master of the vessel Chris Ferguson were ordered to pay a total of over £75,000 by North Shields Magistrates' Court.

The court heard how sales notes showed that between January and September 2017 the Catatonia made 31 fishing trips when the vessel did not have a valid licence from the MMO for commercial fishing.

The MMO provided advice to E&J Shellfish Limited on completing the necessary paperwork prior to and after the transfer of the vessel to their ownership in January 2017. 18 of the fishing trips made without a licence were after the MMO had sent a letter to the vessel owners making it clear that it was unlicensed and that using it to undertake commercial fishing would be an offence.

As a result of the trips 18,458kg of razor clams were landed with a total value of £103,979.50.

The offences arose under sections 4 and 12 of the Sea Fish Conservation Act 1967 ("the Act") and Regulation 3 Sea Fish Licensing (England) Order 2015. The Act provides for directors of companies to also be found liable for offences.

E&J Shellfish Limited, Ewan Inglis and Chris Ferguson all pleaded guilty in court.

E&J Shellfish Limited was ordered to pay a total of £65,010 – a fine of £12,000 plus a further £50,000 in respect of the value of the fish, plus a victim surcharge of £170 and costs of £2,840.00. Ewan Inglis was fined £9,850 plus a victim surcharge of £170 and Chris Ferguson was fined £383 and order to pay a victim surcharge of £38.

The vessel later became licensed in November 2017 after the owners completed the relevant paperwork and took the necessary steps for a fishing vessel licence to be issued.

A spokesperson for the Marine Management Organisation said:

"Commercial fishing by English fishing vessels, wherever they may be, is only permitted under the authority of a licence issued by the Marine Management

Organisation.

“The outcome of this enforcement action shows that the MMO can detect non-compliance with legal requirements by carrying out cross-checks of information such as sales notes.

“We’re pleased the Magistrates recognised that undermining the regulatory regime is a serious matter.”