Report on the Joint Fisheries Statement

Covering the period November 2022 to November 2025

March 2026

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe
Department o' Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Riaghaltas na h-Alba

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Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 11(3) of the Fisheries Act 2020

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Contents

Executive summary

This is the first statutory report of the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS), required by the Fisheries Act 2020 (the Act). It assesses how far the JFS policies have been implemented since its publication in November 2022 and sets out the extent that policies in relevant fisheries management plans (FMPs) have been implemented, and the extent to which both have contributed towards the Act's fisheries objectives.

Background

The JFS is a policy statement setting out the overarching direction of fisheries management in the United Kingdom (UK). It is a key part of the UK Fisheries Management and Support Common Framework (the Fisheries Framework) and will be periodically reviewed to ensure that the policy ambitions it contains remain relevant and fit for purpose.

The JFS sets out the strategic policies of the fisheries policy authorities (the Secretary of State, Scottish Ministers, Welsh Ministers and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in Northern Ireland) for achieving, or contributing to the achievement of, the Act's 8 fisheries objectives:

(a) the sustainability objective

(b) the precautionary objective

(c) the ecosystem objective

(d) the scientific evidence objective

(e) the bycatch objective

(f) the equal access objective

(g) the national benefit objective

(h) the climate change objective

As part of the wider Fisheries Framework the JFS establishes common policy ambitions across the fisheries policy authorities. It provides for flexibility in implementation, where appropriate, to respect the devolved nature of fisheries. This means that regulators can act in a manner proportionate to the fisheries issues being addressed in their own areas.

More widely, the JFS sets out the fisheries policy authorities' ambition of continuing to deliver world class, sustainable management of fisheries in line with the fisheries objectives, and the UK's wider international commitments. It seeks to secure lasting benefits for fishing communities and the UK seafood supply chain, both now and in the future.

Section 11(1) of the Act mandates that “The fisheries policy authorities, acting jointly, must, in relation to each reporting period, prepare and publish a report on the extent to which the policies set out in a relevant JFS —

(a) have been implemented, and

(b) have achieved or contributed to the achievement of the fisheries objectives.”

The first reporting period is the period of 3 years beginning with the day on which the first JFS is published. Reports must be published for each subsequent 3-year period and must also “report on the extent to which the policies contained in a relevant fisheries management plan –

(a) have been implemented, and

(b) have affected the levels of stocks of sea fish.”

The reporting period for this report is November 2022 to November 2025.

The next report will be published in 2029, covering the second reporting period between November 2025 and November 2028.

Structure and approach to developing the report

This report follows the structure of the JFS, covering the strategic context and overarching objectives for fisheries management; the specific policy themes and delivery mechanisms; and reporting on FMPs. The report highlights work which has been implemented under each of the JFS’s policy themes during the first reporting period, highlights the contribution implemented work has made to the fisheries objectives and also sets out some of the work the fisheries policy authorities plan to implement in future.

Delivering the JFS

Science and evidence

The UK takes a collaborative, evidence-based approach to fisheries and aquaculture management, using the best available science and comprehensive monitoring to guide decisions. This enables the UK’s ongoing compliance with international obligations and supports its ambition to be a world leader in fisheries science and innovation. Key elements include:

Best available scientific advice

Over the reporting period, the UK has maintained a strong working relationship with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), involving around 500 UK scientists in over 100 expert groups. The newly established Group of UK Permanent Representatives to ICES (GUKPRI) coordinates the UK’s contribution and engagement,

including ongoing review of the UK-ICES Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which has also strengthened UK – ICES relationships. The annual meetings between ICES and requesters of ICES Advice also serves as a forum to review and discuss the advice ICES provides to support sustainable fisheries and marine ecosystem management.

The UK actively engaged with international organisations, including Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), environmental organisations, and industry which enabled it to support measures consistent with the best available scientific advice.

The fisheries policy authorities also worked together through the UK Fisheries Science and Evidence Steering Group and UK Fisheries Science Advisory Panel to coordinate, develop and procure scientific advice on fisheries matters.

Scientific data collection and sharing

The UK ensures continuity and consistency of its fisheries data through a coordinated data collection programme under the Data Collection Framework (DCF), which includes the UK Work Plan and relevant monitoring technologies. Over the reporting period we commenced work to analyse the DCF to ensure it is fit for purpose going forwards. We have also separately reviewed and published the UK Work Plan annually to ensure we continue to meet our domestic and international data sharing commitments. The fisheries policy authorities also contributed to biological, economic and social data collection, including on the sustainability of stocks, through fisheries independent surveys, fisheries-dependent sampling and other relevant monitoring.

The UK has continued to facilitate comprehensive data sharing across the fisheries policy authorities through the Data Coordination Group, with the national fisheries authorities (the Secretary of State, the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), the Scottish Ministers, the Welsh Ministers and DAERA) aiming to provide each other with full and open access to scientific and technical information. The fisheries policy authorities share data, with most DCF data also shared internationally through ICES for advice generation. Some specialised data types like Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) and bycatch are shared at UK level for domestic processing. The UK continues to share data appropriately with other countries, facilitated through membership and engagement with ICES. The fisheries policy authorities have also made efforts to improve public access to fisheries datasets, including through innovative tools such as interactive apps.

Improving the evidence base

The UK continued to maintain and further enhance its evidence base through targeted research during this period. Between them, the fisheries policy authorities have focused specific research and development projects on areas including, but not limited to: selective fishing gear, bycatch, onshore monitoring (including monitoring and measuring of catches at ports), Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), fleet resilience and blue carbon restoration. The fisheries policy authorities responded to ICES data calls, providing data for international stock assessments and engaged in research collaboration and external quality assurance with member country laboratories.

Working in partnership

The fisheries policy authorities have encouraged strong collaborative relationships to support the delivery of JFS policy ambitions and advance achievement of the fisheries objectives. Open engagement with industry, science, environmental groups, and communities, has fostered transparency, shared learning and joint problem-solving. This collective approach enables best practice sharing and evidence-based solutions that support sustainable fisheries, healthy marine environments, and resilient coastal communities.

Regular UK-wide partnership working is the driver behind turning fisheries data and evidence into coordinated UK action where appropriate. The progress highlighted in this report reflects the strength and benefits of these partnerships, and the shared commitment across the UK to deliver long-term, sustainable outcomes for our seas and those who depend on them.

Participatory decision making

The fisheries policy authorities have developed and strengthened arrangements for collaborative working across UK fisheries with interested stakeholders, in doing so promoting greater involvement in decision making processes. For example, the establishment of advisory groups across the fisheries policy authorities also facilitates community engagement in the design of future fisheries management measures.

Delivering sustainable management of fisheries

Our approach to fisheries management

Sustainability, support for biodiversity and consideration of the wider ecosystem is at the heart of the fisheries policy authorities' approach to fisheries management, both domestically and internationally. Through the JFS we are committed to an ecosystem-based approach that supports long-term, profitable fisheries whilst minimising the impacts of climate change.

The fisheries policy authorities continue to recognise the vital role of the seafood sector and will ensure, through ongoing collaboration and strategic planning, the multifaceted aims of food security, community wellbeing, environmental stewardship, and economic resilience are met now and into the future.

The Act and the JFS are part of the Fisheries Framework for delivering effective and sustainable fisheries management across the UK. Our FMP policy stems from our policy ambitions in the JFS, with individual FMPs setting out the policies, goals, actions and measures for delivering the sustainable management of specific fisheries or stocks, as well as seeking to address wider issues in fisheries management such as evidence gaps

and how best to make use of new technologies. More information is provided in the FMP section.

The UK Marine Strategy (UKMS) also informs the UK's approach to fisheries management. It comprises 3 parts, which work together to assess the state of the UK's seas, provide relevant data to monitor progress towards achieving the internationally recognised Good Environmental Status (GES) statutory target and outlines the measures needed to achieve and maintain GES.

GES relates to protecting the marine environment, preventing its deterioration, and restoring it where practical, while allowing sustainable use of marine resources. As of 2025, GES had been met in UK waters for 2 out of 15 descriptors/ecosystem components (eutrophication and hydrographical conditions). The Programme of Measures published in January 2025 includes the Act and the fisheries objectives, the JFS and FMPs as new measures to contribute to achieving or maintaining GES.

Other measures include:

- putting in place fisheries management measures in MPAs across UK waters, including designating Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) in English waters
- achieving the internationally recognised commitment to effectively protect 30% of our seas by 2030
- policies in Marine Plans, which are required to consider GES
- implementing measures within FMPs to protect fish stock levels and marine ecosystems
- research programmes such as Defra's Marine Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment (mNCEA) and the Welsh Government's Assessing Welsh Fishing Activities Project

Climate change, including contributing to net zero carbon targets, remains a key consideration in the development of FMPs and other fisheries management approaches. The fisheries policy authorities are engaging with the fishing industry and wider stakeholders to develop measures that aim to better understand and minimise the adverse effects of fisheries on climate change. In addition, we also recognise the impact climate change is having on sea temperatures and consequently on the distribution of stocks and, in line with the JFS and through FMPs, we are looking to adapt and respond to these challenges.

Finally, the fisheries policy authorities recognise that financial support is needed to help the fishing industry and wider seafood sector adopt the fisheries management approaches and policy ambitions stemming from the JFS.

To replace the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) following the UK's exit from the European Union (EU), each fisheries policy authority has implemented their own domestic funding schemes, designed to support the priorities within their own areas. This includes:

1. DAERA establishing the Marine Environment and Fisheries Fund to support sustainable growth in the marine and fisheries sectors while advancing Net-Zero and environmental goals
2. The Welsh Government has designed, with input from Welsh stakeholders, the Welsh Marine and Fisheries and Coastal Capacity Building Schemes to support a sustainable future for the Welsh fishing industry, related supply chains, our valuable marine environment and coastal communities
3. The Scottish Government delivering its annual Marine Fund Scotland (MFS), designed around agreed criteria including Scotland's Blue Economy Vision outcomes, to support projects delivering innovation and sustainable practices in its marine sectors
4. In England, Defra delivered investment through the Fisheries and Seafood Scheme (FaSS) to safeguard the long-term sustainability, resilience and prosperity of its seafood sector
5. The UK Government also delivered the UK Seafood Fund, a UK-wide scheme that, while not a direct replacement for EMFF funding, was in operation during the reporting period

In May 2025, the UK Government announced the Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund, which will provide £360 million in funding over the next 12 years to support the UK's fisheries and seafood sector, and coastal communities. UKG has determined that this will be allocated on the basis of the Barnett formula.

Achieving the fisheries objectives through our policies

The JFS sets out the policy ambitions to secure the long-term sustainability of our fish stocks and the achievement of the fisheries objectives set out in the Act. The resulting policies – built on best available scientific evidence, transparent decision making, and collaborative working – are organised into 16 themes covering fisheries, aquaculture and management of the marine environment within the JFS. This section sets out the work undertaken to implement policies within each theme. The last section in this report considers the extent to which those implemented policies have contributed towards achieving the fisheries objectives and sets out some ongoing work to continue delivering JFS policies.

Fishing opportunities

The UK works with coastal State partners to agree and implement a range of management measures for shared stocks, including but not limited to setting catch limits. A significant proportion of fishing opportunities for the UK fleet refer to the maximum quantity of fish that may be caught (catch quota) which is determined by the Secretary of State. For most stocks, the determination is made on an annual basis and follows international negotiations. In some circumstances, opportunities may be determined on a provisional basis. For example, where international negotiations have not concluded by the time a fishing year begins.

Following determination, opportunities may be apportioned between the fisheries policy authorities by the Secretary of State. It is then for each authority to decide how to distribute their share to industry.

The Secretary of State determines fishing opportunities taking account of the fisheries objectives and using best available scientific advice. This supports progress towards the JFS ambition to restore and/or maintain all commercial stocks above biomass levels to support sustainable yields, whilst balancing environmental and social and economic considerations.

What we have implemented

As a coastal State, the UK has a legal duty to sustainably manage the living resources within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This responsibility includes cooperating with other coastal States where stocks are shared across boundaries, through a process of annual negotiations. As a coastal State in the North East Atlantic, the UK plays a full role in the joint management of shared fisheries resources. The UK has now embedded coastal States, bilateral (with the EU, with Norway and with the Faroe Islands) and trilateral (with the EU and Norway) negotiations for shared stocks into business-as-usual processes. These are underpinned by the best available data from ICES, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas), Marine Directorate's Science, Evidence, Data and Digital Portfolio, Northern Ireland's Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), Welsh Government Fisheries Science team and the MMO. In the period 2022 to 2025, the UK secured increases of 25% in tonnage and 24% in value from these negotiations. During the reporting period, the UK published annual economic outcomes of negotiations relating to UK fishing opportunities, see here for outcomes published in 2025 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/economic-outcomes-of-negotiations-for-uk-fishing-opportunities-2025/economic-outcomes-of-annual-negotiations-for-uk-fishing-opportunities-in-2025#executive-summary).

The UK has also embedded into business-as-usual processes the agreement of management approaches and negotiating quota allocations for shared stocks, where appropriate, within RFMOs. These include the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation, the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC). For example, 2025 outcomes from ICCAT negotiations have resulted in an increase of UK bluefin tuna quota from 63 tonnes to 231 tonnes per year for 2026-2028. This was the largest rate of increase of any of the nearly 20 parties involved.

Establishing sustainable total allowable catches (TACs) and quota shares are a key element of those international negotiations. Defra publishes an annual report, produced by Cefas, showing the number of domestic and international TACs passing Cefas' sustainability assessment. In the 2022 report, 34% of UK-set TACs passed that Cefas assessment, increasing to 46% in the 2025 report. The Scottish Government's Sustainable Fishing Indicator, published annually, also summarises the sustainability status of commercial fish and shellfish stocks in Scottish waters showing of 38 stocks, 73% were sustainably fished in 2023.

There are instances where TACs are set above headline advice. In these cases, the UK has sought to develop approaches to negotiations and/or domestic management which take appropriate account of wider social and economic considerations, to avoid adverse impacts on the fishing and seafood sectors. The UK promotes the sustainable exploitation of stocks through actions it takes unilaterally as well as through joint actions with international partners, for example:

- sharing of TACs, where two or more coastal States agree a TAC for a shared stock and divide it between themselves based on agreed shares
- setting bycatch TACs with the EU to minimise choke risks for healthy stocks caught alongside zero catch advice stocks in mixed fisheries
- using expert groups to explore alternative management approaches for stocks (such as skates and rays)
- working collaboratively with the EU and Norway to address shared management challenges (such as through the Cod Management Working Group)
- ongoing work with the Specialised Committee on Fisheries (SCF) to identify stock specific management measures where necessary. The SCF was established under the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement to manage fisheries cooperation between the UK and the EU
- recognising the advice sought from ICES to support the evidence base for informing management decisions
- implementing Long-Term Management Strategies for stocks managed trilaterally with the EU and Norway (such as herring, which was agreed and implemented for 2026)
- continuing engagement with other coastal States on the development of comprehensive sharing arrangements for stocks where these are not yet established (such as mackerel, blue whiting and herring)

The UK continues to apply the same sustainability principles when managing its domestic stocks. All the fisheries policy authorities are continuing to build their data and evidence bases to inform the future management of stocks in their respective waters.

The apportionment of fishing opportunities by the Secretary of State between the fisheries policy authorities is set out in the UK Quota Management Rules (QMR). The QMR are published on GOV.UK and have been updated twice during this period, in July 2023 and September 2024, to reflect the outcome of the consultation on ‘Managing Quota in 2023 and Beyond,’ which ran in 2022.

The fisheries policy authorities also independently manage additional quota (AQ) for some stocks in their waters. Different allocation methods of AQ to each authority’s fleets have been explored through pilots and trials and application initiatives, with many being based on historic catch levels or prioritising fishers using selective gears or less environmentally impactful techniques. These include the Cornwall Community Quota Scheme, the English bluefin tuna commercial fishery, the Quota Application Mechanism in England and the West of Scotland cod AQ new application initiative.

Non-quota stocks

Alongside quota managed stocks, the fisheries policy authorities manage non-quota stocks (NQS) in their waters, many of which are jointly managed with the EU. Under the JFS, the fisheries policy authorities have committed to developing sustainable domestic management approaches for these stocks, as well as seeking to develop multi-year strategies with the EU via the SCF.

What we have implemented

In relation to the domestic management of NQS, the fisheries policy authorities are delivering a programme of FMPs to develop appropriate management of domestic NQS such as bass, king scallop, crab, lobster and other mixed finfish and cephalopod species. More information can be found in the FMP section.

A UK Statutory Instrument, the Sea Fisheries (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2024 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2024/1028/made), was introduced in October 2024. This Statutory Instrument enabled the introduction of management measures to progress goals within certain FMPs (for specific details see the FMP section).

During the reporting period, DAERA introduced the Scallop Enhancement Sites (Prohibited Methods of Fishing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2022/272/made), which took effect on 1 January 2023. These regulations ban fishing for sea fish using demersal mobile gear and diving for scallops in several designated areas within the Northern Ireland zone that have been set up as scallop reseeding sites. DAERA also introduced amendments to regulations for the Northern Ireland brown crab fishery in January 2023 to prohibit the landing of soft-shelled crabs.

In 2024, DAERA published its response to its consultation and call for evidence on the intertidal hand-gathering of shellfish in Northern Ireland. A new FMP for species which are harvested by hand-gathering has been added to Annex A of the JFS, a revised version of which was published, following consultation, in December 2024.

The Welsh Government introduced permitting schemes for a number of their NQS fisheries during the reporting period, including cockles and whelks. These management systems enable a more timely, adaptive approach to managing the NQS fisheries in the future through the inclusion of conditions on the permits.

During the reporting period, the Scottish Government implemented interim management measures for key non quota species as a first step in their Inshore Fisheries Management and Improvement Programme. These included a prohibition on landing of egg-bearing lobster as well as controls on the largest category of crab-catching vessel. This was followed in June 2025 by publication of a report on their call for evidence. This sought stakeholder views on Scotland’s development of the agile, regionalised framework for management of our inshore fish and shellfish species called for by this Programme.

The Sea Fisheries (Remote Electronic Monitoring and Regulation of Scallop Fishing) (Scotland) Regulations 2024 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2024/165/contents/made) was implemented to strengthen management of the scallop fishery, refining controls to protect vulnerable stocks while enabling continued responsible harvesting activity via the use of Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) systems.

The Scottish Government also progressed a scoping exercise designed to assess the distribution and landed catch value of commercially exploited NQS in Scottish waters. This will help inform their consideration and approach to NQS FMPs in Scotland.

Wider international engagement

The UK actively engages in international fisheries meetings and negotiations through bodies such as the United Nations (UN), the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and RFMOs. The UK has also signed bilateral MoUs with Iceland and Greenland to strengthen cooperation on fisheries matters, and in addition to this an MoU was signed between Defra and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Under the JFS, the fisheries policy authorities committed to participating in these, and other international fora to promote and uphold high standards in fisheries management.

What we have implemented

The UK continues to actively engage, influence and share its fisheries management expertise through its membership of international fora as an independent coastal State. For example, securing text within the following:

- the UN General Assembly Sustainable fisheries resolution promoting the importance of transparency, filling data gaps and the ecosystem and precautionary approaches to fisheries management
- the FAO Sub-committee on Fisheries Management addressing evidence and data gaps in relation to high seas fisheries
- the 2025 UN Ocean Conference Declaration promoting science-based management

Fishing capacity

Under the JFS, the fisheries policy authorities have committed to ensuring the fishing capacity of UK fleets is balanced between maintaining their economic viability, fish stock health and aiming to provide social benefits for coastal communities. This includes a presumption against allocating public funding for new fishing vessels where this increases fishing capacity beyond sustainable levels.

What we have implemented

The UK fleet's capacity to fish is, in relation to quota stocks, largely determined by the TACs agreed by the UK at international negotiations. Detail on TAC setting and negotiation processes can be found in the fishing opportunities section.

FMPs are one of the key operational tools for fisheries policy authorities in managing the balance between economic viability and sustainable stock limits. They support profitable fishing industries while including measures to adjust fishing effort or capacity if stocks become overexploited.

Fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance measures also help to enforce any sustainable catch limits on the domestic fleet. Further details of this work can be found in the fisheries monitoring and enforcement section.

Other actions implemented by the fisheries policy authorities taken under this policy theme include:

- Defra lifting the 350kg licence cap for English under 10 metre vessels enabling small vessels to fish for a greater volume of quota
- DAERA reducing the number of permits for commercial fishing on Lough Erne and actively managing activity in the Lough Neagh fishery through conservation regulations

More generally, while funding is used to support the sector, in line with international commitments, the UK ensures its support for the industry is not contributing to increasing capacity of vessels. The criteria agreed in relevant free trade agreements and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies also discourages any actions that could further deplete overfished stocks or increase a vessel's fishing capacity.

Approach to access to UK waters

The fisheries policy authorities are responsible for regulating the access of all fishing vessels operating in UK waters. The equal access objective set out in the Act stipulates that access of UK fishing vessels to any area within British fishery limits is not affected by the vessel's home port or any other connection of the vessel or any of its owners to any place in the UK.

What we have implemented

The fisheries policy authorities take full account of the Act's equal access objective when developing and delivering their policies and administrative and management functions relating to UK fishing vessels to UK waters. They continue to respect existing voisinage reciprocal access arrangements where they apply to the 0-6 nautical mile limit. In addition, all fishing vessels operating in UK waters are legally obliged to comply with the relevant access rules and regulations included in their licence conditions.

Through the delivery of FMPs, the fisheries policy authorities abide by principles of equal access as part of the management of specific stocks. Policies, goals, actions and measures within individual plans relating to who can fish, where and under what conditions are consistent and non-discriminatory across fleets fishing in UK waters.

Fisheries monitoring and enforcement

Fisheries monitoring and enforcement provides assurance of compliance as well as increasing confidence in the data on fisheries products removed from UK waters. Under the JFS, the fisheries policy authorities have committed to ensuring effective enforcement of commercial fishing by all vessels in UK waters and UK vessels, wherever they may operate, using methods that are appropriate, proportionate, intelligence-led or risk-based. This includes systems to improve the accuracy of fisheries catch data, to discourage illegal discarding and to increase understanding of the incidence and causes of sensitive species bycatch. The national fisheries authorities have committed to work together where appropriate to ensure that enforcement meets legislative requirements, and, where feasible, promotes and simplifies existing procedures.

What we have implemented

Collaboration by the national fisheries authorities is promoting an increasingly UK-wide approach to fisheries control and enforcement. For example, a UK Fisheries Monitoring Centre operational agreement finalised in 2022 allows fishing activity to be monitored through a single entity. The national fisheries authorities are also closely aligned through quarterly meetings of the UK Heads of Enforcement Group, whose key objectives are to promote consistency between authorities, review investigations and share intelligence.

At sea and onshore enforcement of our fisheries regulations is prioritised throughout the UK. Multiple patrols and multi-agency operations have been undertaken across the reporting period, with a number of successful prosecutions.

The UK's enforcement strategy is intelligence-led and risk-based, ensuring compliance with both domestic and international obligations. During this reporting period, work continued on reviewing the UK Control Regulation, Regulation (EC) 1224/2009 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2009/1224/contents), which establishes systems of monitoring, control and surveillance and compliance measures to ensure all vessels in UK waters are compliant with fisheries regulations. Internationally, the national fisheries authorities share knowledge, implementing fisheries and control agreements made with international parties and countries with which the UK has fisheries agreements.

The national fisheries authorities have also continued to strengthen monitoring, control, and surveillance systems domestically, including exploring the use of vessel monitoring and REM technologies. For example, at a UK level the national fisheries authorities are currently engaging with the EU, to ensure that any future REM systems and processes are interoperable, where possible. This will allow vessels to fish across multiple jurisdictions without needing more than one REM system to meet numerous requirements/standards.

The fisheries policy authorities have also been developing ways to reform discards management. This includes working with industry to tackle the barriers of adopting more selective gears and looking at how to account for discards, as well as landings of fish against quota. In addition, the Sea Fisheries (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2025 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2025/92/contents/made) came into force in February 2025 which made changes to some landing obligation discard exemptions in English waters.

In their own nations, the national fisheries authorities have also implemented fisheries control measures, specifically:

- establishment of Welsh Fisheries Monitoring Centre (Welsh Government)
- introduction of Catch Recording system for under 10m vessels (Welsh Government, Defra)
- introduction of mandatory REM for pelagic and scallop vessels fishing in Scottish waters, and for Scottish pelagic and scallop vessels wherever they are fishing (Scottish Government)
- introduction of requirement for inshore VMS (iVMS) for under 12m vessels through legislation and licence conditions (Welsh Government, Defra, similar plans for Scottish Government)
- introduction of electronic permitting system (Welsh Government)
- taking on management of the Burry Inlet cockle fishery from June 2025, when the fishery transitioned from a Regulating Order to a public fishery (Welsh Government)
- use of short range Remote Piloted Aircraft System, or drones (Scottish Government)
- establishment of enforcement programme for Inland Fisheries (DAERA)
- introduction of balanced scorecard for Sea Fisheries Inspectorate staff (DAERA)

Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing

Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is a major threat to the sustainability and productivity of the marine environment and to the livelihoods of those living and working in coastal communities. Under the JFS, the fisheries policy authorities have committed to working together to implement effective controls to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing. This includes robust controls at the border to prevent IUU fish entering UK supply chains; implementing key international agreements such as the Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA); increased transparency through enhanced data collection and sharing to support fisheries monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement; and strengthening international cooperation and policy. The fisheries policy authorities also work with the seafood sector to ensure that UK exporters can meet the IUU requirements of other countries.

What we have implemented

The UK has played a key role within international fora to strengthen efforts to tackle IUU fishing, including:

- approval of the OECD Recommendation on Eliminating Government Support to IUU Fishing
- providing funding to OECD for an expert workshop on transparency of beneficial ownership of fishing vessels
- being signatory to the WTO agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, which prohibits subsidies that contribute to IUU fishing
- securing an agreement to share data on port inspections and denials of foreign vessels collected within NEAFC's port state control system with the FAO's Global Information Exchange System (GIES) to support information sharing and transparency in line with the PSMA, and encouraged use of GIES within other international fora
- leading work to secure an agreement within ICCAT to align port state measures with those set out under PSMA
- co-founding and co-chairing the IUU Fishing Action Alliance, a global coalition committed to implementing the IUU-Action Alliance Pledge on tackling IUU fishing, between 2022 and 2024

The fisheries policy authorities also implement control measures to manage imports of seafood into the UK from other countries. This includes banning imports and landings of fish and fisheries products from any vessel which has been identified as engaging in IUU activity and is included on the UK's IUU vessel list. Similar arrangements also apply whereby imports from certain countries identified as non-cooperative in tackling IUU fishing are banned. The UK currently bans imports from Cambodia, Comoros and St Vincent and the Grenadines.

The fisheries policy authorities have supported UK exporters to meet other countries' IUU requirements through the development, implementation and maintenance of the Fish Export Service (FES). This enables UK exporters to generate the validated IUU documents required for export to EU and non-EU countries operating a catch documentation scheme. The fisheries policy authorities have engaged extensively with UK industry across the whole supply chain to support preparations to comply with the EU's latest IUU requirements introduced in January 2026. This includes hosting a series of industry webinars, targeted engagement with key exporters and launching a communications campaign called 'Fish, Trace, Ship'.

Reducing bycatch and minimising catches of sensitive species

The fisheries policy authorities are committed to the principle of reducing bycatch, including fish stocks below Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS), and minimising discards. Under the JFS, they are working towards ensuring that all catches are recorded and accounted for, developing a range of management measures in collaboration with stakeholders to avoid unwanted catches of quota species and reducing unnecessary fish mortality and the discarding of fish. This includes minimising, and where possible eliminating, the unwanted bycatch and entanglement of sensitive species including cetaceans, seals, seabirds and elasmobranchs.

What we have implemented

The Marine wildlife Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI), published in 2022, outlines how the UK will achieve its ambitions to minimise and, where possible, eliminate the bycatch of sensitive marine species. It sets out policy objectives to identify 'hotspot' or high-risk areas, gear types and fisheries in which to focus monitoring and develop and implement effective measures to minimise bycatch and entanglement. The fisheries policy authorities continue to build on existing work to deliver against the BMI objectives. For example, specific actions have included research and development trials supported by Scottish Government and in collaboration with the sector to address seabird bycatch in its longline fleet, and the Welsh Government's assessment and ongoing research into bycatch, and action, included in the recently published Welsh seabird conservation strategy.

Other work by the fisheries policy authorities to reduce bycatch include Defra's expansion of the flagship programme, Clean Catch, for a further 3-year period and the announcement of a second bycatch monitoring and mitigation trial. Defra has also provided funding for trials of mitigation methods (such as pingers for cetaceans and seabird scaring devices) and a 'bycatch risk prioritisation framework' evidence project. It is also supporting the development of an action plan to mitigate seabird bycatch in English waters.

The Scottish Government have funded a Scottish Entanglement Alliance project, addressing baleen whale entanglement, through MFS. The Scottish Government also actively collaborated with industry as part of the development of the Future Catching Policy to reduce bycatch of sensitive marine species through effective partnership, working to explore and deliver pragmatic solutions tailored to consider the varied fleet segments.

The Welsh Government issued a call for evidence in January 2025 on shore-based nets where information was sought on bycatch. A scientific bycatch study and a voluntary catch recording system has since been commissioned to gather further evidence.

DAERA has carried out random gear and net inspections in port to ensure compliance with fishing area regulations. They have also funded a number of projects through the Marine Environment and Fisheries fund, as well as the Environment Fund (Nature Recovery), to assess the risk of elasmobranch bycatch in commercial fisheries and explore electromagnetic deterrent devices as a way to reduce this.

Published FMPs include goals and measures that support existing policy initiatives aimed at reducing bycatch and minimising catches of sensitive species. Where applicable, FMPs propose handling guidelines for recreational and commercial fishers, aiding compliance in managing stocks. In international organisations such as ICCAT and IOTC, the UK has secured strengthened measures for sensitive species such as basking and great white shark, sought improvements to seabird measures, and advocated for improvements in the management of other sensitive species.

Displacement

Under the JFS, the fisheries policy authorities have committed to working with the fishing industry to identify and address displacement issues, given its potential negative social, economic and environmental impacts. This includes improving understanding of where fishing activity occurs, greater consideration of displacement in spatial planning, facilitating co-location of activities and seeking appropriate adaptation where impacts are unavoidable.

What we have implemented

The location of different fisheries, and areas within them that are of greatest significance, were considered during the development of the FMPs that have been published to date. Where appropriate, these plans include actions to monitor and mitigate displacement activity. The fisheries policy authorities have worked with interested stakeholders across the fisheries sector to identify evidence gaps and some published FMPs include actions to gather further evidence to help better identify areas important for the fishing industry.

The UK's Marine Plans also include policies addressing displacement issues, for example safeguarding key fisheries against inappropriate displacement, recognising the urgency to develop marine renewable energy, providing overarching framework characteristics for assessing sustainability and focusing on the coexistence of proposals with other marine activities.

To identify emerging displacement issues, Defra regularly engages with marine users including the UK fishing fleet particularly through Regional Fisheries Groups.

In 2022, a formal consultation on HPMAs in English waters led to 3 sites being designated in July 2023. The MMO then consulted on a fishing prohibition byelaw covering the sites (outcome to this consultation is detailed in the MPA section below). Cefas modelled displacement effects to UK fishing vessels and we considered the displacement of fishing vessels to areas outside of the HPMAs for both consultations.

Marine spatial planning

The UK Marine Policy Statement (UKMPS), enables activities in the UK marine area to be managed in a way that protects the marine environment, supports sustainable development and promotes co-existence. Under the JFS, the fisheries policy authorities committed to ensure that marine plans include policies that consider fisheries, aquaculture and support habitats for fish stocks. They also committed to consider the relationship with marine spatial planning when developing FMPs. Throughout the marine planning process, the fisheries policy authorities committed to consult marine users to incorporate their views on how the marine area should be managed.

What we have implemented

The marine plans for all UK waters are, or are on track to be, implemented in accordance with the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009

(https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/23/contents), the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2010/5/contents), the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2013/10/contents) and the UKMPS. Fisheries management decisions are in made line with these plans.

Outside of the marine plans, the UK Government has, for the first time, given a strategic steer to The Crown Estate on the key risks and issues associated with areas for potential future offshore wind development in English waters. The impacts on fisheries were considered throughout this process, with areas of importance identified using the best available mapped data.

The UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments are working closely with the National Energy Systems Operator in the development of the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan. This focuses on energy infrastructure across the electricity and hydrogen sectors for both terrestrial and marine at a Great Britain level.

In June 2025, the Welsh Ministers issued a Written Statement (https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-response-findings-independent-review-marine-planning-approaches-wales) on the findings of an independent review of marine planning approaches, which concluded that the Welsh National Marine Plan is effective in delivering marine planning in Wales. The Scottish Government also continues to develop their National Marine Plan 2 (NMP2) to support sustainable development of their seas. The policy development and statutory assessments for NMP2 are ongoing including consideration of the varied feedback received during the NMP2 Planning Position Statement consultation, which closed in spring 2025.

The fisheries policy authorities have also set out policies in published FMPs to identify potential overlap with existing marine activities (e.g. MPAs, windfarms) in order to consider future mitigation during the implementation phase of the plans. Assessments were undertaken during the preparation of the FMPs to ensure that these are aligned with relevant national marine plans.

Marine Protected Areas

As part of work to deliver GES and to support our shared commitment to effectively protect 30% of our seas by 2030, the UK continues to develop a network of protected sites at sea to safeguard specific habitats and species of national or international importance under international and national legislation. Under the JFS, the fisheries policy authorities have committed to ensure that fishing activities are managed to enable existing and future sites within the UK MPA network to meet their conservation objectives and maintain the ecological coherence of the MPA network. This is achieved through the monitoring of sites, implementation of management measures and the enforcement of compliance with management measures.

What we have implemented

The fisheries policy authorities are working to enable current and future sites within the UK MPA network achieve their objectives and contribute towards GES. MPAs have individual conservation objectives depending on the habitats or species they are designated to protect, including from damage caused by human activities.

For HPMAs the conservation objective is to fully recover their entire marine ecosystem to a natural state and prevent further degradation and damage. In England, the MPA target established under the Environment Act 2021 is a key driver for implementing management measures where required, with delivery timelines set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan 2025.

A comprehensive network of 181 MPAs has been established, including 3 HPMAs, covering 40% of English waters. The 3 HPMAs were designated in July 2023, following formal consultation in 2022. Currently 60% of English MPAs are protected by byelaws that limit the use of damaging fishing gear. The MMO implemented byelaws in 2022 and 2024 resulting in the restriction of damaging fishing gear over sensitive species in 17 English MPAs.

The MMO consulted in June to September 2025 on further proposed byelaws for 42 English MPAs. The MMO are now conducting a thorough review of responses to the consultation to ensure that all views and additional evidence is carefully considered to inform any decisions. The MMO also consulted on a proposed byelaw to prohibit all commercial and recreational fishing in English HPMAs, and on a byelaw to prohibit anchoring within the inshore HPMA, Allonby Bay. Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) continue to develop MPA management measures where needed in their districts.

In Scotland, the Scottish Government reported to the Scottish Parliament on the status of their MPA network at the end of 2024. In October 2025, the Offshore Fishing (Prohibition of Fishing Methods) (Scotland) Order 2025 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2025/240/contents/made) came into effect in Scottish Parliament, implementing fisheries management measures for MPAs within Scotland's offshore waters. Scottish Government aim to launch a 16-week consultation on inshore MPAs and the 11 Priority Marine Features most vulnerable to bottom-contact gear after the Scottish Parliamentary Election in May 2026.

In Northern Ireland, DAERA introduced the Marine Protected Areas (Prohibited Methods of Fishing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2022/292/contents), which came into operation on 1 January 2023. These regulations prohibit the use of certain fishing methods considered damaging to sensitive marine habitats and species within designated MPAs.

Wales has 139 MPAs in its waters, covering 69% of the inshore or approximately 50% of all Welsh waters. In summer 2025, Natural Resources Wales published the first comprehensive condition assessments for all 'wholly' Welsh Special Areas of

Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas, to replace previous assessments published in 2018. The assessments showed no sites were adversely affected by fishing.

Marine litter and end of life fishing gear

Through the JFS, the fisheries policy authorities committed to providing support to the industry as it moved towards reducing its environmental impact and increasing sustainability to protect and conserve our marine environment through the reduction of marine litter. In addition, there was agreement to support the growth of the circular economy by aiming to increase the amount of end-of-life fishing and aquaculture gear collected and managed sustainably in line with the waste hierarchy and encouraging circular design of new fishing and aquaculture gear.

What we have implemented

To support the industry in reducing its environmental impacts, the fisheries policy authorities have included a focus on abandoned, lost and otherwise discarded fishing gear in some FMPs and provided specific funding for projects seeking to reduce and collect marine litter.

Defra has provided over £250,000 in grants through the FaSS since November 2022 for 6 projects focused on preventing and collecting marine litter. One of these projects was KIMO's England-wide Fishing for Litter, a voluntary initiative that engages the fishing industry in reducing marine litter while raising awareness of its environmental and economic impacts. The initiative included approximately 57 fishing vessels, with 35 English harbours designated as drop-off points for collected litter. This resulted in approximately 350 tonnes of litter being collected. Through this initiative there was also engagement with local communities to promote environmental awareness and sustainable fishing practices.

During this period, the Welsh Government has continued to work with Odyssey Innovation to deliver a scheme collecting end of life fishing gear, which was set up in 2022, with approximately 15 tonnes having been collected from harbours across Wales as of April 2025.

The Scottish Government, through the MFS, has provided over £2.5m funding since 2021 for litter related projects, including gear upgrading, expansion of gear recycling capabilities and litter removal equipment for use in harbours. This includes ongoing funding for KIMO's Scotland-wide Fishing for Litter initiative, which has over 480 vessels participating from 38 ports.

Additionally, DAERA has introduced licence conditions for its aquaculture sites with the aim of reducing levels of litter and runs targeted campaigns for recreational anglers to raise awareness about their discarded fishing gear and its potential impact on wildlife. They also support an Environmental Sustainability Officer within the Harbour Authority, whose responsibilities include managing end-of-life fishing gear. Crown Estate Scotland also has lease conditions for its aquaculture sites where there is a requirement to log

plastic use on sites and their approach to waste management as well as committing funding to decommissioning in the event of operations ceasing.

The fisheries policy authorities are encouraging the circular design of new fishing and aquaculture gear. For example, they are supporting commitments made in OSPAR's Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter in 2022 and have promoted new industry standards for circular design (BS EN 17988), published in November 2024. This new standard for use by manufacturers, designers, users and waste managers aims to reduce the environmental impact by extending the use of gear, reducing the risk of loss and improving repairability and opportunities for recycling.

Coastal and freshwater

Coastal and freshwater habitats are essential to a healthy marine environment and thriving fisheries, providing important support to the life stages of a wide range of fish species of commercial and recreational value to the UK seafood sector. Under the JFS, the fisheries policy authorities have committed to implement measures which are needed to manage the UK's coastal and riverine freshwater environments and their resulting impacts on the health of the marine environment, particularly through the UKMS and River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs).

What we have implemented

On a UK-wide level, the fisheries policy authorities take actions to protect freshwater fish stocks, including reporting catch data for salmon and eel internationally through ICES. Under the Windsor Framework, some EU fisheries and environmental rules continue to apply in Northern Ireland. This includes areas such as eel conservation, where EU requirements still operate in the Northern Ireland zone. This ensures regulatory alignment with the EU for those specific measures while wider UK fisheries policy continues to develop. The EU framework requiring Eel Management Plans (EMP) remains applicable in Northern Ireland under the Windsor Framework and in England, Wales and Scotland through assimilated EU legislation, and the fisheries policy authorities published a UK EMP progress report (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6758190df1e6b277c4f79ab6/UK_EMP_2024.pdf) in December 2024.

Data collection required to meet international commitments for the assessment and management of North Atlantic salmon stocks is reported annually through the DCF. The data is shared to support the ICES Working Group on North Atlantic Salmon to undertake international stock assessments and provide advice to the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO).

In June 2025, each fisheries policy authority presented an assessment on the pressures on Atlantic salmon at the NASCO annual meeting (hosted by the UK in Cardiff), and each is now developing a 6-year action plan to address these pressures and slow the decline of salmon.

The Scottish Government has and continues to take action to protect salmon in their waters. The Wild Salmon Strategy provides an overarching framework to tackle the wide range of pressures on wild salmon, and an associated Implementation Plan was published in February 2023 which sets out actions Scottish Government and partners are taking to protect and restore populations of wild salmon. They are working on monitoring activities to collect data on catches, counts, size age and sex ratio of salmon and thereby assess its conservation status. This determines those stocks where salmon can be retained by fisheries, grading rivers which specify where salmon are subject to mandatory catch and release due to being in poor conservation status and informs the annual update of the Conservation of Salmon (Scotland) Regulations 2016 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2016/115/contents). Scottish Government produces annual statistics on Scottish salmon and sea trout which are shared annually to support the ICES Working Group on North Atlantic Salmon who in turn undertake international stock assessment and advice provision to NASCO.

The retention of salmon in coastal waters has remained prohibited in Scotland until the conservation status of salmon improves sufficiently. The need for this prohibition is reviewed annually and is an action within the 5-year Implementation Plan of Scotland's Wild Salmon Strategy, published in 2022.

To protect coastal waters, Defra and the Environment Agency (EA) have identified 63 shellfish waters where there is a real opportunity to achieve compliance with microbial standards by 2030, or where further action is needed to prevent deterioration. The EA has set out actions in the Water Industry National Environment Programme requiring water companies to explore action to prevent deterioration, improve water quality or carry out further investigation in those 63 waters.

The Welsh Government have provided £2.1 million to six Nutrient Management Boards covering SAC rivers. These boards are delivering local action plans to improve water quality. In addition, £9 million has been provided for the "4 Rivers for LIFE" project to restore the rivers Tywi, Teifi, Cleddau, and Usk. For example, on the Usk, interventions include riparian tree planting and fencing to create buffer strips, reducing nutrient and sediment runoff from agricultural land, and working directly with over 350 farms to implement sustainable land management practices. These measures not only improve water chemistry but also stabilise riverbanks and enhance habitat complexity. Since 2022, over 136 hectares of floodplains and wetlands have been restored – boosting biodiversity and improving 776km of river habitat.

The UK's Marine Plans also contain policies which support the wider UKMS and RBMPs. DAERA's Inland Fisheries team have included habitat and fish barrier measures in their Water Framework Directive's RBMPs, with over 400 barriers inspected in 2024. Their Lough Neagh Action Plan also addresses water quality and ecological restoration in one of Northern Ireland's most significant freshwater bodies.

Climate change

In order to respond to climate change, the seafood sector must be prepared to mitigate and adapt to its effects. To achieve this, the fisheries policy authorities have committed to identifying feasible changes to reduce emissions across the fisheries supply chain and support the transition towards net zero. In recognition of the importance of blue carbon habitats in supporting mitigation, the fisheries policy authorities have also committed to working with the scientific community to research the impacts of fishing activity on these habitats, taking this into account in future policy and decision making. Climate change already impacts on the seafood sector, and the fisheries policy authorities have committed to work in partnership with the sector to support its adaptation, address challenges and take advantage of opportunities.

What we have implemented

The fisheries policy authorities are committed to developing policy in line with respective net zero legislation, which makes it a legal imperative to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. As part of progress towards net zero, the Department for Transport published a Maritime Decarbonisation Strategy in March 2025, setting out the pathway for the UK's domestic maritime sector to reach zero fuel lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

The fisheries policy authorities have provided funding for projects working towards these ambitions. This includes Defra's mNCEA programme, which co-funded a £2.1 million match-funded competition with Innovate UK in 2023 and 2024 to support small and medium size enterprises to develop innovative marine monitoring capabilities, including carbon-neutral and wind or wave-propelled vessels. The Welsh Marine and Fisheries Scheme launched a funding round in January 2023 for Climate Change adaptation to support industry realise carbon savings. DAERA's 2025/26 Marine Environment and Fisheries Fund provided opportunities to support investments that innovatively aim to identify actions that may realise carbon savings, progress the protection and restoration of blue carbon habitats and improve the production and marketing of low-carbon seafood. The MFS has supported projects which tested novel engine technologies to support climate change mitigation. Examples include the installation of solar power on a fishing vessel, and a net zero power data project.

To enhance monitoring of the fishing industry's climate impacts, the Welsh Government commissioned a carbon audit of Welsh fisheries and aquaculture through Seafish in November 2025, using their recently established Seafood Carbon Emissions Profiling Tool. The Scottish Government has built an evidence base on fishing's climate impacts, including information on greenhouse gas emissions from the Scottish fleet, fishing practices and net-zero vessel concepts.

The fisheries policy authorities have acted to understand the importance of blue carbon habitats in UK waters to support actions to protect and restore those habitats. At a UK-wide level, Defra, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and the devolved governments established the cross-administration UK Blue Carbon Evidence Partnership

in 2022. The Partnership's Evidence Needs Statement (published in 2023) identified critical evidence gaps on blue carbon habitats in UK waters.

To begin to address these evidence gaps, Defra funded a 3-year project (2022-2025) to improve our understanding of carbon stores in the seabed and how human activities may impact on these.

The fisheries policy authorities are identifying and addressing blue carbon impacts in their waters. In 2024, the Welsh Government established the Blue Carbon Forum for Wales. DAERA published its Blue Carbon Action Plan in April 2025, following a consultation the previous year. In September 2025, the Scottish Blue Carbon Action Plan was published, which also sets out priorities for blue carbon habitats in Scotland with actions to address remaining evidence gaps.

DAERA's Marine Planning team, in collaboration with AFBI and the fishing industry, participated in the UK Research and Innovation funded four-year programme Marine Spatial Planning Addressing Climate Effects (MSPACE). Published outputs of the MSPACE programme include a Northern Ireland case study, which has improved the Northern Irish blue carbon evidence base.

FMPs published to date include actions tailored towards developing a better understanding of climate change impacts and supporting adaptation. For example, actions to encourage industry participation in initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve understanding of the impact that king scallop vessels have on the marine environment (including seabed, blue carbon and CO2 emissions).

The UK's third National Adaptation Plan (published in 2023), the Climate Adaptation Strategy for Wales (2024), and Scotland's National Adaptation Plan 3 (published in 2025) sets out how the UK and Devolved Governments will mitigate the climate change risks identified by the independent Climate Change Committee's 5-yearly assessment. Informed by this, the fisheries policy authorities are helping the fishing industry adapt to the impacts of climate change on how they operate.

For example, Defra, the Welsh Government and the Scottish Government have provided funding for the UK wide Marine Climate Change Impacts Partnership which reviews scientific evidence of marine environmental changes to provide evidence updates on topics likely to affect the fishing activity of the UK fleet, such as ocean acidification and sea temperature. Cefas has assisted in the development of a fisheries-specific indicator which, based on the 'mean temperature of the catch' across England and Wales, supports the Climate Change Committee's statutory adaptation reporting by reflecting the balance between warm and cold favouring fish and shellfish in reported landings.

Environmental changes as a result of climate change have caused different species to appear, or re-appear, in UK waters, notably bluefin tuna. The fisheries policy authorities have put in place measures through legislation to protect this species, further details can be found in the recreational sea fishing section.

Aquaculture

Aquaculture is important at a UK level, with diverse sub-sectors, and related industries, which contribute to the nation's food security agenda as well as playing a role in the protection of the marine environment. It is of particular importance in Scotland, where in 2023 aquaculture production generated £468 million Gross Value Added (GVA) which comprised 8% of Scottish marine economy GVA. Under the JFS, the fisheries policy authorities have committed to supporting balanced, industry-led, sustainable development of each aquaculture sub-sector based on the best available science. They also collaborate to maintain the high standards of aquatic animal health and welfare they have already adopted.

What we have implemented

The introduction of the Aquatic Animal Health (Amendment) Regulations 2022 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2022/835/contents/made), applicable to Great Britain but not Northern Ireland, removed lists of susceptible and vector species from legislation, allowing the lists to be updated more quickly and frequently in future. This has helped to protect Great Britain's aquatic animal health status and support trade with third countries. In September 2024, Defra, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government revised Great Britain's susceptible and vector species lists to bring them into line with current scientific evidence and World Organisation for Animal Health guidance.

In July 2023, the Scottish Government published the document "Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture". This sets out ambitions for the sustainable development, within environmental limits, of the Scottish aquaculture sector through to 2045 and recognises the considerable social and economic benefits the sector delivers.

Developments in Scotland on the oversight and management of fish farming include establishing a Consenting Task Group in November 2022, which has developed a new multilateral pre-application consenting process for fish farm developments. From January 2024 this has been piloted in the Shetland and Highland local authority areas. An independent evaluation of the pilots was published on 29 July 2025 which provided recommendations to further improve the process and work is now underway to take forward the recommendations of the evaluation report.

In February 2024, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency commenced the implementation of a new risk-based framework for managing the interaction between sea lice from farmed fish and wild Atlantic salmon. In March 2025, a framework for protecting sea trout populations was established. In June 2025, Scottish Ministers introduced the Town and Country Planning (Marine Fish Farming) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2025 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/sdsi/2025/9780111062760/introduction), making relevant local planning authorities the responsible body for assessing and determining fish and shellfish farm planning applications out to 12 nautical miles.

In May 2025 Defra published regulatory guidance on seaweed aquaculture to provide clarity for applicants on the consents and authorisations required to set up, operate and decommission a seaweed farm in English inshore marine waters.

Recreational sea fishing

Under the JFS, the fisheries policy authorities have committed to continue working together, to ensure recreational sea fishing is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. Management measures are underpinned by encouraging data collection on catches, economic impact, and species-specific data across the recreational sea fishing sector, and ensuring recreational interests are part of relevant stakeholder engagement processes.

What we have implemented

To complement the statutory data collection obligations for commercial fishing under the DCF, the fisheries policy authorities have increased monitoring of recreational sea fishing. For example, Defra and the Welsh Government commissioned Cefas to carry out a voluntary catch reporting scheme (recreational Sea Angling Diary project) which provides species and regional level statistics on recreational angling activity, and DAERA provides recreational charter angling boats with data collection forms.

With the increase of bluefin tuna in UK waters, the fisheries policy authorities are developing policies to ensure that recreational fishing of the species remains sustainable and compliant with ICCAT international obligations.

UK legislation to establish permitting regimes for the recreational targeting of bluefin tuna came into force in 2024, enabling each fisheries policy authority to determine if, and when, to introduce a bluefin tuna catch and release recreational fishery in their waters. In 2024, an English bluefin tuna recreational fishery and a Welsh bluefin charter fishery were opened and renewed in 2025. Permit holders in England and Wales are legally required to report all trips and provide catch data to contribute to the monitoring of activity.

England’s 2024 recreational Bluefin tuna fishery was independently evaluated, including collection and analysis of catch and social and economic data. These findings, along with input from Defra, MMO, Cefas and sector representatives, informed the design of the fishery in 2025.

In September 2025, DAERA published a consultation on proposed amendments to existing arrangements for recreational fishing for crabs and lobsters in Northern Ireland waters to improve the management and sustainability of the stocks.

The fisheries policy authorities are working to develop measures for the recreational fishing of bass and pollack stocks in UK waters. Existing and proposed management measures for the recreational fishing of bass, such as seasonal closures and bag limits, are included in the bass FMP. For pollack, a mandatory bag limit of 3 fish per fisher per day was agreed at the 2025 UK-EU bilateral negotiations.

Production, marketing and consumption of seafood

The seafood sector is an essential source of employment in communities across the UK, as well as a key contributor to the national food security agenda. Under the JFS, the fisheries policy authorities have committed to supporting the seafood sector to adapt to current and future demands and challenges. This includes encouraging new entrants to the industry, building the resilience of the seafood supply chain and processing sector, creating a thriving UK and international seafood market and supporting opportunities to diversify.

What we have implemented

To encourage new entrants to the seafood industry, the fisheries policy authorities have worked to better understand the barriers that exist for new entrants. For example, Defra commissioned the UK Seafood Careers Project, which started in autumn 2024, to assess seafood sector incomes and help address unclear renumeration practices. From January to March 2025 Defra ran the Fishing Industry Social Survey, developed in partnership with the fishing industry, which focuses on the lives and wellbeing of commercial fishermen in England. Datasets resulting from the responses to the survey offer valuable insights for future policy development.

To improve working conditions for new entrants, Defra engages with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) and Department for Transport on health and safety at sea. For example, Defra worked with the MCA in 2024 to secure a derogation from the requirement for operators of under 10 metre commercial fishing vessels to have medical certificates. The Northern Ireland Fish Producers' Organisation Training Centre provides mandatory safety training, including refresher courses, as well as various competency related training courses.

The fisheries policy authorities have made funding available to support new entrants to the fishing industry. For example, the Welsh Government funded a feasibility study to identify training requirements for new entrants in November 2021 that resulted in a Seafish-led training programme for new and experienced commercial fishers being introduced in October 2023. The MFS supported 37 young fishers to develop a career in the fishing industry, with over £2.5 million worth of grants awarded between 2021 and 2024. DAERA's Marine Environment and Fisheries Funding Strategy provides opportunities for industry to support the promotion and progression of a career within fisheries sectors and to support schemes that strive to enhance the renumeration of crew members.

Funding has been provided by the fisheries policy authorities to help to build a resilient seafood supply chain and processing sector. For example, MFS allocated £148.8 million to the seafood processing sector since 2021 to help businesses to modernise facilities, reduce energy consumption and improve efficiency. DAERA's Marine Environment and Fisheries Funding provides opportunities to support innovation relating to economic success. It allows stakeholders to explore new technologies, business models and market opportunities that contribute to a more adaptable and future-ready seafood industry.

The Welsh Government have engaged in the development of the Seafood Supply Chain resilience roadmap process, led by Seafish and the Welsh Fishermen's Association, building on work carried out by Bangor University. Amended economic link conditions, introduced by the Scottish Government in January 2023, have enabled an estimated additional £58 million of mackerel and herring to be landed into Scotland during the first two years the new conditions were in effect. Defra implemented a new Border Target Operating Model for seafood imports in 2024 and has encouraged the processing sector to move away from a reliance on Russian caught seafood. The UK Government is promoting an increase in domestic seafood consumption through 'The Good Food Cycle,' a food strategy for England published in July 2025.

The Welsh Government, working in partnership with Seafish and their advisory groups, have commissioned social and economic studies of 11 commercial and recreational fisheries to understand and quantify, where possible, the direct and indirect benefits of these fisheries to local coastal communities and how these benefits could be maximised and measured.

The fisheries policy authorities are making catch and production information accessible to commercial buyers through labelling and supply chain data, ensuring transparency for the consumer. Across the UK, Seafish provides, collates, reports on and shares bi-monthly market insight data on seafood consumption and retail sales to help inform the sector and support seafood businesses to promote locally sourced seafood.

Defra has worked with HM Revenue and Customs to update the transit manual to enable domestic catches of shellfish landed in EU ports to return to Great Britain more efficiently. The species included in the UK Commercial Designations list continues to increase, boosting the variety of fish that can be consumed and processed in the UK.

DAERA has provided financial assistance for the Northern Ireland Seafood Trails, a website and map pamphlets that feature seafood eateries and retailers, heritage and educational activities. Seafood Scotland, supported by the Scottish Government, has piloted a series of workshops in primary and secondary schools across the country since 2023. Over 1250 pupils have been engaged in helping future generations to be better informed and more connected to Scotland's seafood heritage.

The Welsh Government made funding available for businesses to improve processes, diversify and market products through the Welsh Marine and Fisheries Scheme and Food Business Accelerator Scheme. The introduction of an 'animateur' service in Wales in January 2025 provided support for fishermen to access these funding schemes and has facilitated an increase in successful applications for funding.

To create a thriving international market for UK seafood, Defra, in partnership with the Department for Business and Trade, Seafish and GREAT Food and Drink delivered the Seafood Exports Package (2022-2025), targeted at the promotion and awareness of UK seafood globally. The Scottish Government has funded Seafood Scotland (a national trade and marketing body), that has received almost £10 million from the Scottish Government's MFS since 2021. UK seafood businesses exhibited in the UK pavilion at Seafood Expo

Global 2025 in Barcelona and other Expos in China, Japan and the United States. Defra is working to open new export markets for UK seafood, ensure continued market access and tackle harmful fisheries subsidies at the WTO. The UK has agreed new Free Trade Agreements since 2022, notably with the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Trade and India. These agreements will promote an increase in seafood trade through changes such as lower tariffs and simpler rules.

Fisheries management plans

FMPs are evidence-based action plans which set out policies, goals, actions and measures designed to restore one or more stocks of sea fish to, or maintain them at, sustainable levels. The plans propose new fisheries management interventions and consider wider environmental, social and economic issues to achieve their wider policy aspirations over the short, medium and longer term. The JFS commits the fisheries policy authorities to publishing a total of 43 FMPs, the publication deadlines and coordinating authorities for each plan are set out in Annex A of the JFS.

In October 2024, the fisheries policy authorities launched a consultation which proposed amending the publication deadlines in Annex A of the JFS for those FMPs not yet published. These changes were proposed as experience from developing and publishing the first 5 FMPs showed that more time was needed to allow for meaningful engagement with stakeholders during development of plans and to respond to changes in scientific fish stock advice. The consultation also proposed some technical and geographic changes to some plans to ensure they aligned with the realities of fisheries management and available science. There was also a proposal to add a new Northern Ireland intertidal hand gathering of shellfish FMP. The majority of respondents to the consultation agreed with the proposed amendments, and as a result those changes, and 2 additional changes suggested by respondents were made and Annex A of the JFS was updated with effect from December 2024.

Eleven out of 43 FMPs listed in Annex A of the JFS had been published. The remaining 32 are in the process of being prepared.

FMP development

A collaborative approach has been adopted in the development of FMPs, co-creation has been at the heart of preparing these documents with extensive engagement across with a wide range of stakeholders including commercial and recreational fishers, environmental non-governmental organisations, academics and the wider supply chain. This stakeholder engagement has been conducted via FMP working groups, bespoke policy development meetings, the Defra FMP blog and formal consultation processes. Arm’s Length Bodies (ALBs), IFCAs (for Defra-led FMPs) and conservation bodies have also contributed to accompanying environmental assessment and evidence gathering.

As part of FMP development, addressing evidence gaps is essential to understanding and progressing towards sustainable fisheries management and to support the effective implementation of policies, goals, actions and measures that are set out in the FMPs.

In November 2025, the Scottish Government published a consultation on 11 Scottish-led demersal FMPs which are due for publication in the second half of 2026. These FMPs cover the following fish stocks across UK waters:

- Atlantic Cod
- Atlantic Haddock
- North Sea and Eastern Channel Whiting
- North Sea and West coast of Scotland Haddock
- North Sea and West coast of Scotland Megrim
- North Sea and West coast of Scotland Monk/Anglerfish
- North Sea and West coast of Scotland Saithe
- Northern Shelf Cod
- Northern Shelf Hake
- Northern Shelf Ling
- West coast of Scotland Whiting

Across the reporting period the fisheries policy authorities have also carried out significant preparatory work to develop and prepare those 21 FMPs which are yet to be consulted on or published. This includes: the first Wales-only crab and lobster FMP; the DAERA-led Irish Sea pelagic and demersal FMPs; the Northern Ireland-only non-quota shellfish FMP; the Scottish-led Nephrops and pelagic FMPs and the remaining 4 Defra-led FMPs.

Published FMPs

The 11 FMPs that have been published (this number includes those that received Ministerial approval for publication in November 2025) are:

- Bass FMP (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bass-fisheries-management-plan-fmp) for English and Welsh waters (December 2023)
- Channel demersal non-quota species FMP (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/channel-demersal-non-quota-species-fisheries-management-plan-fmp) for English waters (December 2023)
- Crab and lobster FMP for English waters (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crab-and-lobster-fisheries-management-plan-fmp-for-english-waters) (December 2023)
- King Scallop FMP (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/king-scallop-fisheries-management-plan-fmp) for English and Welsh waters (December 2023)
- Whelk FMP (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/whelk-fisheries-management-plan-fmp-for-English-waters) for English waters (December 2023)
- Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel mixed flatfish FMP (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/southern-north-sea-and-eastern-channel-mixed-flatfish-fisheries-management-plan-fmp) for English waters (October 2024)
- Cockle FMP (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cockle-fisheries-management-plan-fmp) for English waters (December 2025)

- North Sea and Channel Sprat FMP (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/north-sea-and-channel-sprat-fisheries-management-plan-fmp) for English and Scottish waters (December 2025)
- Queen Scallop FMP (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/queen-scallop-fisheries-management-plan-fmp) for English waters (December 2025)
- Southern North Sea and Channel Skates and Rays FMP (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/southern-north-sea-and-channel-skate-and-ray-fisheries-management-plan-fmp) for English waters (December 2025)
- Southern North Sea Non-Quota Demersal FMP (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/southern-north-sea-demersal-non-quota-species-fisheries-management-plan-fmp/southern-north-sea-demersal-non-quota-species-fisheries-management-plan) for English waters (December 2025)

Implementation of published FMPs

Each FMP sets out tailored fisheries management interventions and wider policies, goals, actions and measures specific to each fishery and/or area that a plan covers. Plans are implemented via many different mechanisms for example voluntary measures adopted by industry (but not enforced by law), Statutory Instruments, changes to licence conditions, byelaws and commissioning research, which the national fisheries authorities have worked collaboratively with stakeholders to identify.

Work is underway to implement goals and measures in published FMPs. Indicators to monitor the impacts of published FMPs against the goals they contain are also detailed in each individual plan, ranging from indicators to maintain, or improve, evidence for achieving maximum sustainable yield (MSY), where appropriate, to the implementation of specific policies or management measures.

Evidence for the stocks covered by the first FMPs published at the end of 2023 (and those contained in more recently published FMPs) remains limited. Although work is underway through the FMPs to address these gaps and strengthen the evidence base, it is still too early for these efforts to show measurable changes in the available stock data.

As well as delivering management measures and other actions set out in the published FMPs, Defra are running a Research and Development programme, delivered by its ALBs and external partners, to help build the evidence to successfully deliver and implement FMPs. This includes research to improve stock assessments, particularly in species where there is limited data, as well as research on wider environmental and social and economic impacts of implementing FMPs, and approaches to taking an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management. This will all help with evaluating FMPs in the future, by allowing understanding of how stocks are changing, and whether FMPs are delivering benefits for both the environment and the fishing industry.

The UK promotes the sustainable exploitation of stocks through both unilateral and joint actions with international partners. The UK cooperates with other coastal States where

stocks are shared across boundaries through the annual negotiations process, further information on which can be found in the fishing opportunities section.

Measures implemented from published FMPs

In October 2024 a UK Statutory Instrument, The Sea Fisheries (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2024, was introduced, which:

- increased the MCRS for crawfish to 110mm (ICES areas 7d and 7e) (Crab and Lobster FMP)
- introduced an MCRS for lemon sole (250mm), turbot (300mm) and brill (300mm) in English waters of the Channel Sea (ICES areas 7d and 7e), (Channel demersal NQS and Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel mixed flatfish FMP)
- restricted the engine power of vessels (greater than 221kW) using flyseining gear and increased the minimum mesh size to 100mm for flyseiners in English waters of the Channel Sea (ICES areas 7d and 7e) (Channel demersal NQS FMP)
- changed commercial catch limits for bass in the UK through licence conditions instead of secondary legislation following international negotiations (Bass FMP)

The MMO published a cuttlefish action plan (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/cuttlefish-fishery-action-plan) in April 2025 to support the sustainable management of the cuttlefish fishery which was identified as a data-poor species with high economic importance (Channel demersal NQS FMP). New codes were also introduced on the MMO 'Catch Recording App' (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/record-your-catch#full-publication-update-history) to differentiate between species of octopus, helping to gather new data and evidence on octopus catches (Channel demersal NQS FMP).

Evidence gaps for wider NQS have been identified and published to better understand them and what work is needed to close them (Channel demersal NQS FMP). Additionally, Defra has commissioned ALBs to carry out 20 research projects to address evidence gaps identified in other FMPs it is leading on.

In 2024, the Welsh Government established the Welsh Sea Bass Advisory Group and Wales King Scallop Advisory Group to co-design the implementation of the FMPs in Wales. Defra also established the Bass Management Group as a forum to define how best to deliver the commitments in the bass FMP in England. Membership of these groups include representatives from recreational and commercial sectors, regulators, environmental groups, scientific bodies, Defra and the Welsh Government.

In October 2025, the Welsh Government launched a consultation on adaptive scallop fishing management measures in Wales in support of the published FMP. Proposed measures include strengthening management of king scallop dredging, introducing the ability to adaptively manage king scallop fishing and enabling low impact fishing methods, such as hand diving or potting with lights. In addition, the consultation included a proposal to align the MCRS for queen scallop in Wales with neighbouring jurisdictions to provide the stock with greater protection.

The MMO updated bass fishing guidance for England and Wales which was published in October 2025.

Defra is developing legislation to amend section 17(1) in the Sea Fisheries Act (Shellfish) 1967 to prohibit all landings of soft-shelled and spawning edible (brown) crab (Crab and lobster FMP).

Best available scientific evidence is being used to inform decisions on implementation, across all fisheries policy authorities. For example, policy teams have used best available scientific evidence to inform a phased increase in crab and lobster MCRS in English waters over 3 years, and to help determine the length of seasonal shellfish fishery closures to help protect stocks.

Contribution to the achievement of the fisheries objectives and future work

The 8 fisheries objectives as set out in the Act are intended to provide a basis for and collectively define sustainable fishing and aquaculture and thereby assist the fisheries policy authorities to balance an economically and socially prosperous seafood sector with the long-term sustainability of the marine environment.

Working towards achieving the fisheries objectives will require continuous and ongoing effort from the fisheries policy authorities working collaboratively with the fishing industry and the seafood sector, as well as international partners. Developing and implementing fisheries policies in a manner which respects a diverse range of stakeholder views and environmental factors, alongside the use of the best available scientific advice, is essential. It can, and will, take time to evaluate the extent to which the JFS and FMP policies have contributed to achieving the objectives, noting that this will also be influenced by external factors.

Each of the policy themes in the JFS contribute, either directly or indirectly, to the achievement of one or more of the fisheries objectives. This section of the report highlights how some of the work that has been implemented to date is contributing to those objectives.

Taken together, the information in this report shows that the UK has made a demonstrable contribution towards achieving the Act's fisheries objectives. The work implemented across all JFS policy themes in the first reporting period since the JFS was published shows a clear strengthening of environmental stewardship in UK fisheries management.

Looking forward, we have included in this section an outline of some areas for future work to be undertaken across the fisheries policy authorities as we continue the journey of delivering the policy ambitions within the JFS.

Contribution to fisheries objectives

Sustainability objective

The Act says “The sustainability objective is that –

a) fish and aquaculture activities are –
   i) environmentally sustainable in the long term, and
   ii) managed so as to achieve economic, social and employment benefits and contribute to the availability of food supplies, and
b) the fishing capacity of fleets is such that fleets are economically viable but do not overexploit marine stocks.”

The principal way in which the UK works to ensure the sustainable exploitation of quota stocks is through species specific TACs agreed with other coastal States, which are based on the best available scientific advice. The fisheries policy authorities consider this advice alongside other social and economic factors to ensure a balance is achieved between sustainability of stocks and longer-term social and economic benefits for the fishing industry and seafood sector. Defra publishes annual reports on the sustainability of negotiated fisheries catch limits (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/assessing-the-sustainability-of-fisheries-catch-limits-negotiated-by-the-uk-for-2025), produced by Cefas. These show a general trend of modest improvement in the number of TACs passing Cefas’ sustainability assessment during the reporting period.

The fisheries policy authorities consider that progress made in the reporting period on IUU enforcement and changes to trade documentation is contributing to the sustainability objective by improving traceability and therefore reducing the risk of non-responsibly sourced seafood entering UK supply chains.

At an international level, the UK has strengthened its role as a proponent of sustainable fishing by adopting the WTO agreement on the prohibition of harmful fisheries subsidies, which can incentivise overfishing and the continued depletion of global fish stocks.

The development of the UK MPA network during this reporting period also demonstrates progress made towards the sustainability objective. HPMAs in English waters, the first 3 of which were designated in July 2023, aim to promote whole ecosystem recovery which should ultimately result in long-term benefits for level of fish stocks and the communities which depend on them.

Research programmes have been introduced, including mNCEA and the Fishing Industry Social Survey. These have provided valuable ecological, social and economic data sets for policy teams to make use of as they balance both social, economic and environmental factors in the development of future fisheries management policy.

While TACs are the principal way that the fisheries policy authorities ensure the sustainability of quota stocks, FMPs are the key mechanism for ensuring the sustainability of NQS. There has been significant progress developing FMPs, which aim to secure the long-term sustainability of the relevant quota and non-quota stocks for current and future

generations. Delivery of FMPs remains a priority for all fisheries policy authorities. FMPs include goals and measures to not only manage specific fish stocks, but to also tackle wider environmental, social and economic challenges faced in those fisheries. Work is underway to develop long-term monitoring processes for published FMPs, which will enable a better understanding of these challenges and benefits, and outputs from these processes will be used to refine plans over time.

Precautionary objective

The Act says “The precautionary objective is that –

a) the precautionary approach to fisheries management is applied, and
b) exploitation of marine stocks restores and maintains populations of harvested species above biomass levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield.”

Applying the precautionary objective prevents the fisheries policy authorities from postponing, or implementing management measures to protect species and their environments in instances where there is a current lack of sufficient scientific information.

TACs agreed at negotiations with other coastal States are based on the best available scientific evidence. This reflects a strengthening of precautionary management as it ensures they are set at a level which best available scientific evidence indicates should provide progress towards restoring and/or maintaining stocks above biomass levels, wherever possible. Defra publishes an annual assessment of the sustainability of negotiated fisheries catch limits (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/assessing-the-sustainability-of-fisheries-catch-limits-negotiated-by-the-uk-for-2025), produced by Cefas. This shows a general trend of modest improvement over the reporting period in the number of TACs set in line with best available scientific advice (including MSY advice).

Where there is insufficient evidence, the fisheries policy authorities have not delayed taking difficult management decisions, using proxy evidence, where suitable, to take decisions. For example, in Wales, species specific adaptive management approaches have been introduced allowing the Welsh Government to ensure measures can be varied in a timely manner in response to a changing evidence base.

Progress on improving the evidence base is described underneath the scientific evidence objective.

The best available scientific evidence is used to develop policies, actions, goals and measures in FMPs. Where there is insufficient evidence to assess MSY, the published FMPs, alongside specific goals and actions, contain commitments to tackle evidence gaps in future, with work already underway to identify and address these.

Ecosystem objective

The Act says “The ecosystem objective is that –

a) fish and aquaculture activities are managed using an ecosystem-based approach so as to ensure that their negative impacts on marine ecosystems are minimised and, where possible, reversed, and
b) incidental catches of sensitive species are minimised and, where possible, eliminated."

In line with the BMI, the fisheries policy authorities have taken forward research and monitoring to improve our understanding of bycatch of sensitive marine species in UK waters and to implement action working in partnership with the fishing sector, to reduce the numbers of sensitive marine species captured incidentally in fisheries.

By taking an ecosystem-based approach through targeted management measures we have made progress in strengthening ecosystem resilience. As an example, the relevant fisheries policy authorities' decision to close sandeel fisheries in English North Sea waters and all Scottish waters had tangible outcomes designed to protect wider food web dynamics and support marine species dependent on sandeels.

Funding schemes have also contributed to practical environmental improvements by supporting initiatives like marine litter collection. These efforts have helped to reduce pollution pressures and maintain healthier marine habitats.

The development of the UK MPA network has progressed the successful safeguarding of entire ecosystems and key habitats including seagrass beds, maerl, kelp forests and reef systems, protecting them from damaging fishing activity.

A range of successful ecosystem focused initiatives developed by the fisheries policy authorities are also contributing towards the achievement of GES. Research funded by the fisheries policy authorities has advanced understanding of blue carbon habitats, climate adaptation and the ecosystem benefits of aquaculture, strengthening evidence-based management.

In addition, published FMPs demonstrate the embedding of ecosystem-management principles throughout fisheries policy and practice.

Scientific evidence objective

The Act says "The scientific evidence objective is that –

a) scientific data relevant to the management of fish and aquaculture activities is collected,
b) where appropriate, the fisheries policy authorities work together on the collection of, and share, such scientific data, and
c) the management of fish and aquaculture activities is based on the best available scientific advice."

To ensure that the management of fisheries and aquaculture activities is informed by the best available scientific advice, the fisheries policy authorities have engaged extensively with scientific institutions, the fishing and aquaculture industries, environmental

organisations and international partners to support shared learning, promote methodological consistency and enhance access to data. This includes coordinated work through the UK Fisheries Science and Evidence Steering Group, joint research initiatives, and improvements in data accessibility for both regulators and the public.

To meet the objective, the fisheries policy authorities have collected and shared scientific data and taken management decisions based on the best available scientific advice. This is demonstrated by the UK annually negotiating on TACs using high quality scientific guidance and working collaboratively with international partners to exchange essential data.

The fisheries policy authorities have undertaken continuous monitoring of fishing activity, which is providing robust evidence about what fish are being taken from UK waters and their areas of origin. This information plays a vital role in shaping effective stock management strategies.

To improve the evidence base, progress has been made in monitoring of fisheries across the reporting period, which ensures that robust fisheries data is being collected to inform the application of the precautionary principle to their policies. This includes expanded use of VMS, REM, catch recording and iVMS across the individual fisheries policy authorities.

Development of the UK MPA network has likewise demonstrated robust application of the scientific evidence objective, having been informed by scientific data and fishing activity evidence gathered through formal consultation processes. In addition, the fisheries policy authorities continue to collect information on recreational fishing activity through voluntary reporting measures.

FMPs further support the scientific evidence objective by relying on best available scientific advice to guide policies, goals, actions and measures aiming to restore or maintain fish stocks at sustainable levels. Work is ongoing to address the most significant evidence gaps through targeted research projects.

Bycatch objective

The Act says “The bycatch objective is that –

a) the catching of fish that are below MCRS, and other bycatch, is avoided or reduced,
b) catches are recorded and accounted for, and
c) bycatch that is fish is landed, but only where this is appropriate and (in particular) does not create an incentive to catch fish that are below minimum conservation reference size.”

To contribute to this objective, the UK has ensured bycatch is reduced by setting minimum selectivity standards for fishing gear. The Scottish Government’s developing Future Catching Policy looks to further develop selectivity measures where required. Further measures include frequently setting bycatch TACs in negotiations to minimise choke risks and ensure unavoidable bycatch is recorded and landed and monitoring and mitigation initiatives.

The fisheries policy authorities consider that UK monitoring, control and surveillance measures have contributed to the objective in helping to increase understanding of the patterns and causes of bycatch. The use of VMS, iVMS, REM and Defra's Catch Accounting are also providing a more accurate picture of fish mortality and bycatch patterns, supporting more targeted interventions and enabling the UK to account more fully for catches, including unavoidable bycatch.

The fisheries policy authorities also consider that progress has been made in encouraging innovation within the sector through domestic quota trials, which have proven effective by rewarding fishers who adopt selective and innovative gear. This approach directly promotes more sustainable fishing practices by minimising harmful impacts on marine ecosystems and reducing bycatch.

At an international level, the fisheries policy authorities have advocated for stronger measures in international engagements, such as ICCAT and IOTC, that avoid, or reduce, the catching of fish below MCRS and other sensitive species such as sharks and seabirds. The fisheries policy authorities also consider they are making progress towards this objective through their IUU policies, which work towards avoiding bycatch by ensuring that catches are recorded and accounted for.

FMPs reinforce these efforts by outlining goals and measures to reduce bycatch of non-target species and to limit the discarding of undersized fish. These measures include setting appropriate size limits, consideration of policies to reduce discarding and mitigate bycatch of sensitive marine species, encouraging accurate reporting through the Catch App, and promoting innovative technologies like REM to enhance catch monitoring.

Equal access objective

The Act says "The equal access objective is that the access of UK fishing boats to any area within British fishery limits is not affected by –

a) the location of the fishing boat's home port, or
b) any other connection of the fishing boat, or any of its owners, to any place in the United Kingdom."

The fisheries policy authorities consider that they are achieving this objective through proposed, or introduced measures, which ensure that the access of UK fishing boats to any area of UK waters is not affected by the location of the boat's home port or its port of registration. Any restrictions on a vessel's ability to fish in an area should be based on objective criteria and the need to protect stocks and the marine environment.

Any new UK policies will reflect this commitment. In addition, any management interventions in published FMPs apply to all vessels in the fishing area covered by a plan equally, and this approach will continue for those FMPs published in the future.

National benefit objective

The Act says “The national benefit objective is that fishing activities of UK fishing boats bring social or economic benefits to the United Kingdom or any part of the United Kingdom.”

As a coastal State, the UK has secured notable benefits for the UK fleet and, therefore, fishing communities through annual negotiations. This includes negotiations with the EU, other coastal States such as Norway and at international organisations such as ICCAT, where the UK secured an increase in bluefin tuna quota bluefin tuna from 63 tonnes to 231 tonnes in 2025.

Domestic quota trials have allocated quota based on the social and economic benefits derived from the associated fishing activity, encouraging increased economic benefit to the UK. The fisheries policy authorities' trade policy measures also encourage processors, when available and suitable, to use UK caught or harvested produce to boost domestic production.

The Seafood Exports Package has helped maintain and grow market access, with Scotland alone exporting £1.2 billion of seafood in 2024, accounting for 55% of the UK’s total food exports. Amended economic link conditions in Scotland (effective from 2023) have also resulted in an estimated £58 million worth of mackerel and herring being landed into Scotland in 2023 and 2024.

The fisheries policy authorities have also introduced incentives to increase the fishing industry's domestic workforce and boost the growth of regional and coastal economies both on and offshore.

The aquaculture sector is a significant contributor the UK economy and coastal communities, in particular through trade, employment and investment, and farmed salmon consolidated its position as the UK’s biggest food export within the period of this report.

FMPs prioritise a number of species due to their economic and social value and include management actions to protect these stocks. This ensures they are appropriately balanced to provide long-term sustainability to the fishing communities that depend on them.

Climate change objective

The Act says “The climate change objective is that –

a) the adverse effect of fish and aquaculture activities on climate change is minimised, and
b) fish and aquaculture activities adapt to climate change.”

UK research and development projects are making progress in collecting data on the impacts on, and of, climate change, particularly the impact of certain fishing gears on marine habitats and the extent and impact of ocean acidification. This information is being

used to inform future management measures to help adaptation to, and mitigation of, climate change effects.

The UK's approach to TAC setting signals a robust application of the climate change objective. TAC setting is guided by the best available scientific advice from ICES and takes climate change into consideration as a distinct pressure.

Measures endorsed or proposed by the fisheries policy authorities in international fora contribute to the objective by ensuring that the adverse effects of fish and aquaculture activities in the high seas are minimised, and that these activities can adapt to climate change. The bluefin tuna fishery in the UK is an example of a new stock in our waters for which the fisheries policy authorities are ensuring sustainable management from the outset by only allowing a restricted fishery.

The fisheries policy authorities consider that the development of the UK MPA network demonstrates progress in protecting habitats important to long-term storage of carbon and those in provision of flood and erosion protection. Management measures in place contribute to the safeguarding of habitats critical for biodiversity and blue carbon storage, enhancing climate resilience and minimising harmful effects of fishing and aquaculture activities on climate change.

The fisheries policy authorities have continued to drive the sustainable development of the aquaculture sector. Aquaculture has an important role to play in delivering net zero and adapting to the challenges arising from climate change. Defra has funded research into its ecosystem benefits to progress understanding of this potential, which could help to mitigate climate impacts in future.

UK trade measures have also made progress towards to this objective by encouraging seafood importers to consider their carbon footprint and to further reduce it by using renewable energy and measuring carbon emissions for their business with carbon tools. This will minimise impacts from the seafood sector on climate change.

FMPs include policy goals and actions aimed at mitigating and helping industry to adapt to the impact of climate change.

Future work

The fisheries policy authorities will continue to deliver the policies in the JFS through the exercise of their functions and in line with the fisheries objectives. While much work has been done to implement the policies in the JFS, there is still more to be done, and some examples of anticipated work are set out below. There may be some cases where the work referenced in this section has progressed; any developments will be included in the next JFS report covering November 2025 to November 2028.

Work will continue across the fisheries policy authorities to develop and consult on the remaining 32 FMPs in Annex A of the JFS, which are yet to be published.

The fisheries policy authorities will continue to design and deliver funding schemes in line with their fisheries and aquaculture policy priorities and to deliver on the ambitions stemming from the JFS.

The UK will continue to work to secure outcomes from international negotiations relating to quota stocks which support their long-term sustainability whilst balancing the need to ensure a prosperous fishing industry. The UK will also continue to participate in negotiations to progress the second part of the WTO agreement on the prohibition of harmful fisheries subsidies.

To continue to effectively monitor fishing activity in UK waters, Defra plans to expand the use of REM in English waters through a phased implementation process. The Welsh Government will also work to increase the use and benefits of vessel monitoring (in particular VMS for over 12m vessels) and REM systems in Wales. DAERA intends to expand implementation of iVMS across Northern Ireland's under 12m fleet to improve spatial evidence, strengthen compliance activity, and support future fisheries and marine planning decisions, while the Scottish Government have committed to ensuring that iVMS is in place for all under 12 metre vessels in Scotland by the end of 2026. The Scottish Government will also be considering options for further rollout of REM to additional fleet segments.

The fisheries policy authorities will be updating the information required in Catch Certificates and other IUU documentation via a Statutory Instrument due to come into force in 2026. This will increase traceability and ensure UK exporters can continue to re-export seafood originating from other countries to the EU. The fisheries policy authorities also plan to update the UK's IUU Vessel List to ensure robust controls on seafood imports entering the UK.

Updates to the UK's Marine Plans are anticipated, with the Marine Plan for Northern Ireland expected to be finalised by March 2026. Defra and the MMO will also be collaborating with marine users to update the East Marine Plan. The Scottish Government also continues to develop their NMP2 to support sustainable development of their seas.

Defra are currently undertaking a review of the English MPA network to explore ways to update protection and management approaches to better address the nature crisis and improve climate change resilience, while supporting Government priorities such as growth and food security. Defra is engaging stakeholders in the review of its MPA network to ensure that potential impacts, benefits and opportunities representative of different sea users and the environment are considered.

The Welsh Government is proposing to designate further Marine Conservation Zones, with public consultations anticipated in 2026. DAERA's MPA strategy for 2025 to 2030 is also expected to be published in spring 2026.The Scottish Government aim to launch a 16-week consultation on inshore MPAs and the 11 Priority Marine Features most vulnerable to bottom-contact gear after the Scottish Parliamentary Election in May 2026.

Defra is also progressing the use of MPAs as environmental compensation for impacts to benthic habitats from offshore wind, working openly with stakeholders.

Following the anticipated publication of a carbon audit of the Welsh fleet in 2026 the Welsh Government will consider the results to identify main sources of emissions and highlight opportunities for future decarbonisation within the sector.

DAERA is currently finalising, ahead of publication, the third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme, having consulted on a draft in summer 2025.

DAERA has developed an aquaculture policy as part of the Northern Ireland's Fisheries and Water Environment Bill which aims to introduce a new streamlined aquaculture licensing process to ensure it is fit for purpose and capable of supporting the sustainable development of all aquaculture sub-sectors in the future.

DAERA has also agreed to work with industry stakeholders to support a transition from the traditional dredge fishery to more sustainable sources of blue mussel seed for the bottom-grown mussel aquaculture sector. They will also use the recommendations from the Sustainable Algae Northern Ireland project, which they have funded to support the development of seaweed aquaculture in Northern Ireland

On recreational fishing, Defra and the Welsh Government will continue to facilitate the recreational fishing of bluefin tuna in their respective waters, building on the success of the 2024 and 2025 fisheries. The Scottish Government and DAERA are considering recreational catch and release bluefin tuna fisheries in future.

The fisheries policy authorities will continue to support UK seafood exporters to comply with the EU's new IUU regulations which came into force on 10 January 2026. Work is also underway to integrate FES with the EU's CATCH system to facilitate digital transfer of information to ensure that UK seafood exports remain attractive.

Defra will continue to work to open up new markets for UK seafood, with the UK hoping to negotiate Free Trade Agreements with countries such as South Korea, Switzerland and the Gulf Cooperation Council States.

The Scottish Government is preparing to consult on a new inshore fisheries management model. This Inshore Fisheries Management Improvement initiative aims to deliver long-term sustainability, improve responsiveness to emerging evidence, and better reflect regional priorities.

The Welsh Government will continue to deliver evidence for stock assessments to ensure long-term sustainability of key Welsh stocks. In addition, the outcomes of social and economic research of selected fish and shellfish species of commercial and recreational importance in the Welsh zone are due by the end of March 2026. The Welsh Government will use these to inform the delivery of adaptive management systems of permitted fisheries and FMP development and implementation and form a baseline to measure impacts of interventions in fisheries.

The national fisheries authorities will continue implementing commitments made in published FMPs, incorporating goals and measures from those plans into work programmes. For example, further steps on management of the scallop fishery in Wales will be agreed following a public consultation. Further commissioning of additional research projects to address evidence gaps in FMPs are also under development.

The fisheries policy authorities are committed to the ongoing evaluation of the policies they are implementing to ensure that they are fit for purpose and continue to contribute to the fisheries objectives.

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