



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Consultation on discards reform

Proposals for reforming the management of discards
in England

July 2023

We are the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We're responsible for improving and protecting the environment, growing the green economy, sustaining thriving rural communities and supporting our world-class food, farming and fishing industries.

We work closely with our 33 agencies and arm's length bodies on our ambition to make our air purer, our water cleaner, our land greener and our food more sustainable. Our mission is to restore and enhance the environment for the next generation, and to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.



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Introduction

The United Kingdom has some of the best wild seafood resources in the world. Our fish stocks are a public asset which generate food and create jobs in an industry with a strong sense of identity and pride for their communities. These fish stocks also form a vital part of our marine ecosystems.

Many of our fish stocks are under pressure from fishing and climate change. Fishing can also have impacts on our ecosystem, for example, through accidental bycatch or the effect of fishing gears on the seabed. It is therefore important to consider both the positive and negative effects of fishing as part of our overall management of the marine environment.

The Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 for England sets out how we will improve our environment and sets a plan for a decade of delivery with target-led actions towards leaving our environment in a better state than when we inherited it.

The Joint Fisheries Statement sets out more detail about how the UK authorities will deliver on the 8 objectives set out in the Fisheries Act 2020, including the bycatch objective. This consultation sets out how reform of the way we manage discards will contribute to the delivery of this objective in England.

This consultation will run for 12 weeks from 17 July to 9 October 2023.

It should be read alongside the parallel consultations on expanding the use of remote electronic monitoring in English waters and on the first 6 draft fisheries management plans.

Aims

The landing obligation was introduced by the European Union in 2015 and has been fully in place across the UK since 2019¹. This requires all catches of fish species which are subject to quotas to be landed, unless exempt from the landing obligation.

The landing obligation aimed to reduce unwanted catch (bycatch) and encourage more selective fishing. However, evidence shows that it has not been effective in changing fishing practices². In some cases, discarding may have even increased since the landing obligation was introduced with this potentially leading to the overfishing of some quotas.

This is a difficult situation and there is no easy solution. Our engagement with industry and other stakeholders to date shows little consensus about what we should do. Yet it is clear that the landing obligation has proved ineffective, and we need to consider reform.

There is a legal duty in section 26 (1) of the Fisheries Act 2020 for the national fisheries authorities to exercise their functions to ensure, (as far as possible) that British fishing boats do not catch fish in excess of their quota. It is important that we act in accordance with this duty. The responses to this consultation will help us to develop the most appropriate methods to prevent overfishing.

The Fisheries Act 2020 contains a bycatch objective³. This provides 3 aims for us to achieve. In summary:

- Catches should be recorded and accounted for.
- Bycatch should be avoided or reduced.
- Bycatch should be landed where appropriate.

This consultation sets out how proposals for how England could meet these 3 aims and contribute to the achievement of this objective.

Some proposals would apply to English registered vessels. Others would apply to English waters. While we will seek to align with others where it is appropriate and right to do so, we are prioritising finding a solution that works for England.

¹ [Regulation \(EU\) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations \(EC\) No 1954/2003 and \(EC\) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulations \(EC\) No 2371/2002 and \(EC\) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

² See Applied Science to Support the Industry in delivering an end to discards (ASSIST) - II - MF1262 English catch and discard patterns during phased implementation of the Landing Obligation: Final Report [Science Search \(defra.gov.uk\)](#)

³ [Fisheries Act 2020 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

Principles

We recognise that reforming how we manage discards could take time. We need support and expertise from industry and other stakeholders to get it right. We propose to adopt the following principles to help us do this:

- **Working collaboratively** – We are committed to working together with industry and other stakeholders to develop reforms and to learn lessons from the implementation of the landing obligation. We recognise the wealth of knowledge industry has around fisheries and around gears and technical measures. It is essential that we draw upon this expertise to deliver reforms that everyone can support.
- **Risk-based** – Discarding does not always present a risk to long term sustainability. For most stocks, even when discards are taken into account, the total catch remains within sustainable limits. We propose to focus action first on those higher risk stocks where quota uptake and discard rates are such that there is a risk of catches exceeding quotas. There may later be opportunities to consider expanding exemptions for lower risk stocks.
- **Fishery-focused** – One of the lessons we have learned from the landing obligation is that one-size-fits-all solutions do not work. Discarding is a complex problem. It happens for different reasons. Practical challenges around avoiding or reducing unwanted catches also vary across different gears and stocks. We need to work with industry and other stakeholders to find and implement solutions that work for each individual fishery.

Q1. Do you agree with these principles?

Approach

Having established aims and principles, the next step is to identify which fisheries we should focus on first. We want to do this in collaboration with industry and other stakeholders using a risk-based approach. However, we have made proposals in the following section on priorities. These are based on an initial assessment of which stocks we think may be at higher risk from discards.

The consultation document then sets out proposals for how we could better account for catches. This may not directly reduce discarding, but it would help deliver on the bycatch objective aim to record and account for catches. It is also required for stock assessment and to identify whether discard rates are changing in response to reforms.

Next, the consultation document sets out proposals to work with industry and other stakeholders to review and implement technical measures such as gear modifications. This is based on the idea that the best way of managing discards is to avoid unwanted catches in the first place. This would also help deliver on the aim to avoid and reduce bycatch. Measures would be developed collaboratively and with a focus on individual fisheries.

Following this, the consultation document sets out how a discard prevention charge (DPC) scheme could be used in future. Potentially in mixed fisheries where there is a risk of choke.

Finally, the consultation document sets out proposed changes to exemptions from the landing obligation in English waters. Currently all exemptions are set to expire at the end of 2024. We are proposing to extend many of these and to make changes to others. This would update the exemptions in line with the best available evidence.

Remote electronic monitoring

This consultation should also be read alongside our parallel consultation on expanding the use of remote electronic monitoring (REM) in English waters.

Better information and data have a key role to play in managing unwanted catches and discards. There are many ways that we collect data on fishing activity but our capacity for at-sea observation is limited and is conducted by a small pool of scientific observers and enforcement officers. REM is a tool with high potential to improve the recording of catches, fill scientific data gaps and support better decision making in fisheries management.

In the REM consultation, we set out a vision of fully documented fisheries in English waters. In the long run this could be transformative and could fill key information gaps and provide greater confidence in catch data. But even in the short term it could provide opportunities. For example, there is the potential for vessels using REM to inform discard rates, or they could even be subject to different discard management approaches which reflect the higher level of assurance we have in their activities.

Priorities

We need to identify which fisheries we should focus on first. As a starting point, we have completed an initial assessment of quota uptake and discard rates together for each stock (Annex 1). This demonstrates that, for most stocks, discards do not present a risk to the sustainability of the stock. This is because landings and discards taken together still do not exceed the quotas set for those stocks.

However, this also demonstrates that there are a few stocks which may be at higher risk of catches exceeding quotas. These stocks are listed in table 1 below.

Table 1: initial assessment of stocks at higher risk of catches exceeding UK TACs

Sea area	Stocks
Celtic Sea	Cod (COD/7XAD34) Haddock (HAD/7X7A34) Whiting (WHG/7X7A-C)
North Sea	Cod (COD/2A3AX4) Hake (HKE/2AC4-C) Saithe (POK/2C3A4) Whiting (WHG/2AC4)
West of Scotland	Cod (COD/5BE6A) Haddock (HAD/5BC6A.) Whiting (WHG/56-14)
Irish Sea	Cod (COD/07A.) Whiting (WHG/07A.)

The assessment compared catches to agreed UK total allowable catches (TACs) during the years 2014 to 2021. It did not consider the levels at which TACs have been set relative to scientific advice on fish stocks.

It should be noted that we have heard from our industry engagement that some of these stocks – for example, haddock in the Celtic Sea or whiting in the North Sea – are not discarded in reality and that they should not be considered priorities. There could be various reasons for this discrepancy:

- The assessment has been undertaken using UK wide data. This means it may not be wholly representative of the English fleet in some ways.

- Discarding is more associated with some types of gears than other type of gears. Those fishers who use more selective gears may not recognise some of these stocks as priorities.
- Things have changed for some of these stocks since the assessment was done. And it is likely that things will change further over time. This means our approach may need to be adapted as and when new priorities are identified.

There could be other reasons too.

With these caveats in mind, we present this as a starting position. We seek feedback to help us identify where the higher risks are likely to be. This will help us to prioritise.

Q2. Which fisheries or stocks do you think we should prioritise?

Catch accounting

Each year, catch quotas for the UK are set out in the Secretary of State's determination of fishing opportunities for British fishing boats⁴. We need to record and account for all catches to ensure that these quotas are not exceeded. This is one of the aims set out in the bycatch objective. However, for stocks where there are unwanted catches, fish may be discarded and not recorded. This is likely to create a risk that the total catch (landings plus discards) could exceed our quotas.

As such, we think that better accounting for catches should underpin the reforms to how discards are managed. We have good estimates of discard rates derived from observer programmes and other monitoring. They are currently used in stock assessments and to inform scientific advice on catch levels. We could also use these discard rates to ensure all our catches are being counted against quotas.

We have identified two possible options to do this:

- Deduct estimated discards before quota is allocated
- Deduct estimated discards after catches are landed (preferred option)

These proposed changes would apply to English registered vessels.

By itself, changing how we account for catches will not stop discarding. But it would help ensure that catches are being recorded and accounted for. And over time it could help incentivise avoidance and reduction measures.

Option 1: Deduct estimated discards before quota is allocated

The first option is to use discard rates to make a deduction from quotas before they are allocated. This would take place following the apportionment of quota between UK administrations but before the distribution of the English share to industry. The discard rate would vary by stock and would be updated on an annual basis.

In some ways, this is similar to how quotas were managed before the landing obligation was introduced. It is also similar to how deductions are made for de minimis exemptions now.

One benefit would be simplicity. It would be easy to administer and understand. It should also meet our aim of ensuring all catches are accounted for against quotas.

⁴ [Fishing opportunities for British fishing boats \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

However, setting a discard rate for each stock would not take account of different discard rates between the different vessels fishing each stock. It would basically mean a flat rate being applied to all of them. Those types of vessel, which generally have less unwanted catch, would not see a lower discard rate reflecting their lower discarding levels.

It could also become complicated when quota is traded with other parts of the UK or with the EU. Other administrations may choose to manage discards in a different way. If they did not follow a similar approach, this could mean deductions need to be applied to quota being traded into England too. That could affect exchange rates and potentially become very difficult for industry to manage.

Option 2: Deduct estimated discards after catches are landed (preferred option)

The second option is to use estimated discard rates to make a deduction from quotas after fish are landed. The discard rate would effectively act as a multiplier and would be applied to recorded landings. For example, when considering a specific quota, based on an estimate that 25% of the catch is discarded, if 60kg were landed, this would mean that a total of 80kg would be deducted from that quota to account for the full catch.

This would be more complicated to administer initially but it would allow discard rates to vary by vessel. This is because we know which vessel has caught the fish by the time the catch is landed. As such, the gears used by that vessel can be considered when deciding which discard rate to apply.

This could be a fairer approach. Vessels which generally have less unwanted catch could then have a lower discard rate applied to reflect their lower discarding levels. This may even encourage use of more selective gears.

Implementation challenges

If we went ahead with these proposed changes, we would expect to begin with higher risk stocks and in the longer term, potentially implement the catch accounting measure more widely across England. This would likely see us prioritise those stocks where average quota uptake and estimated discard rates are such that it appears there is a risk of catches exceeding quotas.

We anticipate that the discard rates currently used to inform stock assessments would be our starting position. But we recognise that, while these may be suitable for use across the fleet as a whole, they may not accurately reflect certain segments of the fleet. This is something we would need to work through with industry during implementation.

We also anticipate that some fishers may contend that no deductions at all should be applied to them because they are compliant with the landing obligation at present and do

not discard fish. Again, this is something we would need to work through during implementation. Either at a vessel level or a producer organisation level.

There is also potential for vessels adopting remote electronic monitoring to fully document fishing activity to be exempt from having discard rates applied or have a different approach to accounting for catches open to them.

Q3. Which catch accounting option do you prefer and why?

Q4. If we went ahead with your preferred option, how do you think we should implement this?

Q5. How do you think we should be accounting for catches against quota?

Measures to avoid or reduce unwanted catch

The most effective way to minimise discarding is to avoid or reduce the amount of unwanted catch in the first place. This is also one of the aims of the bycatch objective. This could be done through more selective fishing practices or the use of closed or restricted areas.

This is a highly technical area. Before making any changes, we want to work closely with industry and other stakeholders to ensure measures do what is intended and to manage down the risk of unintended consequences.

We propose setting up steering groups for the fisheries where discarding poses higher risks. These would have representatives from industry and other stakeholders as well as fisheries managers and scientists. These groups would be tasked with identifying fishing gear modifications and other measures that could help to reduce discarding in that fishery.

Gear selectivity

Fishers have a wealth of knowledge on what fishing gear types work best. Industry has made great efforts over recent decades to increase selective fishing practices and reduce discarding. There are also existing gear requirements in various fisheries. For example, in the Celtic Sea there are measures to help protect cod, haddock and whiting. And some of our exemptions from the current landing obligation only apply when certain conditions on gear selectivity are met. But there is still more to do, particularly for those gear types associated with higher rates of discards.

Otter trawls are one gear type associated with higher rates of discards. This includes both $\geq 100\text{mm}$ and $70\text{-}99\text{mm}$ mesh sizes. Several potential modifications to otter trawls could improve selectivity and reduce unwanted catches. These include:

- Codend modifications
- Escape panels
- Raised fishing line trawls
- Low headline trawls
- Coverless trawls
- Horizontal separator trawls
- Selection grids

Beam trawlers are another gear type associated with higher rates of discards. Again, several potential modifications could be made for these too. These include:

- Codend modifications
- Larger meshes in trawl body
- Escape panels
- Coverless trawls

We propose using the steering groups to jointly identify and implement gear modifications. These groups would also explore why modifications have not been adopted in the past despite successful trials. This would build on good collaborative work that has already happened in the past, for example, in the Celtic Sea. We also need to consider the potential impact on catches of target species and the cost of changing to new gears.

Initially we would anticipate modifications being implemented on a voluntary basis. Potentially this could be linked to lower discard rates being applied to participating vessels when accounting for all catches.

Later, to advance the uptake of more selective gears in English waters, we are considering whether modifications should be made mandatory for all vessels operating in that fishery, including both domestic and international vessels.

Q6. What do you think about creating steering groups to jointly identify and implement gear modifications and to consider other technical measures such as area closures?

Q7. Do you have any initial views on the suggested otter trawl and beam trawl modifications?

Q8. Do you agree with the approach of making gear modifications mandatory for all vessels operating in a particular fishery? Please explain why or why not.

Area closures

Area closures can be used to restrict fishing activities and can potentially help avoid unwanted catches. These closures may be temporary or permanent, prevent all fishing activity or just limit the use of certain gear types. They are commonly used to protect spawning fish or juveniles or to prevent the bycatch of sensitive marine species.

There are challenges with at-sea monitoring of area closures and in gathering sufficient data to assess their effectiveness, particularly with real-time closures. Technology may help with this in future. Especially as we expand the use of remote electronic monitoring and as the modelling of 'hot spots' improves. These could facilitate real-time closures in areas with high amounts of bycatch.

Industry has also been trialling and developing different approaches which may have a valuable role to play. For example, using technology to issue alerts in real-time to other vessels to avoid certain areas.

We propose using the steering groups to explore expanding the use of area closures. Initial questions we are keen to explore include whether:

- The current approach to area closures is working.
- Area closures help reduce unwanted catch or choke.
- The use of real-time area closures.

- The use of technology in area closures.

Q9. Do you have any initial views on the questions we have identified around area closures?

Discard prevention charge

We are considering the possibility of introducing a voluntary discard prevention charge (DPC) scheme in England. This would give vessels the option to land catch in excess of their quota (unauthorised catch) if they pay a charge. This would allow the fish to be sold and help avoid waste. But the charge would minimise or cancel out the profit and avoid any financial incentive to fish above quotas.

The DPC scheme could offer a way of managing any residual catches that could not be avoided and for which vessels could not obtain quota. The scheme would not allow English quotas to be exceeded. To make sure the catch paid for through the DPC scheme is counted against quota, we would need to hold back a pool of quota. Catches could then be counted against this pool of quota until it was exhausted.

At this stage, we are seeking initial views on the basic concepts of such a scheme. Our ambition would be to develop a fair, practical and transparent scheme that works alongside the way we manage fisheries and quota more generally. We want to allow time to work with industry and other stakeholders to develop and test the concept and then would need to legislate. We would expect to consult again on a more detailed scheme design, if we do go ahead.

In the longer term, we anticipate the accuracy of discards information and catch monitoring will increase. For example, by using remote electronic monitoring in English fisheries. With this change, we could potentially use the DPC as an alternative to the catch accounting changes proposed above to continue to better count catches against quota.

DPC scheme concepts

Registration – A voluntary DPC scheme would operate in England only. English fishing licence holders or producer organisations (POs) with at least one English member could be eligible to register in the scheme. POs would be included because they manage quota on behalf of their members and could have a role to play in collecting and paying the charge on behalf of their members.

Quota – A pool of quota would be needed to offset the excess catch paid for through the DPC scheme - after all usual quota flexibilities, such as leasing and swapping, had been used first. In the first instance, we would expect to use reserve quota to create this pool. This is the increased quota ('uplift') made available when the landing obligation was first introduced. We could potentially also use some of the English share of the UK's additional quota secured as a result of Brexit.

We would need to forecast the amount of quota to be held in this pool. If the pool was too large, quota could be left at the end of the year. If the pool was too small, the scheme may not work. Uptake would have to be kept under review. If all the quota was used up, the usual enforcement mechanisms would still be in place to manage any subsequent fishing. If any surplus quota was left, it could potentially be banked or reallocated.

The quota held back for the scheme may have been allocated to vessels in previous years based on fixed quota allocation (FQA) unit holdings. We have been clear that the use of FQA units to allocate both reserve quota and additional quota in England does not create any long term association with existing FQA units.

Charge setting – The DPC could be calculated in various ways. For example, we could use historic sale prices or we could set it relative to the value of the stock at the time of landing. This would need to be reviewed periodically. Either in real time in response to market conditions, annually or every few years. The charge could potentially be reduced in certain circumstances, for example if more selective gears were to be used.

Charge payment – The DPC could be applied and payments made on landing, monthly, or annually as part of an end-of-year quota balancing process. We would identify who would manage the charge collection and other administrative processes. Once a charge was paid for any over quota fish caught in excess of quota landed, there would then be no further risk of prosecution in relation to that fish.

Q10. What are your views on the possibility of creating a voluntary discard prevention charge scheme?

Q11. Would you be interested in taking part in any discard prevention charge scheme or its development and testing?

Exemptions

Exemptions from the landing obligation are currently in place across the UK⁵⁶⁷⁸. These allow fishers to legally discard part of their catch if they meet specific criteria. There are two broad categories:

- High survivability exemptions: these are used for some fish species that have been assessed to meet the criteria of having high survival after being discarded.
- De minimis exemptions: these allow fishers to discard a limited amount of their catch where selectivity is very difficult to achieve or there are disproportionate costs of handling unwanted catches.

In 2021, Cefas reviewed the list of exemptions and made recommendations to either keep, modify or discontinue each one⁹. In addition, they recommended close monitoring of many exemptions to prevent overfishing. Many of these recommendations were adopted in January 2022¹⁰. However, all UK exemptions currently expire at the end of 2024.

We propose to continue using exemptions in English waters from January 2025:

- 5 exemptions for beam trawlers would be updated to require more selective gear configurations.
- 9 exemptions would be discontinued.
- The rest would remain the same.

More information is provided in Annex 2 and Annex 3.

All these proposals extend only to English waters. The devolved administrations are responsible for their own waters and it is for them to decide what to do with exemptions in

⁵ [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) No 1393/2014 of 20 October 2014 establishing a discard plan for certain pelagic fisheries in north-western waters \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

⁶ [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) No 1395/2014 of 20 October 2014 establishing a discard plan for certain small pelagic fisheries and fisheries for industrial purposes in the North Sea \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

⁷ [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2019/2238 of 1 October 2019 specifying details of implementation of the landing obligation for certain demersal fisheries in the North Sea for the period 2020-2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

⁸ [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2019/2239 of 1 October 2019 specifying details of the landing obligation for certain demersal fisheries in North-Western waters for the period 2020-2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

⁹ [CEFAS, A review of existing and proposed exemptions from the Landing Obligation applicable in the UK waters of the North Sea and North Western Waters regions, September 2021](#)

¹⁰ [The Sea Fisheries \(Amendment etc.\) \(No. 2\) Regulations 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

their waters. Where the devolved administrations propose to continue using exemptions, we will look to align with them where it is right to do so.

Over time, if other reforms help us better account for all catches and reduce discarding, it is possible that some exemptions would no longer be necessary. This would be kept under review.

We would also need to consider the interaction between catch accounting changes and exemptions. For example, we would need to ensure that there is no double counting between discards allowed under de minimis exemptions and discard rates deducted against quotas. Again, this would be considered if we decided to go ahead with the catch accounting changes.

Q12. Do you agree with our proposals to continue using exemptions in English waters from 2025?

Other ideas

As part of our risk-based approach to managing discards, we are keen to consider whether some lower risk parts of the fleet could be made entirely or partially exempt from the landing obligation when fishing in English waters.

For example, under 10 metre vessels make up around 82% of the English fleet. However, they land only around 4% of the quota stocks. This could mean that, even if their discard rates are similar to over 10 metre vessels, the absolute volume of discards they generate is likely to be proportionally low.

If these vessels could be made entirely or partially exempt, this could potentially reduce regulatory costs to smaller businesses and allow fisheries management to focus on those larger vessels which make more landings and which are associated with a higher volume of discards.

We would still need to ensure we recorded and accounted for all catches, but this could be a situation where it is not appropriate to require the bycatch to be landed.

This may be something that could be considered at a fishery level once we have determined priorities and in collaboration with industry and other stakeholders.

Q13. Do you have any initial views on making lower risk parts of the fleet exempt?

Q14. Are there other ideas for reforming discards management that we should consider?

Consultation information

Who will be affected by these proposals

This consultation will be of interest to fishing industry stakeholders in England. The proposals are also likely to be of interest to retailers and other stakeholders in the seafood supply chain, consumers, NGOs (non-governmental organisations), gear manufacturers and fishing technology companies.

Why we are consulting

We are seeking views on proposals to reform the management of discards in England. This will help shape our thinking as we develop future policies and measures.

This is a 12 week consultation running from 17 July to 9 October 2023.

Summary of questions

1. Do you agree with these principles?
2. Which fisheries or stocks do you think we should prioritise?
3. Which catch accounting option do you prefer and why?
4. If we went ahead with your preferred option, how do you think we should implement this?
5. How do you think we should be accounting for catches against quota?
6. What do you think about creating steering groups to jointly identify and implement gear modifications and to consider other technical measures such as area closures?
7. Do you have any initial views on the suggested otter trawl and beam trawl modifications?
8. Do you agree with the approach of making gear modifications mandatory for all vessels operating in a particular fishery? Please explain why or why not.
9. Do you have any initial views on the questions we have identified around area closures?
10. What are your views on the possibility of creating a voluntary discard prevention charge scheme?

11. Would you be interested in taking part in any discard prevention charge scheme or its development and testing?
12. Do you agree with our proposals to continue using exemptions in English waters from 2025?
13. Do you have any initial views on making lower risk parts of the fleet exempt?
14. Are there other ideas for reforming discards management that we should consider?

Responses

To submit your response, please complete the questionnaire available from the Citizen Space website at the following link: <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/discards/discards-reform>

Alternatively, you can send us your comments by post to:

Discards Policy Team

Marine and Fisheries, Defra

Lancaster House

Hampshire Court

Newcastle upon Tyne

NE4 7YH

Or you may reply by email at discards@defra.gov.uk.

Please let us have your comments by 9 October 2023 and say if you would like your response to be confidential and why.

Confidentiality and data protection

This consultation is being conducted in line with the Cabinet Office “Consultation Principles” and be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance>.

Representative groups are asked to give a summary of the people and organisations they represent and where relevant who else they have consulted in reaching their conclusions when they respond.

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal data, may be published or disclosed in accordance with the access to information regimes these are primarily the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs), the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA). We have obligations, mainly under the EIRs, FOIA and DPA, to disclose information to particular recipients or to the public in certain circumstances.

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, as a public authority, the Department is bound by the Freedom of Information Act and may therefore be obliged to disclose all or some of the information you provide. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information, we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

Defra will process your personal data in accordance with the law and in the majority of circumstances this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties. A full privacy notice is included as a related document alongside the online consultation document.

Defra may publish the content of your response to this consultation to make it available to the public without your personal name and private contact details (e.g. home address, email address, etc).

If you have any comments or complaints about the consultation process, please email: consultation.coordinator@defra.gov.uk

Next steps

A summary of responses to this consultation will be published on the government website at www.gov.uk/defra. An annex to the consultation summary will list all organisations that responded but will not include personal names, addresses or other contact details.

The response to the consultation is expected to be published within 12 weeks of the consultation closing date.