



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# **Proposed Fisheries Management Plan for Channel Demersal Non-Quota Species**

## **Executive Summary**

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# Executive Summary

## Context

Sustainable management of fisheries requires appropriate management of harvesting to protect our diverse stocks. Meeting our responsibilities will support vibrant, profitable, and sustainable fishing industries alongside a healthy and productive marine environment. Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) are a requirement of the Fisheries Act 2020 (the Act), the UK Joint Fisheries Statement in 2022 and a commitment in the England Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 and provide a tool for managing fishing activity towards more sustainable fisheries.

The Channel Demersal Non-Quota Species Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) has been prepared for the purpose of meeting the requirements set out in the Act. This has been developed by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) on behalf of the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The FMP was developed in collaboration with a working group made up of fisheries stakeholders, including commercial and recreational fishers. The MMO also engaged widely with coastal communities, supply chain businesses, scientists, and government agencies. Contributions from environmental non-governmental organisations have been considered across all FMPs in a group coordinated by Defra. Further detail of the engagement can be found in Annex 3: Record of Engagement.

## What is a Fisheries Management Plan?

An FMP is an evidence-based action plan that chart a course to sustainable fisheries. An FMP sets out a vision and goals for the target fishery (or fisheries), together with the policies and management interventions necessary to achieve these goals. Defra intends to use FMPs to tackle environmental, social, and economic issues associated with our fisheries, significantly enhancing our ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management. FMPs will be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they respond to new evidence and practical experience to remain effective.

## Why an FMP for Channel Demersal Non-Quota Species (NQS)?

The Channel Demersal NQS FMP establishes a road map to achieve long-term sustainable management of demersal non-quota fisheries in English waters in the English Channel (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) areas 7d and 7e) in line with the Fisheries Act objectives.

## Proposed FMP for Channel Demersal Non-Quota Species

Demersal NQS fish are those species living close to the seafloor which do not have [quota](#) allocated to them. In 2020, landings of demersal NQS by United Kingdom (UK) and European Union (EU) vessels fishing in UK waters in areas 7d and 7e totalled 12,761 tonnes valued at £33.1m. However, demersal NQS are data limited with many lacking comprehensive data collection programmes or formal stock assessments.

The overarching aim of the FMP is to deliver sustainable management of specified Channel demersal NQS to a position driven by robust stock assessments, supported by consistent data collection and research programmes. The management measures and actions linked to delivering the goals detailed in this FMP describe the key stages on that journey. The FMP also sets out the shared commitment that recreational and commercial fishers and Government have for fisheries catching NQS in the English Channel. A core principle driving the implementation of the FMP goals is iterative development to reflect that as the evidence base improves, management interventions should be more responsive and adaptive.

## Vision and goals of the FMP

*The FMP vision is that demersal NQS fisheries in the English Channel will be managed to achieve environmental, social, and economic sustainability, for the benefit of coastal communities and wider society.*

The FMP goals are based around key themes of evidence, social and economics, and sustainable fisheries contributing towards delivering the Fisheries Act objectives. The FMP goals are as follows:

- **Under the sustainable fisheries theme:** 1) Deliver effective management of demersal NQS in the English Channel, and 2) Deliver wider biological sustainability.
- **Under social and economic theme:** 1) Better understand and optimise economic and social benefits, and 2) Build capacity for the industry to be able to input into matters effecting non-quota species fisheries management.
- **Under the evidence theme:** 1) Better understand wider NQS evidence gaps, and 2) Develop the NQS evidence base.

## Establishing a Channel demersal NQS management group

The FMP sets out a goal for building capacity for the industry to input into FMP management. To support this, the FMP proposes creating a NQS management group, comprising of industry, recreational fishers, processors and markets, the regulatory authority, fisheries scientists, policy makers and other interested

stakeholders, which will act as a means for addressing management concerns and needs.

## Recommended management measures

During this first iteration, five proposed areas for priority management intervention have been identified. These have been developed through evidence gathering and engagement with stakeholders, who recognised that change is required to improve the sustainability of the stocks and fisheries. Further work and consultation will need to be undertaken to determine the applicability of each of these measures and refine where necessary. The priority areas are as follows:

- 1) **Restriction of future flyseining effort:** The recent increase in flyseine fishing or demersal seining capability, and the emergence of newer and larger vessels in the English Channel (ICES areas 7d and 7e), has the potential to cause significant harm to the stocks within the scope of the FMP. Following on from Defra's consultation on this issue in 2022, it is recommended to introduce a standard net mesh size of 100mm for all flyseine vessels operating in English waters of the Channel. In addition, it is also recommended to restrict effort by engine power to 221 kilowatts (kW) for flyseine vessels within 12 nautical mile (nm) of the English Channel.
- 2) **Minimum Conservation Reference Sizes (MCRS):** Cuttlefish, lemon sole, turbot, and brill were highlighted as key FMP species requiring protection during the juvenile life stages of their development. The proposed MCRS are cuttlefish – 23cm; lemon sole – 25cm; turbot – 30cm; and brill – 30cm. These sizes have been identified to align with the MCRS in Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) in the short term and will be evidenced further to determine the appropriate size based on maturity sizes for these species. Considering an MCRS for other flyseine targeted species, such as red mullet, bib and gurnards is recommended as a medium-long term measure.
- 3) **Cuttlefish:** The common cuttlefish was identified by stakeholders as a critical targeted fishery requiring attention. The short life span of cuttlefish needs to be considered as part of a management strategy to promote stock recruitment and population size. A seasonal restriction would aim to protect critical spawning seasons or recruitment pools from high impact fishing gears. The FMP therefore also recommends considering temporary seasonal closures for cuttlefish trawlers to protect pre-spawn juvenile cuttlefish, or egg-laying habitat, pending further evidence for longer term management approaches.
- 4) **A monitoring programme:** Robust data collection is necessary to meet the requirements of the FMP. Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) has been identified as a potential method for data collection that can assist in the monitoring and evaluation of the measures introduced as part of the FMP. The initial recommendation is to focus on an early adopter scheme for flyseining

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vessels alongside a holistic monitoring programme, subject to the outcomes of the consultation on REM in summer 2023.

- 5) **Education, adoption of voluntary guidelines and development of codes of conduct:** Through partnership working, the FMP proposes to develop voluntary guidelines, education, and codes of conduct for both commercial and recreational fishers to improve the sustainability and benefits of the stocks for all sea users.

The FMP recognises that east and west Channel fisheries are distinct, given the physical characteristics of the two regions that support differing habitats and fish assemblages. Therefore, management interventions will need to take spatial-temporal variability into consideration.

## Wider issues and environmental impacts

In addition to the objectives in the Fisheries Act 2020, all FMPs are subject to legal obligations for environmental protection arising from The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, Marine Strategy Regulations 2010, and the Environmental Principles policy statement for the Environment Act 2021.

The Channel demersal NQS FMP will contribute to the commitments to improve our marine ecosystem set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 and the UK Marine Strategy.

## Implementation and monitoring

This FMP is a first iteration and will be further developed during a formal review process, which will be at a minimum completed every six years. Recommended management measures will be reviewed and taken forward by Defra and MMO separately once the FMP is published.

## Conclusion

The Channel demersal NQS FMP has been prepared for the purpose of meeting the requirements set out in the Fisheries Act 2020. This statement and the contents of the plan meet the obligation set out in section 6 of the Act.

This FMP collates existing information for demersal NQS in the English Channel including existing management measures, science and evidence, and highlights where gaps exist. This is supplemented by an Evidence Statement. To protect the stocks that are potentially not being fished sustainably at present, the FMP proposes some precautionary management measures in the short-term whilst more evidence is gathered. Impact assessments will be carried out in parallel to the development of management measures to predict the impacts on the fishery. A research plan has

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been developed to highlight and fill specific evidence gaps, as well as gain further information about how to achieve the vision and goals this FMP sets out.