



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Consultation on the proposed Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal species Fisheries Management Plan

February 2026

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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[FMPconsultations@defra.gov.uk](mailto:FMPconsultations@defra.gov.uk)

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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 and recreational opportunities in a sector with a strong sense of identity and pride for its communities. These fish stocks also form a vital part of our marine ecosystems.

Many of our fish stocks are under a range of pressures such as fishing and climate change. Fishing can also have impacts on our marine environment, 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 our fisheries and the marine environment.

Defra and Welsh Government have set out their plans for protecting our environment into the future. Defra's [Environmental Improvement Plan \(EIP\) 2025](#) sets out how we will improve our environment here in the UK and around the world 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. Welsh Government published the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 that provides an iterative framework to ensure that managing our natural resources sustainably is a core consideration in decision-making. Central to the Environment (Wales) Act is the need to adopt a new, more integrated approach to managing Wales' natural resources to achieve long-term sustainability.

The [Joint Fisheries Statement \(JFS\)](#), as amended, sets out how the UK fisheries policy authorities (Defra, and the devolved governments in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales) will prepare and publish 43 Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) by 2028. The plans will bring together the evidence on the state of the stocks and identify measures and actions necessary to improve the evidence base and manage our fisheries in a sustainable way. Policies in an FMP will set out both the short-term actions and longer-term vision for the management of the fishery. The plans must also consider relevant wider legal obligations including the environmental principles under the [Environment Act 2021](#) and the need for strategic environmental assessment under the [Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004](#).

This FMP is a joint plan with the Welsh Government.

FMPs are evolving documents, developed collaboratively with commercial and recreational fishing interests and other stakeholders. They enable opportunities for growth through a profitable and more sustainable fishing and seafood industry.

The complete list of FMPs that are being prepared by each of the fisheries authorities is set out in the JFS.

# The Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP

The proposed Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP covers English and Welsh waters of ICES areas 7e, 7f, 7g, and 7h

This consultation is seeking your views on:

- the draft Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP as required by Schedule 1, Part 3 of the Fisheries Act 2020; prepared by Defra in collaboration with Welsh government
- the draft Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP Environmental Report which describes the likely environmental impacts of the FMP, as required under the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. This has been drafted by Defra.

A de-minimis regulatory impact assessment has also been developed, which describes the anticipated economic impact of the plan on the fishing sector and associated businesses. We would welcome additional economic evidence to update our assessment as we implement the plan.

This consultation is particularly relevant to:

- individuals, groups, or businesses who are engaged in the fishing, seafood, or aquaculture sectors, including individuals, groups or businesses from the UK or from outside the UK who fish in UK waters
- other individuals, groups or businesses who are sea users, for example, marine industries such as offshore renewables and sailing bodies
- national and local interest groups such as environmental and recreational non-governmental organisations, and industry federations

## Using and sharing your information

How we use your personal data is set out in the FMP consultation privacy notice which can be found in the related documents section on the consultation page.

This consultation is being conducted in line with the Cabinet Office 'Consultation Principles' and can be found at: [Consultation principles: guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles)

If you have any comments or complaints about the consultation process, please send them to [consultation.coordinator@defra.gov.uk](mailto:consultation.coordinator@defra.gov.uk)

# Background: Fisheries Management Plans

## Why are we publishing FMPs?

The [Fisheries Act 2020](#) (the Act) sets out the legal framework to manage fisheries in the UK, including the provision to prepare and publish FMPs. FMPs will protect and recover stocks, support a sustainable fishing industry and safeguard the environment. The JFS lists 43 proposed FMPs tailored to specific stocks and locations, aiming to reform and redefine domestic fisheries management.

## What are FMPs?

FMPs are evidence-based action plans designed to achieve sustainable fisheries. Each FMP outlines short-term actions and long-term visions, aiming to restore or maintain fish stocks at sustainable levels. These plans apply to both commercial and recreational fishing, addressing broader environmental, economic, and social concerns. Where appropriate, FMPs may identify actions to address wider issues identified during their development such as environmental or social and economic considerations.

## How FMPs work

Fisheries are a devolved competency, currently managed through regulation, byelaws, licence conditions and voluntary measures. FMPs may lead to changes to these legal instruments and voluntary agreements.

National Fisheries Authorities (in this case Defra, Welsh Government and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and Welsh Government in Wales) are legally required to act in accordance with the policies set out in the plans and will work with the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs), Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas), Natural England, Natural resources Wales (NRW) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) on implementation.

FMPs identify a range of short and longer-term actions. Plans will be adaptive and develop over time as further evidence is gathered, and measures are implemented. Whilst each FMP will focus on specific stock(s), it will also be important to ensure they work together and recognise the needs of fishermen, or stakeholders, who are affected by more than one FMP.

Each FMP must be reviewed within six years of its publication or sooner, if required. An FMP can also be replaced or amended at any time following a consultation, allowing the plan to be kept up to date.

FMP actions will need to be implemented iteratively over their lifetime to have an impact on how fisheries are managed. It may therefore take some time to show benefits in terms of improving the sustainability of stocks and fisheries.

## FMPs and other coastal States

The UK, whilst having regulatory autonomy over its fisheries, is committed to working with other coastal States, building on our strong and constructive relationships, to ensure sustainable management of shared fisheries resources. In order to deliver the objectives of the Act, the policies and actions in current and future FMPs will be implemented, and iterated where necessary, to reflect commitments made through annual consultations with the EU and other coastal States as well as negotiations in multilateral and bilateral forums.

FMPs provide a long-term framework for managing fishing activity, ensuring stock sustainability and a healthy marine environment. These plans will inform multi-year strategies for conservation and management of shared stocks including those proposed by the UK and EU under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA).

Regulatory measures to implement FMPs will apply to all vessels fishing in UK waters. The UK will notify the EU of any changes affecting EU vessels. We will also work closely with our partners in the North East Atlantic and beyond to promote the sustainable management of international fisheries through bilateral and multilateral forums.

## Approach to the development of the FMPs

Developed in a collaborative and transparent way, we continue to ensure that FMPs are relevant to the fishery or fisheries and support a more practical and flexible approach to fisheries management tailored to species, locations, and fishing activities.

Development of the FMPs and engagement with stakeholders has been tailored according to the specific needs of each plan and balancing variable views across sectors. We have worked to bring some sectors into the process at an earlier stage ensuring genuine collaboration.

In response to earlier FMP consultations, we are working to ensure greater consistency across the FMPs and all future plans. Having more simplified, concise language where possible, fewer consultation questions and supporting material available in tandem with launching the consultation aims to help stakeholders provide informed responses.

We are learning valuable lessons from the implementation of our published plans and recognise stakeholder involvement and ongoing collaboration underpins successful delivery of the FMPs. This approach will continue with delivery partners working closely with industry groups and other stakeholders to ensure co-design of management actions.

# Summary of draft Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal species FMP

The FMP is a jointly managed plan between Defra and the Welsh Government. It was developed in collaboration with the MMO and a working group made up of fisheries stakeholders, including scientific researchers, Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs), commercial and recreational fishers.

This FMP covers 40 species and 2 deep water shark genus groups and only applies to fishing activity within English and Welsh waters of International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) divisions 7e, 7f, 7g, and 7h.

The species in this FMP were prioritised due to their risk of significant over-exploitation without management action, are socially and/or economically important, and/or have ecological significance. These stocks are not only central to commercial and recreational fisheries but also play crucial ecological roles as both predators and prey, linking multiple trophic levels. While some stocks show signs of recovery, others, particularly the gadoids, remain at critically low abundances, and many other FMP species still lack sufficient data for robust assessments.

The vision for this FMP is that Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal fisheries in English and Welsh waters will continue to be managed sustainably, ensuring that stocks are restored to and maintained above biomass levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield (MSY)

## Stakeholder engagement

To ensure co-design with fisheries stakeholders, the MMO set up a working group, to inform development of the plan. Members were encouraged to seek opportunities to engage the wider fishing industry (commercial and recreational) and other key stakeholders where appropriate to feed their views into the FMP's development. The group held seven meetings throughout 2024 and 2025.

Further detail can be found in the supporting engagement report.

**Q1. Do you have any comments on the engagement process for developing the draft FMP? See FMP engagement report for details.**

## Evidence

Commercially, total UK and EU combined landings (over a reference period from 2019 to 2023) of FMP species within the FMP area amounted to 130,769 t, valued at £464.85 M. By weight of landings, the UK and EU landings were split at 44,750 t (34.2%) and 85,999 t (65.8%) respectively.

Landings of FMP species in the FMP area are primarily by vessels 18 to 40 m in length, accounting for 85.6% (111,920 t) of the total landed weight and 86.1% (£400.066 m) of the total landed value between 2019 and 2023.

FMP stocks have different levels of available data as categorised by ICES. ICES categorises fish stocks into six groups (Categories 1 to 6) based on the quantity and quality of available data, which determines the type and reliability of scientific assessment and advice. Maximum sustainable yield (MSY) reference points can be estimated for stocks classified as ICES data Categories 1 or 2; MSY proxies can be established for stocks at ICES data Category 3. Twenty stocks in the scope of the FMP have been assessed to MSY by ICES. (Of these, twelve stocks are considered data category 1, two stocks are considered data category 2, and six stocks are considered data category 3, with MSY proxies in place).

For seventeen stocks the available evidence is not sufficient for an MSY assessment. (Of these, eleven stocks are considered data Category 5, while six stocks are considered data Category 6). More evidence gathering is required to improve data for these species in order to progress them toward an MSY or MSY proxy assessment.

14 species and 2 genus groups are not subject to any stock assessment in the FMP area, primarily the rarer skates and rays and many of the deep water sharks.

The FMP covers stocks that may be at risk of over-exploitation without management action, are socially and/or economically important, and/or have ecological significance. These stocks are not only central to commercial and recreational fisheries but also play crucial ecological roles as both predators and prey, linking multiple trophic levels. While some stocks show signs of recovery, others, particularly the gadoids, remain at critically low abundances, and many other FMP species still lack sufficient data for robust assessments.

The species within the scope of the FMP are caught across a range of seasonal and gear-specific fishery subsets and are more generally caught in mixed fisheries with other quota stocks constituting an important part of fishers' earnings across different target fisheries (i.e., when targeting quota stocks). Mobile benthic gear and drift and fixed nets account for most of the landings of FMP species in the FMP area.

Environmental considerations have been identified in relation to the fisheries for FMP species using evidence provided by Natural England, JNCC and NRW. These have been assessed as part of the development of the plan and underpin the proposed policy goals. Climate change also has the potential to affect these fisheries and has been considered with appropriate actions put forward.

## **Q2. Do you have any comments on the evidence used in the draft FMP?**

## Policy goals for the management of Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal fisheries

To ensure effective management of the stocks, the FMP identifies ten policy goals focused on improving sustainability, strengthening integrated regional management, supporting social and economic sustainability and developing evidence in aid of holistic, cooperative decision-making. These goals were developed to address concerns raised through stakeholder engagement, as well as respond to issues and opportunities highlighted by the current evidence and align with legislative and regulatory requirements. These goals are subject to consideration of consultation responses and will be prioritised appropriately to ensure realistic and measurable outputs.

The policy goals are

1. Development of multi-year recovery plans for FMP gadoid stocks.
2. Harvest flatfish stocks sustainably, with biomasses maintained above the level capable of producing MSY.
3. Harvest nephrops stocks sustainably and manage nephrops bycatch.
4. Harvest anglerfish (lophiforms) stocks sustainably, with biomasses maintained above the level capable of producing MSY.
5. Manage elasmobranch fisheries sustainably and manage bycatch.
6. Build an evidence base for red seabream.
7. Explore the potential to reform existing management and approaches to join up and better align management of FMP stocks.
8. Build towards an ecosystem-based management of fisheries.
9. Support sector adaptation and resilience.
10. Reduce the contribution of fishing to climate change and support the fishing industry to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

For the full wording and rational underpinning the policy goals, see the full FMP

### Q3. Do you have any comments on the policy goals in the draft FMP?

## Proposed management of the Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal fisheries

The actions below have been summarised. For the full wording and details of which actions sit under each goal, see the full FMP.

In summary, the short-term actions focus on:

- for stocks managed by TACs: continue to determine fishing opportunities informed by the best available scientific advice and continue to work with coastal state partners through international negotiations, with the aim of restoring or increasing the sustainable harvesting of these stocks

- restoration of fishing the following stocks to sustainable levels will indicate the effectiveness of this plan: pollack, cod, haddock, whiting ([whg.27.7b-ce-k](#)), plaice ([ple.7e](#) and [ple.7fg](#)) and nephrops ([nep.fu.22](#)) through multi-year recovery plans
- maintenance of spawning stock biomass for sustainably fished stocks: anglerfishes, blue ling, cuckoo ray, megrim, nephrops ([nep.fu.2021](#)), plaice ([ple.27.7h-k](#)) and small-eyed ray
- reduction of fishing mortality and maintenance of spawning stock biomass: sole, undulate ray, thornback ray and spotted ray
- progressing toward an MSY assessment for the following stocks: sole, blonde ray, thornback ray and small eyed ray
- improving the evidence base for the following stocks: roundnose grenadier, saithe ([pok.27.7-10](#)), four-spot megrim, nephrops ([nep.27.7outFU](#)) in ICES Subarea 7, outside the functional units, sandy ray, shagreen ray, blue skate, white skate, common skate complex, kitefin shark, leafscale gulper shark, Portuguese dogfish and red seabream. Also improving evidence for the following stocks: blonde ray, thornback ray, small eyed ray, undulate ray, longnosed skate, sailray, starry ray, common stingray, Mediterranean starry ray, round ray, marbled electric ray
- for all stocks: gather and use the best available scientific evidence and advice to support management decisions and determination of fishing opportunities. This includes:
  - outlining research needs for producing or improving stock assessments where needed, including relating to ecosystem-based approaches
  - supporting and ensuring these fisheries are considered within existing bycatch monitoring, mitigation programmes and initiatives
  - considering assessments of the different bycatch monitoring and mitigation methods, how they apply to gears prevalent within these fisheries and their appropriateness for deterring or mitigating bycatch of sensitive mobile species
  - continuing to work with the inshore fleet targeting these stocks to better understand and capture the challenges they face in relation to fishing opportunities for FMP stocks

In summary, the medium to long-term actions focus on:

- considering a review of the overall effectiveness of current stock management approaches in contributing to the broader goals of the FMP
- for all stocks, supporting current and future evidence gathering to:
  - improve stock assessments
  - support the identification and implementation of the most appropriate ecosystem-based management approaches
  - understand the impacts of climate change and support the industry to adapt to climate change
  - understand the social, economic and cultural benefits of the fisheries associated with the FMP, accounting for the wide range of beneficiaries
- supporting work and collaborating with stakeholders to:

- help preserve cultural identity surrounding small-scale, traditional fishing practices
- explore ways to ensure equitable access to fishing opportunities for current and future generations
- explore where capacity could be increased to support safe and sustainable growth in these fisheries, where appropriate
- integrating and building on the ecosystem model which is currently under development for the Celtic Sea
- considering a social and economic assessment of the fisheries
- continuing to evaluate the impact of climate change on FMP stocks, considering mitigation and adaptation measures to reduce impacts on the fisheries. Identify opportunities to develop a more efficient fleet (including improvements to engine design, fishing gear and technological advancements)

**Q4. Do you have any comments on the measures and actions in the draft FMP?**

## Implementation

Once formally published, the plan will be implemented. This will be a phased process, and Defra and the Welsh Government will be working closely with the commercial and recreational fishing sector and wider stakeholders to develop implementation plans. Publishing the FMP is the start of a multi-year cycle, and we will ensure the plans strike the balance between building momentum for short-term actions and setting direction for the longer term. This can be further iterated as the evidence base is improved. The plans must be reviewed at least every six years.

Cross regulator, government and industry groups have been central to the development of the draft FMPs. Stakeholder involvement and ongoing collaboration underpins successful delivery of the FMPs and will continue beyond their publication.

## Conclusion

In summary, the Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP describes existing management measures and the available science and evidence to assess the status of 40 species and 2 deep water shark genus groups and their associated stocks in the English and Welsh waters of ICES areas 7e, 7f, 7g, and 7h to determine a sustainable level of exploitation. It sets out policies and proposes actions to manage the fishery sustainably.

**Q5. Do you have any additional comments on the draft FMP?**

## Strategic Environmental Assessment

Defra is legally required to consider the environmental impact of policies, plans and programmes. The Environment Act 2021 sets out environmental principles to guide policy

making. The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations 2004) require any qualifying public plans, programmes, and strategies to undergo Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) during their preparation and prior to publication if they are likely to have a significant effect on a European marine site (either positively or negatively). FMPs are plans or programmes for the purposes of the SEA Regulations 2004.

## **What is the Environmental Report and how was it developed**

The SEA considers the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the policies and actions set out in the draft Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP. The Environmental report (ER) sets out the findings of this process. The report describes the current state of the environment (the baseline) and the likely significant effects of proposals in the draft FMP to the baseline. The assessment identifies where the draft FMP could make a positive impact on the baseline and hence our marine environment. Where the FMP may have negative effects on the baseline, the report suggests actions to mitigate and/or monitor these effects. Defra and the Welsh Government developed the ER for the draft FMP. The scope and level of detail was informed through an early consultation with our statutory Consultation Bodies: Natural England, Environment Agency, and Historic England, NRW and Cadw together with the JNCC, as an advisor to the UK government and devolved governments on UK-wide nature conservation. We drew on published information on the state of the environment and the potential impact of fishing on environmental features.

## **Summary of the draft Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP Environmental Report**

The Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal ER has been produced in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. The following issues (from Schedule 2 paragraph 6 of the SEA Regulations 2004) were scoped into the assessment: Biodiversity, Fauna, Flora, Geology, and sediments (soil), Water, Climatic factors, Cultural heritage, Landscape, and seascape. This report assesses the likely significant effects of the draft Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP on these issues.

The assessment was conducted against a baseline that primarily used existing evidence on the state of the marine environment set out in the updated [UK Marine Strategy Part 1](#) published in 2019. Additional sources of evidence were used to establish the current status of the environment in relation to issues, such as climatic factors, not covered by the UK Marine Strategy (UK MS). The historical impact of fishing activity on the marine environment has been considered as part of the baseline. The assessment has been undertaken using the best available evidence to reach a suitable judgement on the environmental effects of the draft Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP.

Existing environmental effects of demersal fishing on those issues scoped into this assessment, in relation to Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), the UK MS descriptors and the wider environment, have been acknowledged and considered in this report. The potential positive and negative environmental effects of the draft Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP's policies and proposed measures alone and in-combination have also been assessed.

Our SEA concluded that current evidence shows the demersal fishery has an impact on the marine environment primarily through seabed disturbance and bycatch of non-target species. There are also impacts through reductions in prey for designated species and on marine food webs, primarily through reductions in juvenile gadoids.

Further work is required to reduce the impact of the demersal fisheries on habitats beyond MPAs to ensure good environmental Status (GES) targets for seabed integrity are achieved. The contribution of demersal fisheries to climate change related issues and its interactions with cultural heritage, through structural damage for example, were also identified as potential impacts.

The draft Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP has considered these existing impacts and sets out proposals to monitor, and, where required, introduce mitigation to address these impacts. The assessment of likely negative effects identified a low risk of significant adverse effects on the environment from implementing individual policies and actions. The policies and actions, will, where appropriate, be developed to avoid any potential negative effects identified by the assessment progress. The environmental effects of implementing the draft Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP policies and actions will also be monitored to identify unforeseen adverse effects at an early stage, so appropriate remedial action can be undertaken.

**Q6. Do you have any comments on the assessment of the environmental effects of the draft FMP, as set out in the Environmental Report?**

## Regulatory Impact Assessments

This FMP is a joint plan between Defra and the Welsh Government. Fisheries management is devolved, and the implementation of specific measures will be taken forward by respective national fisheries authorities as appropriate. Any assessment of impacts for specific measures will also be completed by the relevant national fisheries authority, in line with each authority's individual assessment processes.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/2/contents> For the purposes of the Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP consultation, we have drafted a de-minimis assessment (DMA) that outlines our rationale and approach to assessing the potential impact of the plan on business. This DMA is a supporting document.

Whilst the FMP identifies measures that could be introduced post-consultation, these proposed measures will be developed further and do not currently have sufficient detail for

any economic analysis to be done. These proposed measures could be regulatory or deregulatory, and positive or negative to business, hence it is not possible to estimate impacts.

When individual measures are implemented, the statutory or non-statutory mechanism through which these will be implemented will have their own impacts assessed in the appropriate manner.

## How to respond to this consultation

The consultation will run primarily via the Citizen Space online portal, however, we will accept email and hard copy responses for those unable to access the online survey. A response form to use for email and hard copy responses is included as a related document on the Citizen Space website.

The consultation questions are in bold throughout this document. They also appear in the response form and citizen space portal. Space is also provided for general comments.

Large print and braille versions of this document are available on request.

Defra has a statutory requirement to seek public views on the proposed FMP and its supporting Environment Report.

The consultation survey has three parts:

1. Personal details and confidentiality (required)
2. Questions on the Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP, Environmental Report and stakeholder engagement report.
3. Consultee feedback on the online survey (required)

You only need to respond to the questions that you wish to. However, all respondents must complete the required 'Consultee feedback on the online survey' and 'personal details and confidentiality' sections before you are able submit your response to the online survey.

## Duration of the consultation

The consultation starts on 10 February 2026 and will end on 5 May 2026. Responses must be received by 23:59 on 5 May 2026.

## Responses

Responses can be:

- Submitted via the [Citizen Space online portal](#).
- Sent via email to: [FMPconsultations@defra.gov.uk](mailto:FMPconsultations@defra.gov.uk)
- Sent via post to:

Consultation – Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP  
FMP team – Marine and Fisheries  
Seacole Building, 2 Marsham St  
London  
SW1P 4DF

At the end of the consultation period, we will summarise the responses and place the summary on the UK Government's website.

## Enquiries

If you want to submit a consultation response, please contact:  
[FMPconsultations@defra.gov.uk](mailto:FMPconsultations@defra.gov.uk)

If you have any general enquiries, please contact: [FMPs@defra.gov.uk](mailto:FMPs@defra.gov.uk)

The JFS can be found here: [Joint Fisheries Statement \(JFS\)](#)

The Act can be found here: [Fisheries Act 2020 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)