



## **Caught in the Story: Brixham's Fishing Industry Anchors the English Riviera's Coastal Identity**

Perched on the southern edge of Devon, Brixham may look like a postcard-perfect fishing town, but behind the charm lies a powerhouse of industry.

Around 70–80% of Brixham's catch is exported to the EU, with seafood also making its way to high-end markets internationally. It's a staggering reach for a town of fewer than 20,000 people – one that positions Brixham, nestled in the very heart of the English Riviera as a quiet giant in the UK's seafood economy.

**Barry Young, Managing Director of Brixham Trawler Agents**, has spent decades within the industry. From his early days at sea to leading one of the UK's busiest fish markets, Barry has witnessed the changing tides of fishing in Brixham, technologically, economically, and culturally. "Fishing isn't just what we do here. It's who we are," he says.

But sustaining that identity means facing challenges head-on. Rising costs, shifting regulations, and environmental concerns require innovation and resilience. Brixham's fishing community is adapting through investment in sustainable practices, new technology, and stronger traceability, all while maintaining the traditions that define the town.

### **From Decky Learner to Harbour Leader**

Barry's deep-rooted experience in Brixham's fishing industry spans more than three decades. Arriving from London as a boy, he quickly immersed himself in the workings of the port – starting out on deck as a 16 year-old and earning his skipper's ticket by age 19. When ongoing health issues meant he could no longer go to sea, Barry transitioned to a shore-based role, becoming a respected advocate and leader within the local industry.

"The thing I love most? The people," **Barry says**. "You never stop learning in this job, every day, the sea brings something new. Whether it's unexpected Mediterranean octopus or tuna venturing closer to shore, or the development of new low-impact trawls, Brixham's fishing scene is constantly evolving. And so too is its approach to sustainability."

### **Sustainability Is Now Second Nature**

Over the years, Brixham's fishing industry has undergone a significant yet understated transformation, one marked by a fundamental shift in attitudes towards sustainability. Barry has witnessed this change closely and takes pride in how far the community has come.

"When I first started, no one brought waste ashore. Now, it's standard practice," **Barry explains**. "We operate with complete transparency because we know our future depends on it. There's nothing to hide, and we're proud of the way we manage our industry."

Sustainability in Brixham isn't an afterthought or a trend – it's woven into the fabric of everyday choices. From the nets that are being adapted to allow smaller fish to escape, helping to protect future stocks and prevent quota breaches, to the innovative trawls that are being designed to reduce seabed impact and fuel consumption. These practices may not be visible to

the casual observer but are vital to maintaining the delicate balance between harvesting and conservation.

**Barry puts it simply:** “It’s about leaving enough behind so the next generation has a chance, not just to fish, but to thrive. This isn’t just environmental stewardship; it’s about securing the future of our community and way of life. ”

These quieter shifts reflect a maturity in the industry, one that understands sustainability as a long-term investment, safeguarding the ocean’s health and the livelihoods that depend on it.

### **An Industry That Feeds a Community and the World**

While seafood may only represent a fraction of the UK economy overall, in Brixham it’s everything. **Barry continues,** “It’s one of the primary industries we have here.”

“Unlike many coastal towns across the UK where fishing has steadily declined, Brixham continues to thrive as a vital centre for this sector.”

The reach of Brixham’s fishing industry extends far beyond the town’s shores. Locally, it supports a wide network of jobs across Brixham and the wider area, from fishermen and processors to logistics staff and service providers. Nationally, its influence is felt through supply chains that feed into restaurants, catering companies, hotels, and cruise ships across the UK and internationally.

Yet, a central part of Barry’s mission is to encourage more people across the UK to choose British fish.

This is crucial given that, despite the industry’s strength and sustainable practices, 70 to 80% of Brixham’s catch is exported to European markets, with customers as far afield as the USA and Dubai. Supporting Brixham’s fishing industry is more than a matter of preserving a way of life, it is about sustaining an ecosystem of economic activity that benefits communities, businesses, and consumers alike. By choosing local seafood, consumers not only enjoy fresh, high-quality produce but also contribute directly to the livelihoods of fishermen and workers whose efforts are deeply intertwined with the health of coastal communities.

Now in 2025, Brixham’s fishing story is changing. Visitors aren’t just watching the boats anymore; they’re meeting the people behind them and gaining a deeper understanding of the industry’s daily realities. This growing interest in the town’s rich fishing heritage is part of a wider movement across the English Riviera to celebrate and champion local seafood.

From sea to plate, the region showcases its maritime culture through events like [England’s Seafood FEAST](#) (26 September to 12 October 2025), which draws food lovers from across the country to enjoy the freshest regional catch. And brand new for this year is the [South West Sardine Festival](#) (03 August 2025), further reinforcing the English Riviera’s reputation as a destination for world-class, sustainable seafood and a deepening public connection with the people and practices behind it.

“We’ve started opening the gates,” **Barry explains.** “Public tours, visits from chefs, and school trips are opportunities to give people an honest look at what happens behind the scenes in the industry. Working closely with the English Riviera and partners like Rockfish, these initiatives

are helping to build a new kind of tourism in Brixham, one that focuses on authenticity, seasonality, and a genuine connection to the local community and its heritage.”

### **A Port That Keeps Giving Back**

Barry speaks of Brixham not just as a fishing port, but as a community shaped by its relationship with the sea. It’s a place where respect for tradition goes hand in hand with a commitment to sustainability and a town that balances its rich history with a clear focus on the future.

As many coastal communities across the UK look for ways to adapt and thrive, Brixham stands out as an example of how a local industry, while modest in national scale, can anchor a region’s identity, support its economy, and influence wider conversations.

And for those walking the coastline, it offers more than just a view. It offers a glimpse into the living heartbeat of a town built by the sea, and for the sea.

For more information about Brixham Trawler Agents visit: <https://brixhamfishmarket.co.uk>

For more information about what The English Riviera has to offer visit:  
<https://www.englishriviera.co.uk/>

### **ENDS**

### **NOTES TO EDITOR:**

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### **About the English Riviera**

The English Riviera Business Improvement District (ERBID) Company is a collaborative effort between over 1000 local businesses, authorities, and stakeholders dedicated to enhancing the tourism experience and promoting sustainable economic growth for Torbay.

Looking to Escape Your Everyday? With 22 miles of stunning coastline, the English Riviera covers Torquay, Paignton and Brixham. Torquay is the birthplace of Agatha Christie, the world’s greatest crime writer, and the resort offers a vast array of culture, history, water activities, spas, festivals, entertainment and food and drink experiences. The resort is also an international cruise port.

As a designated UNESCO Global Geopark, the English Riviera has gained international recognition for its 400 million years of geological heritage and is promoted as One of Earth’s Extraordinary Places.

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