



AN t-ÚDARÁS UM  
CHOSAINT  
IASCAIGH MHARA

SEA-FISHERIES  
PROTECTION  
AUTHORITY

## Press Release

Issued by the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority's Press Office

10<sup>th</sup> January 2025

### **Fishing Master Pleads Guilty to Landing Below Minimum Legal Size Brown Crab**

**- *SFPA Reports Court Decision taken on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2025* -**

The Master of a fishing vessel, Brian Leonard, from Co. Dublin, pleaded guilty at Balbriggan District Court, to an offence of landing below minimum legal size Brown Crab at Rush Pier, Dublin in August 2023. The below minimum legal-size catch was detected during a routine inspection by Sea-Fisheries Protection Officers of the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA), of the landing from the licenced fishing vessel "Mary James." The Court heard evidence that under EU and national regulations, the minimum legal size for Brown Crab is 140mm and that 29 Brown Crabs measured below this size, with samples ranging upwards from 118mm. It is not permitted to retain such catches onboard, and they should have been returned to the sea, the Court heard.

Evidence was given that the purpose of the minimum conservation reference size rules, in place since 2019, is to preserve stocks and that gauges are used to comply with this requirement by measuring Brown Crabs at sea. The Court heard scientific papers indicating that Brown Crab stocks are threatened.

In reaching its decision on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2025, the Court stated that it was "important that stocks be preserved" and a penalty must be paid for such an offence. The Court also remarked that the work of the Sea-Fisheries Protection Officers is significant and must be supported. The Court ordered the charitable donation of €500 to Saint Vincent de Paul - the donation was made, and the Master was left without a conviction.

An SFPA spokesperson commented:

"Compliance with EU and national rules on minimum conservation reference sizes is key to ensuring the sustainability of shellfish stocks for trade, fishing communities and ecosystems. Masters and vessel operators must ensure measures are adopted and implemented consistently to comply with their obligations regarding catches of below minimum legal-size shellfish. The SFPA notes the seriousness attached by the Court to non-compliance with the minimum conservation reference size rules. The SFPA commends the Officer involved for their thorough investigation."

Ends

## **Further Information**

### **About the SFPA**

The Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) is the independent statutory body responsible for the regulation of the sea-fisheries and the sea-food production sectors. It promotes compliance with the EU Common Fisheries Policy, sea-fisheries law and food safety law relating to fish and fish products, verifies compliance and, where necessary, enforces it. Its mandate covers all fishing vessels operating within Ireland's 200-mile limit, over 2,000 Irish registered fishing vessels wherever they operate, and all seafood produced in Ireland's seafood processing companies. The SFPA operates through a network of regional port offices situated at Ireland's main fishery harbours. For further information visit: [www.sfpa.ie](http://www.sfpa.ie)