

A Profile of the  
South Coast Fisheries-  
Lyme Regis to Selsey Bill

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**Seafish Report No.411**

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October 1992

# **Sea Fish Industry Authority**

## **Seafish Technology**



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#### **Summary**

The fishing sector of the Southern Sea Fisheries District, of Lyme Regis to Selsey Bill, is typified by small-boat (below 12m) operators who collectively lack organisation and representation. It is estimated from anecdotal evidence (see p.2) that in the order of 350 fishing boats operate full time from numerous bases seriously lacking in infrastructure support. Most boats are owner operated, with the only fleet operation being that of Johnson's Sea Enterprises of Portsmouth who operate four large beam trawlers. In excess of 300 other craft, all under 12m operate on a part time or casual basis.

It is a mixed fishery with principal landings, in terms of value, of crabs, lobsters, bass, sole, plaice and scallops, plus oysters, cod, whiting, skate, ray, claims, brill and mullet. Official MAFF statistics for 1991 value the fishery at first sale at £6.5 million although the figure is known to considerably understate the true value, believed to be in the region of £15 million. The official landed weight is about 3,500 tonnes. Most of the fish and shellfish landings are sold locally directly to fishmongers, caterers and hoteliers or to foreign vivier operators.

There is considerable and increasing pressure from yacht-marina, housing and commercial development and increasing disruption of fishing activity by oil and gas exploration, aggregate dredging and mud dumping. There is also concern among fishermen of pollution of grounds by long sewer outfalls. Within the region three major developments are under consideration that include provision of infrastructure for fishing industry use; at West Bay, Poole and Portsmouth.

The fishery will be affected by the proposals to introduce licencing for all vessels including those below 10m registered length. In future there are also proposals to introduce safety standards for vessels below 12m in length. Both measures could place restrictions on the present operations of many of the vessels, especially those falling into the part time or casual category.

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#### **1. Introduction**

This report is one of a series that examines the fishing activity and related business within regions of the U.K. It covers the coastline of Southern England from Lyme-Regis to Selsey, including the Isle of Wight (Figure 1). The purpose of the study and report is to provide basic information on the extent and nature of the industry and its problems to enable informed discussion and action in support of the industry, either by Seafish or external bodies. The report presents a broad picture of the industry and does not go into the detail of each and every landing site which number in the order of twenty six.

The fieldwork was carried out in mid-September 1992 during which time site visits and interviews were conducted with industry representatives and regulating Authorities (Appendix 2).

The fishing sector of the region is typified by small-boat (below 12m) operators who collectively lack organisation and representation, and who operate from numerous bases seriously lacking in infrastructure support. There is considerable and increasing pressure from yacht-marina, housing and commercial development and increasing disruption of fishing activity by oil and gas exploration, aggregate dredging and mud dumping. There is also concern for pollution of fishing grounds caused by long sewer outfalls.

## 2. Fishing Activity

Fishing activity within the coastal region out to a limit of three nautical miles is managed and regulated by the Southern Sea Fisheries District Committee (S.S.F.D.C.). A bye-law enacted by S.S.F.D.C. restricts fishing within the three-mile limit to vessels of less than 12m overall length and requires that the vessels be registered within the S.S.F.D.C.

The S.S.F.D.C. register indicates that 836 vessels operate in S.S.F.D. waters of which 33 are regular visitor vessels that operate from bases outwith the district. In addition to these there are nine vessels over 12m based at Weymouth, Poole and Portsmouth that operate beyond the three or twelve mile limit depending on the size and fishing technique of the vessel. The disposition of the home-fleet of under 12m boats is given in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Disposition of the under 12m home fleet

Location	Total	Full-time	Casual	Part-time
Lyme Regis	21	13 (9)	5	3
West Bay	28	10 (7)	12	6
Portland	42	25	15	2
Weymouth	124	80	24	20
Swanage	28	15 (8)	4	9
Poole	141	90	29	21
Mudford	35	25 (16)	4	6
Keyhaven	17	13 (7)	3	1
Lymington	30	14 (9)	6	10
Hythe	15	12	2	1
Hamble	49	30	9	10
Gosport	17	14	3	-
Portsmouth	68	42	19	7
Langstone	59	29	26	4
Yarmouth	39	25 (15)	5	9
Cowes	35	16 (3)	10	9
Bembridge	55	29 (15)	19	7
	803	482	195	125

Of the total of 836 under 12 metre vessels, operating in the region 514 (61%) are classified as 'full-time', 195 (23%) classified as casual and 127 (15%) as seasonal.

*Note:* Estimates by fishermen of the number of genuine full-time boats are given for some locations in brackets and suggest fewer in number than as classified by the S.S.F.C. This may be an underestimation on the part of fishermen or be accounted for within the definition of 'full-time' but the estimates consistently underscore the S.S.F.C. register.

Most vessels are owner-operated, with the only fleet operation being that of Johnson's Sea Enterprises based at Portsmouth. The company operates four large beam trawlers with pressure-stock licenses and is currently looking to expand its operation. The beam trawlers operate in the North Sea and the South West and land not only to Portsmouth but to other ports both in the U.K. and in Holland.

The inshore waters of the region are rich in prime species of high value which are prosecuted by various techniques. Many boats are multi-purpose and change fishing technique according to season or returns. Of the inshore-fleet, 52% engage in potting, 55% in lining, 63% in netting, 28% in dredging and 40% in trawling at some time of the year. Several order fisheries for shellfish have been granted at Portland Harbour, Poole, Stanswood Bay, Calshot and Porchester Channel. The Solent Regulated Oyster Fishery is of considerable economic importance to the area.

### 3. Landings

Official M.A.F.F. statistics for landings into south coast ports within the region for 1991 are given in Table 2 in terms of weight and value.

**Table 2**  
Landing statistics for South Coast Ports (M.A.F.F.)

Port	Kilos	Value (pounds)
Lyme Regis	204,833	256,501
West Bay	10,934	31,144
Portland	615,033	901,385
Weymouth	394,023	553,406
Swanage	65,267	89,432
Poole	792,521	1,218,829
Christchurch	5,333	42,000
Lymington	28,569	142,189
Southampton	16,311	41,008
Hamble	4,223	8,059
Portsmouth	756,391	1,922,681
Selsey	347,853	556,758
Isle of Wight	186,613	590,174
<b>Total of above ports</b>	<b>3,427,904</b>	<b>£6,353,566</b>

The MAFF statistics however are largely based on landing declarations that are only mandatory on vessels over 10m and for species subject to E.C. quota. Within the district approximately 80% of the fleet is below 10m and much of the catch not subject to quota. For this reason the M.A.F.F. data can be reasonably assumed to be considerably understated. Simple analysis of the number of boats and the reported values of landings by port or in total demonstrate that the boats would not be viable at the levels reported. **It is estimated that the value of landings is likely to be between two and three times the reported figure.**

The principal species of landings in terms of value are crabs, lobsters, bass, sole, plaice and scallops plus oysters, cod, whiting, skate, ray, clams, brill and mullet.



## **4. Infrastructure**

Infrastructure in support of fishing activity is almost totally absent throughout the region, with strong competition for quay space and moorings coming from leisure craft and housing and commercial development. There are no auction markets and few dedicated facilities for the landing, handling and holding of catches, or for servicing the requirements of fishing vessels.

There is generally a need for improved berthing and landing facilities with access and parking, facilities for the supply of fuel, ice and water, holding facilities for fish and shellfish, and storage for gear and bait. Engineering and craft services are generally available locally, although J.S.E. of Portsmouth choose to send their beam trawlers to Holland for survey and any major repair work. With the exception of Poole and Portland most of the ports or landing places are under the control of local authorities and it is hard not to conclude in some cases that the authorities regard fishermen as the nautical equivalent of gipsies.

Part of the problem lies in the physical dispersion of the boats on the coastline that makes provision of dedicated facilities difficult to provide for within a sensible budget; but part can also be attributed to the weakness of fishermen's representation, and lack of access to professional advice, in their dealing with local authority departments or statutory bodies.

M.A.F.F. have provided grant-aid in the region toward gear stores at Portsmouth and Swanage, and landing quays at Portsmouth and Weymouth. The gear stores at Portsmouth however, built to a high specification, have proved too expensive for fishermen's use and are currently either vacant or in use as wholesale/retail fish sales outlets. The landing quay at Weymouth, in the order of 40m (estimated), was built in anticipation of E.C. Hygiene Regulations and provides a dedicated and fenced quay area provided with fresh water, drainage and a rear loading bay. Although the facility meets the hygiene requirements in terms of specification it is likely to be grossly inadequate for the size of fleet at Weymouth, especially when landing to vivier transport. Weymouth particularly is faced with severe physical constraints, bounded as it is by public roads on both sides of the outer harbour, that is compounded by conflicts of usage. Previous schemes to provide dedicated facilities for landings, gear storage, parking etc., have foundered on availability of sites and cost.

Some Weymouth boats land direct to Copines (Shellfish Merchants) in nearby Portland Harbour, the future of which is currently the subject of some discussion. There is conjecture that the existing Naval Base may be closed and the facilities used as a service base for the off-shore gas/oil industry. It is not thought however that such a development would likely affect the operation of Copines.

Within the region three major developments are under consideration that include provision of infrastructure for fishing industry use; at West Bay, Poole and Portsmouth. At West Bay new breakwaters are planned to provide greater protection to the entrance channel to the harbour which will create a new outer harbour and possible site for fishing-industry use (Figure 2). The plans however are still at an early stage and some years away at least.

Previous plans for fish reception/holding facilities on the existing quay to meet E.C. hygiene requirements have been shelved. To meet E.C. Hygiene Regulations fishermen will land direct to transport for which reserved parking will be allocated.

At Poole, the Harbour Commissioners recently announced that they are considering forming a boat haven at Poole Quay, on a site at the eastern end of the Quay based around the existing Fishermens Dock (Figure 3). The development would provide for in the order of 840 yachts or cruisers and approximately 100 fishing boats, subject to demand. It would also provide fish landing and handling facilities with vehicular access that would comply with the requirements for E.C. Hygiene Legislation. In advance of the main works MAFF have agreed to fund work in connection with the landing quay to comply with hygiene legislation. This scheme is also at a fairly early stage with the detailed requirements relating to the fishing industry yet to be established. Initial drawings, however, suggest that there is a need to examine closely the requirements for landing and handling as presented so far. There is also some concern as to what the level of costs will be and how fishermen's interests can be protected in the longer term.

At Portsmouth, Johnson's Sea Enterprises have plans for the development of a complex that would provide for ice production, chill storage, an engineering workshop, store, net store, fish processing and fish sales. While the facilities would be privately owned, and essentially provide support for the company's fleet, the company is willing to co-operate with local fishermen in establishing an auction if it could be shown to be viable. A development site was originally agreed on the eastern side of the Camber Dock next to the I.O.W. ferry terminal but changes by the Local Council to traffic access to the site required J.S.E. to re-appraise the plan, and it is now their intention to develop their existing site on the Town Quay (Figure 4). Prior to work starting however, the Company await repair to the Camber Quay by the Council. The development, in the order of £1 million has won E.C. Grant Aid of almost £1/3 million.

## 5. Processing and Marketing

Relatively little of the local landings of fish and shellfish are processed locally. Bass, sole and other prime fish is usually sold whole and shellfish sold live. Some primary processing of fin-fish and shellfish is undertaken by merchants. As there are no auction markets in the region fishermen usually sell to merchants with whom they have an established trading relationship or in some cases directly to caterers or retailers depending on species and volumes. Landings at West Bay and Lyme Regis are often overlanded for sale on Brixham market. The principal concentrations of merchants in the region are to be found at Poole; Weymouth/Portland and Portsmouth. A list of merchants handling local landings is given in Appendix I although the list may not be comprehensive.

Vivier lorries are also sent by foreign merchants collecting principally shellfish at certain locations along the coast on set days. It is estimated that as much as 80% of local landings is exported either through local merchants or direct via foreign vivier lorries. The main markets are Spain, France and Holland. Cross-channel ferries operate from Portsmouth, Southampton and Poole and are of great benefit to the districts exporters. There are also export markets in Sweden and Japan. Most of the recognised shellfish waters in the region have been classified as Category B (with some A and C areas) and require bivalves to be purified under E.C. Hygiene Legislation. Purification plants exist at; Poole, Portland, Oakford, Sowley, Beaulie River, Selsey, although many of the plants require work to the premises to bring them up to E.C. standards.

Similarly many other fish merchants require work to their premises to bring them up to E.C. standards. Local Environmental Health Officers have been visiting merchants throughout the region to advise on requirements and have agreed derogations in some cases pending planned major works.

A recent in-depth study<sup>†</sup> of the potential for a public auction market to be established at Portsmouth (independent of J.S.E.) was recently undertaken by Portsmouth Polytechnic. The study discusses the viability of a market based on the potential volume of fin-fish that it might attract. It did not examine the cost of establishing or running such a market or its management. The report does not make out a case for or against the establishment of a public auction market but casts considerable doubt on such an exercise.

Within the region there is no Producer Organisation although the South West F.P.O. recently addressed local fishermen at an open meeting organised by Southern Commercial Fishermen with regard to the advantages of membership. Such an organisation could well have long-term benefit for the region but strength of interest is unknown.

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<sup>†</sup>The Fishing Industry in Portsmouth, An Overview' Centre for Marine Resource Economics. March 1992

## **6. Fisheries Management and Fishermens Representation**

Within the three-nautical-mile limit, management and control of the fishery is the responsibility of the Southern Sea Fisheries District Committee who have the power to make and enforce bye-laws affecting fishing activity and conservation of stocks in the region. The S.S.F.D.C. employ a Chief and five full-time officers to control a coastline of approximately 250 miles. S.S.F.D.C. is based in Poole with area officers based in Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight. Beyond the three-mile limit enforcement is solely the responsibility of the Fisheries Inspectorate of M.A.F.F. who administer the licensing system, enforcement of quota management and the collection of landing statistics. Quotas for Area VII pressure stock species are issued by MAFF after consultation with the industry via a Management Committee. Within the region this principally affects sole and cod. Offices are maintained in Poole and Portsmouth, with offices soon to be established in Weymouth and Selsey. Consideration is currently being given by MAFF to a proposal to extend the S.S.F.D.C. limit to six miles.

Management of the Several Order fisheries is the responsibility of the fishermen themselves and offences committed against such orders are prosecuted under the criminal law of theft.

Management and control of the Solent Oyster Fishery is the responsibility of the S.S.F.D.C. who are empowered under a Regulatory Order.

Fishermen are represented in the region by twenty-seven associations some of which however are semi-moribund. In some instances fishermen might be members of more than one organisation in order, for example, to access a several order fishery. The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations is poorly represented in the region and is unfortunately and mistakenly viewed by many local fishermen as an organisation representing North Sea 'big-boats'. As a result fishermen lack the strength of collective organisation and representation that is needed in dealing with such issues as; provision of infrastructure, pollution, oil and gas exploration, aggregate dredging, mud-dumping and matters of fisheries management and control.

## **7. Discussion**

In assessing or promoting the interests of the fishery of the region serious problems are presented by the lack of reliable data on both effort and landings. S.S.F.C. registration likely overstates the number of genuinely active fishing boats, and M.A.F.F. landing statistics are considerably understated. The understatement of the value of the fishery, both in financial and human terms, particularly causes problems in presenting a case for infrastructure support or arguing in favour of fishery interests that conflict with competing requirements of other developments or leisure interests. This understatement of the real value of the industry is compounded by the fragmented nature of it and the lack of strong collective representation.

Unseemly disagreement between fishermen for example over compensation arrangements from oil/gas companies, for loss of fishing that has resulted in vandalism and sinking of boats does not reflect well on the industry or serve its interest. The industry has problems enough without internecine squabbles of this nature.

In comparison the industry to the South-West in Cornwall has just announced the formation of the Cornwall Fisheries Management Group to provide the Cornish industry with a single and united voice, not only within the region but within Europe. The Group which includes representatives from producers, processors, ports, harbour masters, handliners, shellfishermen, the Sea Fisheries Committee of Cornwall, the County Council and the Cornwall Economic Development Office is intended to ensure that the fishing industry has real bargaining power to respond to proposed changes in European Legislation and the requirement to relate the fishing industry to the country's structural plans.

While the Southern Sea Fisheries region may not be in the same league in fisheries terms as their neighbours to the west there is a clear requirement for an organisation to fulfil a similar function. It is regretful that the N.F.F.O. has not been more successful in the region.

Of possible significance to the fishery will be the introduction of vessel licensing for commercial fishing boats of under 10m overall length in 1993. To qualify for a licence, boats will be required to demonstrate a track record of commercial fishing for the preceding twelve months. This may come as an embarrassment to some but should not threaten bona-fide full-time fishermen. The position of part-time or seasonal fishermen is less clear however, and details have yet to be announced. There is the possibility then that quotas might also be applied to the under 10m boats. If the part-time or seasonal fishermen are not accommodated within the new licensing scheme enormous problems of policing can be anticipated subject to the definition of 'commercial'. Many part-time or casual fishermen could claim to be fishing for pleasure or for their personal consumption. It would likely be a particular problem in the high-value bass fishery.

Also of some significance to the fishery of the region is a recent House of Lords report that U.K. fishing vessels down to 7m in length are to be brought within existing safety legislation that currently only applies to vessels over 10m. This follows a steep rise in casualties on under 12m fishing boats and has prompted a DTp review of safety on these vessels. The

legislation relates to life-saving equipment, fire-fighting, navigation-lights and sound signals etc. As well as obvious concern by fishermen for the cost of such equipment there are also practical problems of how and where equipment can be physically located on small boats so that it is easily accessed in an emergency but not cause nuisance under normal fishing operations. No grants are currently available from Seafish but they are willing to receive applications for grants that will be placed on a register should the position change in 1993.

With regard to forthcoming E.C. Hygiene Legislation and the requirements of basic ports infrastructure it would appear that local Environmental Health Departments are adopting a pragmatic approach to landing and handling operations. In most cases landings will be made direct to suitable transport for onward distribution avoiding the requirement for holding facilities. With regard to temperature control many boats will be exempt from the legal requirement to maintain fishery products at the temperature of melting ice if they sell only 'small' quantities 'locally', or land fish within eight hours of it being caught. Live shellfish is also exempt from temperature control.

## Appendix 1

### Merchants and Processors

C. Samways  
Copine Fish Limited  
Saunders and Wilson  
Weyfish Limited  
K. Greenslade  
Mez Creis Seafoods  
Oakford Oysters  
Sea Harvest  
J.M. Batchelor  
C.F.R.  
Johnson's Sea Enterprises  
C. Marshall  
T & G Shellfish  
Viviers (U.K.) Limited  
M & J Crabs  
Shaw Shellfish  
Puffin  
Wooton Fisheries Limited  
Capt. Stan (Viviers U.K.)

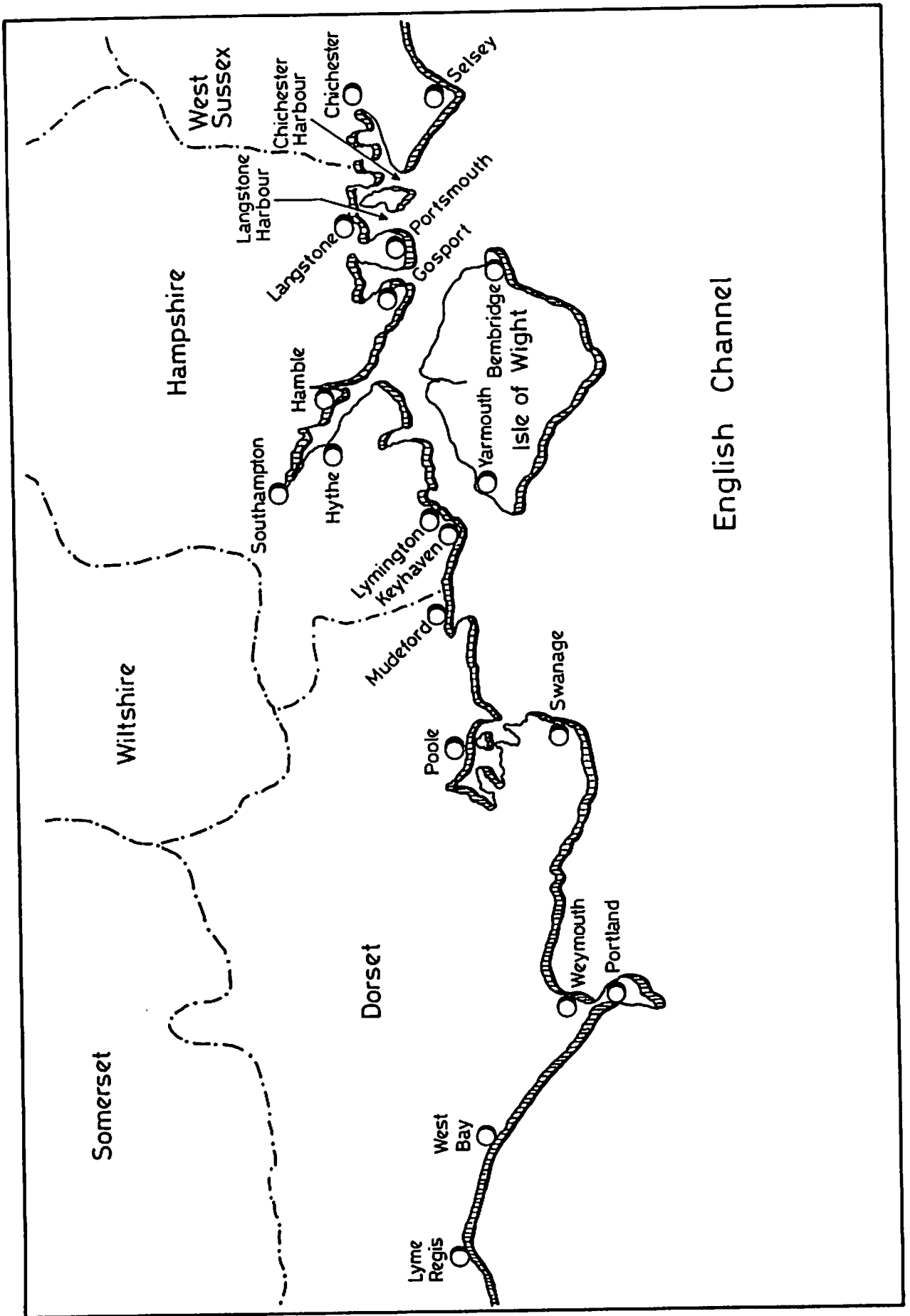
West Bay  
Portland  
Portland  
Weymouth  
Poole  
Poole  
Poole/Blandford Forum  
Poole  
Mudford  
Sowley  
Portsmouth  
Portsmouth  
Portsmouth  
Portsmouth  
Chichester  
Chichester  
Yarmouth  
Ryde  
Bembridge

## Appendix 2

### Organisations Consulted During Visit

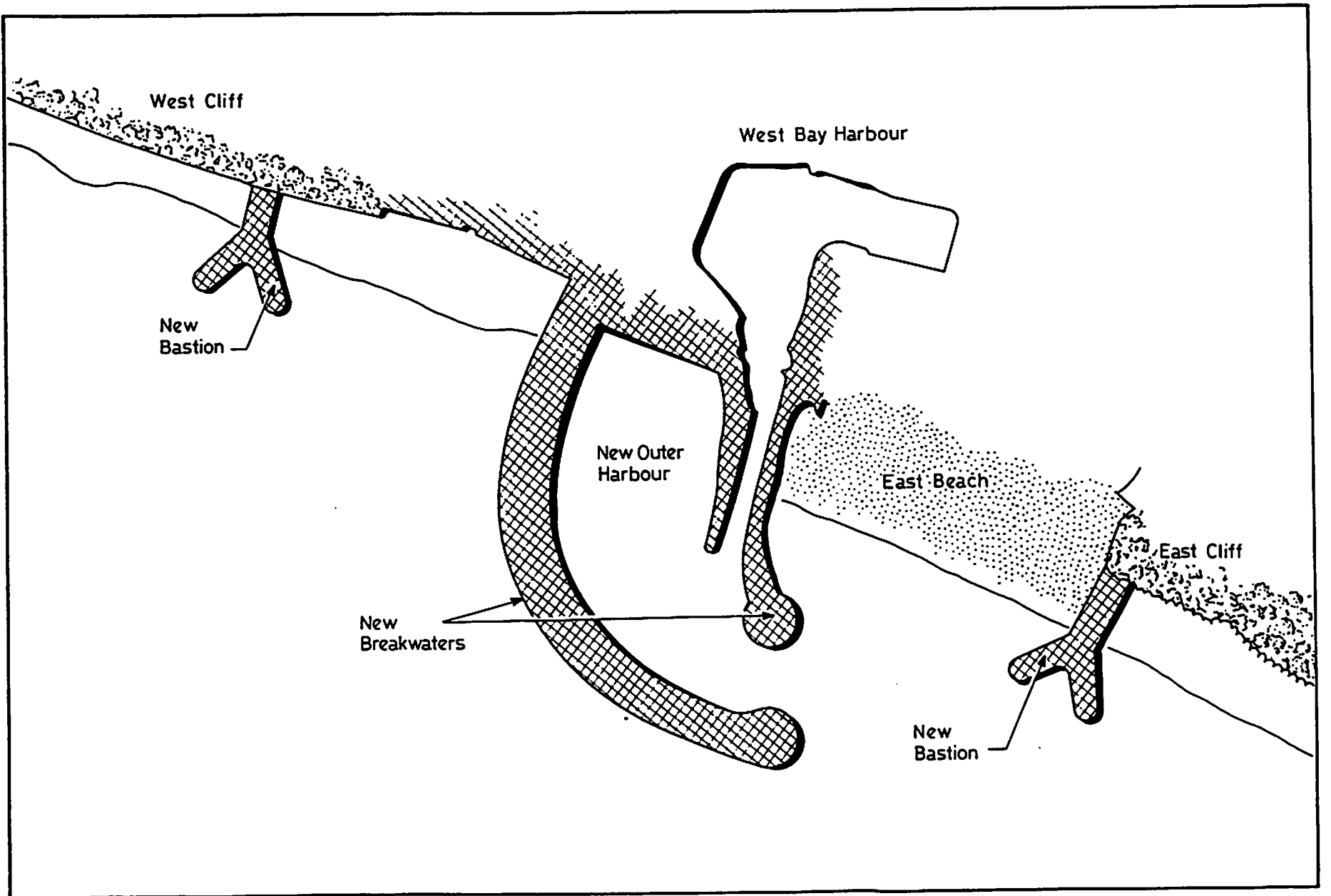
Bridport Commercial Boat Owners and Skipper's Association.  
Christchurch Borough Council.  
C. Samways, West Bay.  
Gosport Association of Commercial Fishermen.  
Johnson's Sea Enterprises, Portsmouth.  
K. Greenslade, Poole.  
Keyhaven Fishermen's Association.  
Lyme Regis Fishermen's Association.  
Lymington Fishermen's Association.  
New Forest District Council.  
M.A.F.F. Poole.  
M.A.F.F. Portsmouth.  
Mudford and District Fishermen's Association.  
Portland Fishermen's Association.  
Poole Harbour Commissioners.  
Portsmouth Harbour Oystermen's Association.  
Southern Commercial Fishermen.  
Southern Sea Fisheries Committee.  
Stanswood Bay Oystermen Limited  
Swanage Fishermen's Association.  
West Dorset District Council.  
Weymouth and Portland Fishermen's and Boatmen's Association.  
Weymouth and Portland Licensed Skipper's Association.





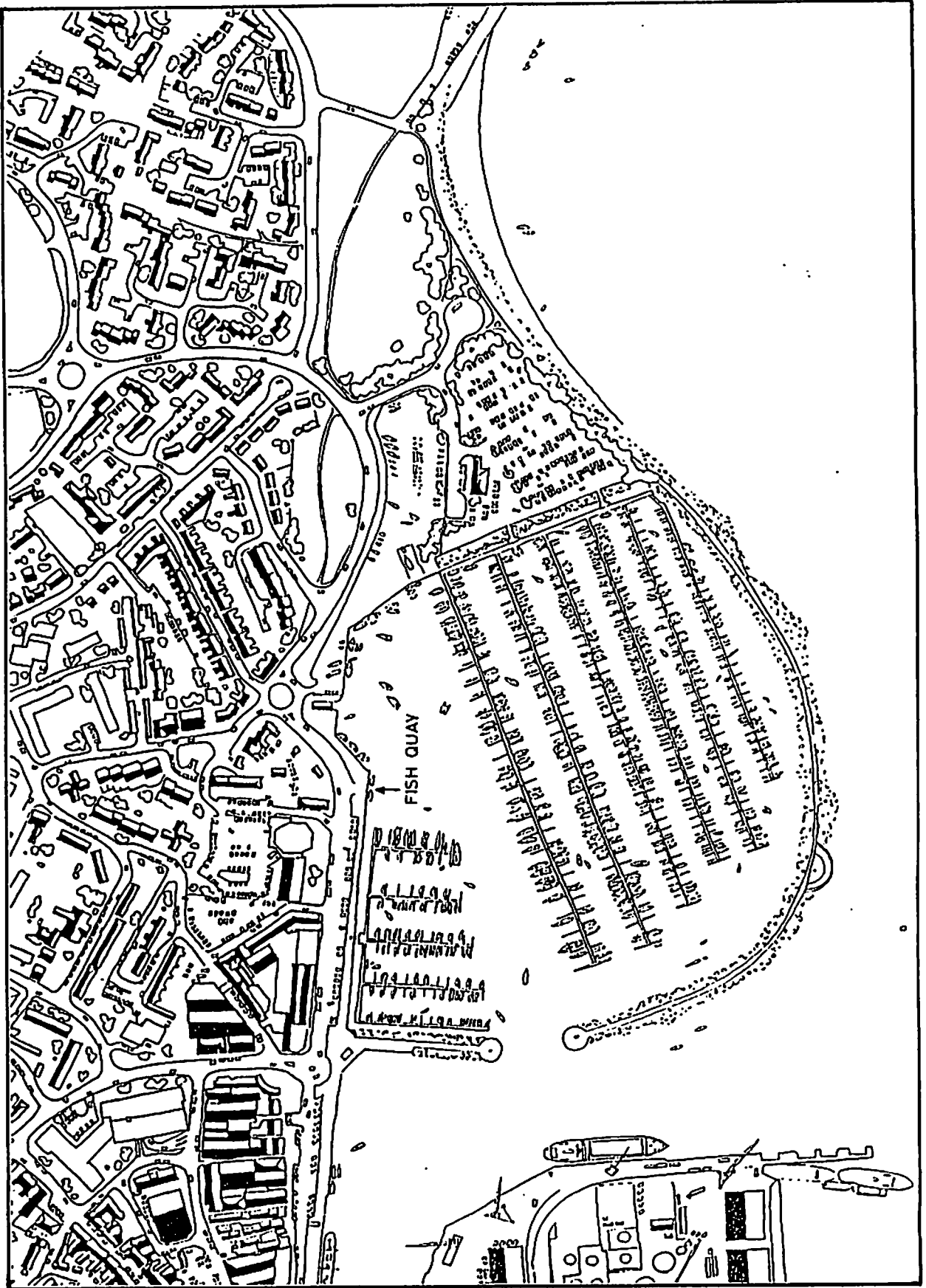
Southern Sea Fisheries District - Lyme Regis to Selsey Bill

Fig.1



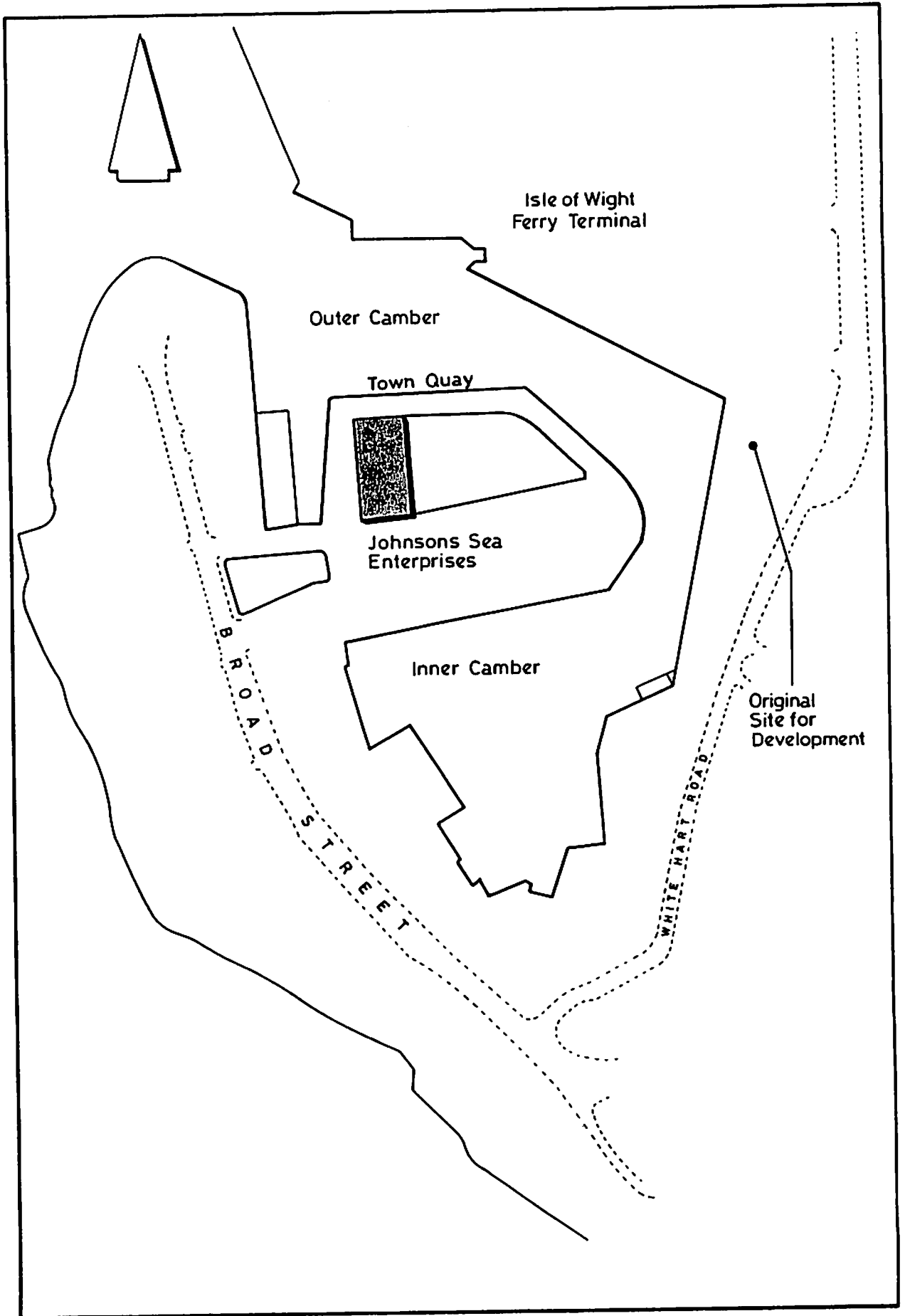
West Bay Development Scheme

Fig.2



Poole Town Quay Boat Haven Development

Fig.3



Johnsons Sea Enterprises Camber Dock Development

Fig.4