De-Minimis Assessment

For Self-Certified Measures in Defra

Title of Measure	Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal FMP
Lead Department/Agency	Defra
Expected Date of Implementation	2027 onwards
Date of Assessment	October 2026
Lead Departmental Contact	georgia.ricketts@defra.gov.uk
Type of Measure (primary/secondary etc)	Other (FMP)

Cost of Preferred Option		
Total Net Present Social Value £0m	**Business Net Present Value** £0m	**Equivalent Annual Net Direct Cost to Business (EANDCB)** £0m

Policy overview, rationale for intervention and intended effects

The Fisheries Act 2020[1] places an expectation on the UK's Fisheries Policy Authorities to publish Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs). The Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) 2022[2] sets this out in practice and lists 43 proposed FMPs. The Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal FMP is a joint plan with the Welsh Government and sets out the road map to sustainably manage stocks in English and Welsh waters and protect the wider environment. Once published, the policies and measures in the FMP will be implemented separately through appropriate mechanisms such as statutory instruments, licensing conditions or voluntary measures. The Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal FMP has been produced to drive progress towards the sustainable fishing of various species in English and Welsh waters.

This is an important and economically valuable fishery with stocks extending into European Union (EU) waters, and species caught as part of both mixed and targeted demersal fisheries. In 2023, landings of FMP species by United Kingdom (UK) and EU vessels fishing in UK waters in the FMP area were valued at £88.45 million[3]. The FMP area supports ecologically and economically important demersal fish communities that have been under intense fishing pressure since the mid-20th century.

Accordingly, this FMP covers stocks that may be at 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.

[1] Fisheries Act 2020

[2] Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) - GOV.UK

[3] Fisheries Dependent Information - European Commission &UK sea fisheries annual statistics report 2023

The FMP identifies 10 policy goals focused on improving sustainability of FMP stocks, strengthening integrated regional management, supporting social and economic sustainability and developing evidence in aid of holistic, cooperative decision-making. An FMP will provide the tools to manage fishing activity towards more sustainable fisheries, and is a requirement of:

- the Fisheries Act 2020 ('the Act')
- the UK Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) 2022
- the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 for England[4]

Government intervention is required as fish stocks, including demersal stocks in the Celtic Sea Western Channel, are a common pool resource. This would lead to the classic economic problem of 'the tragedy of the commons', were the government not to intervene. In the free market, agents would only consider the benefits of catching and fail to weigh this against the costs catching has on the long-term health of the stocks. This could lead to over-fishing and exploitation of the stocks. Government intervention would prevent this overexploitation of fish stocks, and this FMP provides the framework through which government intervention would work. Furthermore, a thriving marine environment has positive externalities, such as improved biodiversity[5], which benefit society and would not be captured by the market mechanism. Government intervention is therefore required to ensure that the optimal social benefit is achieved.

Policy Options (including alternatives to regulation)

Policy Options (including alternatives to regulation)

Option 2 was decided as the preferred way forward, as the government has a legal obligation to produce the FMP under the JFS and the Fisheries Act 2020.

Option 0: Do Nothing - No FMP or related management measures developed.

- Lack of strengthened / new, evidence-based management would increase the likelihood of stocks being overexploited with insufficient protection for the wider marine environment and be legally non-compliant.

Option 1: Self-regulation - No formal Government FMP. Industry introduces voluntary measures.

- It is recognised that voluntary measures have a role to play in sustainable management within scope of this FMP, such as the Angling Trust and Professional Boatman's Association voluntary recreational MCRS in the Pollack Pact.
- However, the introduction of non-regulatory measures, such as voluntary measures developed and introduced by industry, are unlikely to go far enough to ensure stock are being fished sustainably and the wider marine environment is protected.
- Voluntary measures are unenforceable so there is no guarantee they would provide increased protection to stocks.
- Industry introduced measures would likely not account for the impact of recreational fishing on these stocks, which can be significant.

Option 2 (preferred option): Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal FMP.

- The Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal FMP puts forwards policies designed to synthesise existing measures, information, data and evidence, identifying where there are gaps and highlighting opportunities to fill them. They provide a clear pathway for developing an improved, evidence-based management approach (both

[4] Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 - GOV.UK

[5] State of the environment - the coastal and marine environment

regulatory and non-regulatory), in collaboration with industry and stakeholders, and facilitate progress towards establishing a sustainable fishery for the FMP stocks.

Description of Novel and Contentious Elements (if any)

FMPs are internationally recognised as a sustainable way to manage fisheries and are being implemented in the UK with 6 FMPs published to date. The broader policy of FMPs is not considered novel.

Assessment of Impacts on Business

Whilst the Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal FMP identifies measures that could be introduced post-consultation, these proposed measures will be developed further and do not currently have sufficient detail for a full assessment to ascertain these impacts, if any. When individual measures are specifically implemented, the statutory or non-statutory mechanism through which these will be implemented will have their own impacts assessed in the appropriate manner. The FMP will have no direct monetisable impacts upon publication and therefore will have no direct costs to businesses.

This FMP covers 45 species in English and Welsh waters in ICES divisions 7e, 7f, 7g and 7h. Between 2019 and 2023, an average of 26,000t of demersal species were landed by UK and EU vessels from English and Welsh waters covered by the FMP per year, valued at approximately £93m[6]. UK vessels accounted for 34.2% of landings by weight but 39.5% of landings by value as a result of the higher value of sole landings by UK fleets. The businesses most likely to be affected by any measures will be the businesses involved in the fishery.

Wider Impacts (Including Assessment of Impact on SMBs and Households)

When individual measures are specifically implemented, the statutory or non-statutory mechanism through which these will be implemented will have their own impacts assessed in the appropriate manner. Currently, there are not expected to be wider impacts of publishing the plan, until the measures are brought forward for implementation.

Assessment of Impact on Trade and Investment (Including Internal Market Assessment)

At the moment, there are not expected to be trade and investment impacts of publishing the plan, until measures are brought forward for implementation. When individual measures are specifically implemented, the statutory or non-statutory mechanism through which these will be implemented will have their own impacts assessed in the appropriate manner.

Assessment of Environmental Impacts

From 1 November 2023, The Environment Act 2021[7] requires ministers to have 'due regard' to the Environmental Principles Policy Statement (EPPS). The policies and actions included within the Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP have been developed with due regard to the relevant Environmental principles, however there is still potential for some negative environmental impacts as and when the policies are finalised and implemented. These include factors such as the spatial footprint, intensity, type of gear and fishing methods of CSWCD fisheries to alter through publishing the FMP and implementing its policies and actions.

[6] Fisheries Dependent Information - European Commission &UK sea fisheries annual statistics report 2023

[7] Environment Act 2021

It is recognised that management interventions brought in through FMPs may solve one issue, but unintended and unpredictable issues could arise because of the measures being implemented.

Monitoring would help identify any unintended consequences on the environment and indicate whether the implementation of these actions could lead to any significant environmental effects if unmanaged. Mitigating action could then be considered where any significant negative effects are identified, that are related to those issues scoped into this assessment.
Section 3.4 *Assessment of Environmental Impacts* of this document provides more detail on the positive and negative impacts of the FMP policies.

Rationale for producing a DMA (as opposed to an OA/IA)

A DMA has been produced because the FMP itself will have no direct monetised impacts and as such, falls below the £10m threshold necessary for an OA / IA. The implementation of specific individual measures, whether by statutory or non-statutory mechanisms, will have their own impact assessments completed separately. The FMP is not considered to be novel or controversial.

Will the policy be reviewed (yes/no):	**Review date if applicable:**

Review Provision Detail and Monitoring and Evaluation Plans

The fisheries policy authorities will implement appropriate monitoring against the specified indicators. The effectiveness of the FMP will be regularly assessed, and the results reported at least every three years as part of the JFS report, as required by the Act. These reports will be laid before the UK's legislatures. The report will set out the extent to which the policies contained in FMPs have been implemented and have affected stock levels in the UK

The Fisheries Act 2020 requires the Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal FMP to be reviewed at least every 6 years to assess the extent to which the policies in the plan have been implemented and how the stocks have been affected.

	Name, Role	**Date**
Internal Directorate Clearance		
Policy sign off	Georgia Ricketts, Head of Policy, Change and Strategy	06/10/2025
Senior Analyst sign off		
Central Sign Off		
Better Regulation Unit (Policy) Sign off		**28/10/2025**
Office of the Chief Economist (Central Appraisal Team) Sign off		**28/10/2025**

Supporting Evidence

1. The Policy Overview and Rationale for Government Intervention

1.1 Policy Background

The Fisheries Act 2020 places an expectation on the UK's Fisheries Policy Authorities to publish Fisheries Management Plans. The Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) 2022 sets this out in practice and lists 43 proposed FMPs.

The Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal FMP is a joint plan with the Welsh Government and sets out the road map to manage stocks in English and Welsh waters and protect the wider environment. Once published, the policies and measures in the FMP will be implemented separately through appropriate mechanisms such as statutory instruments, licensing conditions or voluntary measures. The Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal FMP has been produced to drive progress towards the sustainable fishing of various species in English and Welsh waters.

This FMP and its policies have been prepared and published to comply with requirements in the JFS and in section 6 of the Fisheries Act 2020, and to contribute to achieving the eight fisheries objectives in the Act. Additionally, the FMP is aligned with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, also known as the Strategic Environmental Assessment regulations (SEA regulations)[8]

In addition to meeting the requirements of the Fisheries Act, the FMP also supports wider commitments on protecting the marine environment, restoring biodiversity, and addressing climate change. The Environment Improvement Plan 2023 restated the commitment to deliver FMPs. Each FMP also supports commitments under the UK (United Kingdom) Marine Policy Statement (MPS), the UK Marine Strategy (UKMS), the marine wildlife bycatch mitigation initiative (BMI), UK Marine Plans and the Climate Change Act 2008.

Also, as a joint plan with the Welsh Government, the Plan has been prepared to comply with the Welsh Ministers' duty to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 (section 6(1)), and to contribute to the well-being goals and the Welsh Ministers' well-being objectives set under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (sections 3 to 5).

The preparation process for the FMP had regard for the prevailing Marine Plans (as required by section 58(3) of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009) and the Environmental Principles (as required by sections 17(5) (a-e) and 19(1) of the Environment Act 2021). The FMP overlaps with the South West Inshore and Offshore Marine Plan, the South Inshore and Offshore Marine Plan and the Welsh National Marine Plan .

This is an important and economically valuable fishery with stocks extending into European Union (EU) waters, and species caught as part of both mixed and targeted demersal fisheries. In 2023, landings of FMP species by United Kingdom (UK) and EU vessels fishing in UK waters in the FMP area were valued at £88.45 M. The FMP area supports ecologically and economically important demersal fish communities that have been under intense fishing pressure since the mid-20th century.

Accordingly, this FMP covers stocks that may be at 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 species and stocks in scope of this FMP are outlined later in this document. The FMP identifies 10 policy goals focused on improving sustainability of FMP stocks, strengthening integrated regional management, supporting social and economic sustainability and developing evidence in aid of holistic, cooperative decision-making. The

[8] The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

policies are covered in more detail in section 13 *Policy Objectives and Intended Effects* of this assessment.

1.2 Rationale for Intervention

The government has a legal obligation under the Fisheries Act 2020 and the JFS to produce FMPs which will contribute towards the sustainability of both the fishery and the wider marine environment. Therefore, the government must act to produce the Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal FMP. Government intervention is required as fish stocks, including demersal species, are a common pool resource. That is, that they are non-excludable, yet rivalrous. Rivalrous here means anyone can catch a fish but once a fish is caught and retained it cannot be caught again. They are non-excludable because it is not possible for one actor to exclude another from catching fish. These characteristics would lead to the classic economic problem of 'the tragedy of the commons', were the government not to intervene. This is because market agents would only consider the benefits of catching. They would not weigh it against the impact it will have on the stock health, leading to overfishing and exploitation of the stocks. Government intervention would prevent this depletion of stock health, and this FMP provides the framework through which government intervention would work. Furthermore, a thriving marine environment has positive externalities to society which would not be captured by the market mechanism. For example, a healthy marine environment can capture carbon emissions[9], helping reduce the impact of climate change for all individuals, which would provide social benefits far greater than the private benefit of an individual taking actions to protect the marine environment. Industry alone would not be able to provide adequate protection of the marine environment as this requires coordination and enforcement that is not possible within markets. Government intervention is therefore required to ensure that these greater social benefits are achieved.

1.3 Policy Objectives and Intended Effects

The FMP identifies 10 policy goals focused on improving sustainability of FMP stocks, strengthening integrated regional management, supporting social and economic sustainability and developing evidence in aid of holistic, cooperative decision-making. These are as follows:

Policy Goal 1: Development of multi-year recovery plans for FMP gadoid stocks. This policy aims to deliver comprehensive multi-year recovery plans to manage fishing pressures at a level suitable to enable stock recovery for pollack, cod, haddock and whiting. These may incorporate ongoing work towards implementing discard reduction schemes, increased adoption of more selective gear in fisheries that bycatch these gadoids, as well as harvest control rules (HCRs) for recovery stocks. Recovery efforts will require additional evidence gathering and international cooperation. For roundnose grenadier, saithe and blue ling, the FMP will seek to contribute to the evidence base to better understand these stocks and inform future management decisions, setting out steps to strengthen the evidence base. Evidence to support the above statement includes International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) stock assessments.

Policy Goal 2: Harvest flatfish stocks sustainably, with biomasses maintained above the level capable of producing Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). This policy aims to deliver a comprehensive plaice multi-year recovery plan, to manage fishing pressures at a level suitable for enabling stock recovery. MSY refers to the largest amount of a fish stock that can be harvested sustainably over the long term without depleting the population. The policy also aims to support long term, sustainable sole harvesting and maintaining stock levels for megrim and four-spot megrim. The landed value of flatfish has increased in the FMP area over the last decade, with a value of £24.15 M in 2013 to approximately £43 M in

[9] The ocean – the world's greatest ally against climate change | United Nations

2023. Sole is a cornerstone of the FMP fisheries, with approximately £251 M of sole being landed in the FMP area over this timeframe

Policy Goal 3: Harvest nephrops stocks sustainably and manage nephrops bycatch. The aim of this policy is to contribute to sustainable management of the nephrops fishery and sustainable exploitation of three nephrops stocks located within the FMP area. This will be achieved by the restoration of nephrops stock Functional Unit (FU) 22 and maintaining sustainable management for a further two nephrops stocks. In addition, nephrops are caught as part of a mixed fishery with demersal fish and result in bycatch FMP recovery stocks. Therefore, the FMP has identified actions to seek evidence and further understand the bycatch impacts on other FMP recovery stocks and consider appropriate mitigative measures.

Policy Goal 4: Harvest anglerfish (lophiforms) stocks sustainably, with biomasses maintained above the level capable of producing MSY. This policy aims to contribute to maintaining sustainable fishing for anglerfishes, and to sustainably manage bycatch of FMP recovery stocks caught in anglerfish fisheries. Anglerfish are of high commercial importance in the UK. From 2013 to 2023, a total of 71,615 t of anglerfish valued at £233.14 m were landed by UK and EU vessels within the FMP area. As anglerfish are caught in mixed fisheries alongside other FMP species (it should be noted that there is a targeted anglerfish tangle-net fishery), the FMP will consider the impacts of this fishery on recovery stocks bycatches.

Policy Goal 5: Manage elasmobranch fisheries sustainably and manage bycatch. The aim of this policy is to contribute to the sustainable management of fisheries exploiting elasmobranchs. The policy aim is to maintain stocks at sustainable levels, to implement management to increase stocks to sustainable levels, where needed, and to increase evidence to understand the current state of data-deficient stocks.

Policy Goal 6: Build an evidence base for red seabream. This policy aims to restore stock levels through continued sustainable management for red seabream. The FMP will seek to contribute to the evidence base to better understand these stocks and inform future management decisions, setting out steps to strengthen the evidence base. Landings and stock size of red seabream showed a severe decline in the 1970s and 1980s and the stock is currently considered seriously depleted. Catches have stabilised at historical low levels since then but show further decrease since 2014. Through the SCF, the UK is committed to "continue to monitor the changes in fishing patterns, the effectiveness of implemented measures, and the progress on stock recovery, whilst also following up on the overarching commitment for the recovery and long-term conservation of deep-sea stocks."

Policy Goal 7: Explore the potential to reform existing management and approaches to join up and better align management of FMP stocks. This policy aims to reform the current management structure for FMP stocks by integrating future management strategies into a cohesive framework. Central to this approach is the enhancement of mixed fisheries management, improved data collection, and stronger evidence-based decision-making. These efforts will support the development of more selective fishing practices, leading to healthier fish populations and ecosystems within the FMP area. Key focus areas include the exploration of mixed-fisheries approaches and ecosystem-based fisheries management, the evaluation of the Technical Conservation measures, implementation of REM, alignment with domestic policies such as catch accounting and the discards reduction scheme, as well as support the Quota Application Mechanism (QAM). The use of REM is essential in developing an understanding of discarding and other essential fisheries data (i.e. catch composition, length frequency, population structure).

Policy Goal 8: Build towards an ecosystem-based management of fisheries. This Policy Goal has three aims, which will address the SNCB advice. These are: reduce demersal fishing impact to Marine Protected Area (MPA) features and reduce demersal

fishing impact to the wider marine environment; improve the evidence base to strengthen confidence in future assessments; and progress toward ecosystem-based management of fisheries in the future.

Policy Goal 9: Support sector adaptation and resilience. The aim of this policy goal is to support commercial and recreational fisheries to develop sustainably, allowing coastal communities to benefit from opportunities created by the Act. Furthermore, the policy goal seeks to facilitate partnership working in implementation of the FMP in the future.

Policy Goal 10: Reduce the contribution of fishing to climate change and supporting the fishing industry to adapt to the impacts of climate change. The aim of this policy goal is to build resilience within the ecosystem and fishery in response to climate driven pressures, as well as reduce the fisheries' overall contribution to climate change, supporting the climate change objective of the Act. Furthermore, it aims to contribute to the UKs wider legal commitment towards ensuring that the net UK carbon account for the year 2050 is at least 100% lower than the 1990 baseline, as set out in the Climate Change Act 2008[10]. This will be explored through actions to support the fishery in responding to climate driven challenges, including operational implications such as impacts on infrastructure due to weather, as well as through actions aimed at enhancing ecosystem health through evidence gathering and identifying appropriate future management needs.

Policy Options Considered, Including Alternatives to Regulation

The Fisheries Act 2020 provides the framework to manage our fisheries as an independent coastal state outside of the EU Common Fisheries Policy. The Act requires the UK fisheries policy authorities (Defra, and the devolved governments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) to prepare and publish fisheries management plans (FMPs) to help deliver our ambition for sustainable fisheries. The plans were decided during the Joint Fisheries Statement- a collaboration between the UK fisheries authorities.

FMPs are an internationally recognised mechanism to manage fisheries sustainably. Many UK stocks are data poor and lack management. FMPs provide a framework to fill data gaps and introduce management measures to protect stocks now and into the future. Therefore, Option 2, publishing the FMP, was selected as the preferred way forward.

Option 0: Do Nothing - No FMP or related management measures developed.

- Lack of strengthened / new, evidence-based management would increase the likelihood of stocks being overexploited with insufficient protection for the wider marine environment and be legally non-compliant.

Option 1: Self-regulation - No formal Government FMP / Industry introduces voluntary measures.

- It is recognised that voluntary measures have a role to play in sustainable management within scope of this FMP, such as the Angling Trust and Professional Boatman's Association voluntary recreational MCRS in the Pollack Pact.
- However, the introduction of non-regulatory measures, such as voluntary measures developed and introduced by industry, are unlikely to go far enough to ensure stock are being fished sustainably and the wider marine environment is protected.
- Voluntary measures are unenforceable so there is no guarantee they would provide increased protection to stocks.
- Industry introduced measures would likely not account for the impact of recreational fishing on these stocks, which can be significant.

[10] Climate Change Act 2008

Option 2 (preferred option): Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal FMP.

- The Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal FMP puts forwards policies designed to synthesise existing measures, information, data and evidence, identifying where there are gaps and highlighting opportunities to fill them. They provide a clear pathway for developing an improved, evidence-based management approach (both regulatory and non-regulatory), in collaboration with industry and stakeholders, and facilitate progress towards establishing a sustainable fishery for the FMP stocks

1 Expected Level of Business Impact

2.1 Summary of Preferred Option

As the FMP itself will not implement any measures upon its introduction, there will be no direct impacts on businesses through its adoption. Whilst the Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal 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 completed. As detailed costs and benefits cannot be provided in this DMA, background figures to understand the potential scale of impact and scope have been provided below. 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.

From 2019 to 2023 UK vessels landed on average 8,950t of FMP species annually, valued at £36.71m. EU vessels landed on average 17,202t of FMP species over the same time period, valued at approximately £56.26m annually[11]. There is an overall declining trend of EU landed weight between 2013 to 2023, however, landings value did not decline in proportion due to higher pound per tonne for demersal species. UK vessel landed weight remained stable and landed value increased over the same time period, again resulting from the higher pound per tonne for demersal species.

In 2023, the flatfish within the scope of the FMP had the highest commercial value at £43m, accounting for 49% of total landings value from the FMP area. This figure is primarily driven by the high value sole stocks which UK vessels caught proportionally more of. Demersal and beam trawls accounted for 90.9% of landings of FMP species in the FMP area and 90% of landings value. Demersal trawls exhibited a large drop in landings value from £56.37m to £36.27m between 2013 to 2023 whilst beam trawls saw increased landings value from £25.65m to £43.46m over the same time period. This aligns with the increased landings of sole over this period.

2.2 Benefits

There are potential benefits to the introduction of an FMP for Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal species. For example, evidence gathering to better understand their status and location could lead to a stock assessment that allows for the sustainable management of these fisheries. Improved knowledge of the impacts of fishing on pelagic populations would also provide insight into the long-term viability of the live fishery and ensure that wider ecosystems are not being negatively impacted.

Demersal fish are a recreationally important species, in particular pollock, and a well-managed stock could also benefit coastal communities through increased levels of angling, drawing individuals to areas where the stock can be caught.

[11] Fisheries Dependent Information - European Commission &UK sea fisheries annual statistics report 2023

2.3 Indirect Costs and Benefits

The majority of the policies within the FMP will be focused on what occurs within the fishery and therefore are likely to only have impacts on those working directly within the fishery. That said, some of the proposals will include measures designed to support the sustainability of the wider environment, such as coastal communities and species, so some indirect benefits may be observed.

No sensitivity analysis has been undertaken in this DMA, as there are currently no quantifiable impacts of producing the FMP at this stage.

2.4 Risks and Unintended Consequences

There are no direct risks stemming from the introduction of the Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal FMP, however, the implementation of future measures intended to achieve the FMP's goals may potentially raise some issues.

Any fisheries management intervention will result in a range of social, economic and biological impacts. When implementing a new management measure, there is a statutory requirement to estimate the anticipated wider national benefits (for example, improved stock status of target species), as well as the likely impacts on stakeholders, and how negative impacts can be mitigated. Broader impacts on local communities, and economic, social and human rights impacts, will be analysed in associated impact assessments, which will be required as part of the development of measures.

3 Wider impacts

There are expected to minimal impact on the wider society as the impacts are likely to be specific to those involved with the fishery. However, indirect benefits are assumed from the measures which support wider environmental sustainability such as for coastal communities and species.

3.1 Assessment of Impact on Small and Micro Businesses

The primary focus of the legislation is on the fishing industry, which is predominantly composed of small and micro businesses defined by the Better Regulation Framework as being 10-49 employees or 0-9 employees respectively[12]. Within the catching industry in 2024, 94% of employers were micro-businesses, 6% were small, and there were no medium or large employers, all of which gives an indication of the scope of businesses liable to be impacted by the introduction of the FMP[13]. As all businesses in scope sit within the small or micro business bracket, it would mean the policy would be ineffective if they are exempt from the FMP.

3.2 Impacts on Households

The Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal FMP is not expected to have a direct impact on households. If implemented, certain measures proposed in the FMP could have an impact on households. Any potential impacts will be assessed in future De Minimis Assessments. The direction and scale of the impacts will depend on the specific measures adopted and their scope.

The group most likely to be impacted by any changes to fishing regulations are those that derive all, or part, of their income from capture fisheries. Households that work in industries

[12] Better regulation framework guidance 2023
[13] UK business: activity, size and location - Office for National Statistics

that are downstream to the fishery, such as aquaculture business, or other fisheries could also be partly affected, though likely to a lesser extent than those directly involved in the fishery. Also, if the measures are sufficient in scale to change the price of fish, households that consume fish could be affected, though the risk of this is believed to be low.

3.3 Assessment of Impact on Trade and Investment (Including Internal Market Assessment)

The Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal FMP will not have a significant impact on trade and investment on publication. Though if measures proposed in the FMP are implemented later, if the scale of impact on trade and investment is higher enough a Trade and investment assessment will be conducted.

3.4 Assessment of Environmental Impacts

From 1 November 2023, The Environment Act 2021 requires ministers to have 'due regard' to the Environmental Principles Policy Statement (EPPS). The policies and actions included within the Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP have been developed with due regard to the relevant Environmental principles, however there is still potential for some negative environmental impacts as and when the policies are finalised and implemented. The Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP Strategic Environmental Report outlines the policy impacts in more detail, but a brief overview is provided below.

Policy Goal 1: **Development of multi-year recovery plans for FMP gadoid stocks.**

Positive Effects: This policy aims to restore the spawning stock biomass of vulnerable gadoid species - pollack, haddock, cod, and whiting - to sustainable levels.

Negative Effects: While the ambition to recover depleted fish stocks is inherently positive, potential negative effects to pursuing this policy could result from the lost investment of resources should these stocks not be recoverable owing to wider environmental factors. This could come at the expense of resources invested into sustainably fishing and managing effort on other species or at the cost of management, investment and funding which contributes to improving the wider marine environment.

Policy Goal 2: Harvest flatfish stocks sustainably, with biomasses maintained above the level capable of producing MSY.

Positive Effects: Specific actions are aimed at the restoration of plaice to biomass levels capable of producing MSY and the long-term management of sole stocks to bring and/or maintain fishing effort below Fmsy.

Negative Effects: Plaice are often caught as part of a mixed fishery with sole and anglerfishes, with particularly high discard rates, therefore any measures targeting the recovery of plaice can pose a choke risk on healthy sole/anglerfish stocks. The added choke risk may exacerbate discards of plaice, result in non-compliance with recovery measures, and displace pressure on to other areas or stocks. Further research into current plaice fishery interactions may help inform strategies to reduce discards and bycatch – mitigating some potential negative impacts.

Policy Goal 3: Harvest nephrops stocks sustainably and manage nephrops bycatch.

Positive Effects: A key focus of this policy is to contribute to the sustainable management of nephrops within the FMP area.

Negative Effects: From an environmental standpoint, the FU approach to nephrops management is positive. Although nephrops stocks are similar in their characteristics, vessels that target them vary in size, gear, power, and capacity. Many FUs are exploited by

both local fleets, which are likely to be more restricted in which fisheries they can access, and transient / nomadic vessels able to move between different FUs.

Policy Goal 4: Harvest anglerfish (lophiforms) stocks sustainably, with biomasses maintained above the level capable of producing MSY.

The actions for this policy goal are to promote fishing opportunities for anglerfish, in line with best available scientific advice to maintain sustainable stock levels. Currently, commercial landings of anglerfish are recorded under a joint species landing code (anglerfishes nei) and managed as a combined species TAC encompassing both monkfish and anglerfish. By improving species-specific recording and considering the separation of the monkfish and anglerfish group TAC, the overexploitation of either species can be hindered and any stock trends closely monitored.

Policy Goal 5: Manage elasmobranch fisheries at sustainably and manage bycatch.

Positive Effects: The policy goal supports the proposals within the separate Southern North Sea and Channel Skates and Rays Fisheries Management Plan. This includes gathering evidence and actions aimed at the restoration of plaice to biomass levels capable of producing MSY and the long-term management.

Negative Effects: Any fisheries management intervention will result in a range of social, economic and biological impacts. When implementing a new management measure, there is a statutory requirement to estimate the anticipated wider national benefits (for example, improved stock status of target species), as well as the likely impacts on stakeholders and how negative impacts can be mitigated. Broader impacts on local communities, and economic, social and human rights impacts, will be analysed in associated impact assessments, which will be required as part of the development of measures.

Policy Goal 6: build an evidence base for red seabream.

Positive Effects: This policy goal is primarily around building the evidence base to progress our understanding of red seabream stocks in the FMP area. Landings and stock size of red seabream showed a severe decline in the 1970s and 1980s and the stock is currently considered seriously depleted. Catches have stabilised at historical low levels since then but show further decrease since 2014.

Negative Effects: No negative impacts have been identified within this policy. In the absence of comprehensive stock understanding, the precautionary approach will be followed.

Policy Goal 7: Explore the potential to reform existing management and approaches to join up and better align management of FMP stocks.

Positive Effects: The ambition of this goal is to put in place the steps to take a more holistic approach to fisheries management for the next iteration. By advancing mixed and multi-species management, the plan promotes a more holistic understanding of ecosystem dynamics, rather than the previous single-species approach. This approach reduces the risk of overexploitation of vulnerable species and supports the maintenance of balanced marine ecosystems. By maintaining healthy prey populations, this also supports the foraging needs of marine predators such as cetaceans, seals, and seabirds, which rely on abundant and accessible prey for survival and reproduction.

Negative Effects: Choke risks from mixed and multi-species management, particularly when aligning with MSY and multispecies reference points, may inadvertently increase the risk of “choke” species - stocks with low quotas that limit the ability to fish for other, more abundant species caught in the same operations. This could lead to early fishery closures or increased discarding (even under REM), potentially undermining both conservation goals and stock recovery efforts.

Policy Goal 8: Build towards an ecosystem-based management of fisheries.

Positive Effects: The aim of this policy is to minimise the impact of Celtic Sea demersal fisheries on the marine ecosystem by taking appropriate measures to: 1) reduce benthic impact and 2) reduce incidents of bycatch of sensitive marine species; 3) maintain prey availability for across food webs which support the needs of cetaceans, seals and seabirds, and 4) to build toward ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries management.

Negative Effects: If mitigation tools like acoustic deterrents or gear modifications are not properly tested across different ecological contexts, they could have unintended effects, such as displacing sensitive species into other areas or altering predator-prey dynamics.

Efforts to implement ecosystem-based approach and integrate broader ecological evidence into stock assessments could also introduce complexity and uncertainty into decision-making.

Policy Goal 9: Supporting sector adaptation, resilience and engagement.

Positive Effects: The actions proposed under this policy goal can contribute to more environmentally sustainable fisheries by integrating social and economic aspects into ecological decision-making. By identifying vulnerabilities across different fleet segments and assessing their reliance on Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal fisheries, measures can be tailored to reduce environmental pressure while also aiming to avoid disproportionately impacting specific groups.

Negative Effects: Despite these benefits, there are potential negative environmental risks if the social and economic focus is not carefully balanced with ecological priorities. For example, efforts to optimise direct and indirect benefits from fisheries could lead to increased fishing pressure if not aligned with stock health and ecosystem limits – such as the MSY approach, where possible, or precautionary approach. Without strong environmental principles, attempts to maximise economic returns will compromise recovery efforts for vulnerable species or habitats.

Policy Goal 10: Reduce the contribution of fishing to climate change and supporting the fishing industry to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Positive Effects: The proposed actions aim to 1) quantify the contribution of FMP fisheries to climate change, 2) reduce the climate footprint of demersal fisheries in the Celtic Sea and Western Channel and 3) understand the impact of climate change on Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal stocks.

Negative Effects: There are potential unintended environmental consequences if these actions are not carefully managed. Efforts to adapt fisheries to climate change, such as shifting focus to species expected to thrive under warming conditions, could inadvertently increase pressure on emerging stocks before their ecological roles are fully understood in their newer geographic distribution.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

Delivery of the actions for this FMP will be monitored by Defra with possible assistance from Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) in the collection of data.

There is insufficient evidence to determine Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) or a proxy for MSY for all 45 species included within this FMP. This FMP sets out the proposed steps to build the evidence base for these data limited stocks to support progress towards defining and measuring stock status and reporting on stock sustainability. An increase in the

available evidence to define and measure stock status will be an indicator of the effectiveness of this plan for these stocks.

Other Actions and indicators to measure the effectiveness of the policies for restoring, or maintaining these stocks at sustainable levels are:

- An increase in the available evidence to define and measure stock status for stocks which lack sufficient evidence to determine MSY will be an indicator of the effectiveness of this plan. This applies to the following stocks: roundnose grenadier, saithe, four-spot megrim, nephrops 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.
- An increase in wider ecological, social, and economic evidence relating to these fisheries that can be used to inform management of these stocks, including how climate change may affect the stocks and related fishing opportunities will be an indicator of the effectiveness of this plan.
- An increase in evidence on the extent of the wider impacts of the fisheries on the environment, as well as an increase in any measures in place to reduce any impacts identified if shown to be needed, will be an indicator of the effectiveness of this plan.
- An increase in understanding of the economic, cultural and social benefits of these fisheries, will be an indicator of the effectiveness of this plan.
- The completion and sharing of the evaluation of the application of a natural capital approach with stakeholders will be an indicator of the effectiveness of this plan
- An increase in evidence on the risks and opportunities for FMP stocks to inform measures to reduce negative impacts on the stocks and/or to support opportunities for the stocks, will demonstrate effectiveness against this plan.

As set out in the Act, this FMP must be reviewed when appropriate, and at least every 6 years. This formal review will assess how the FMP has performed in terms of meeting the objectives of the Act. The findings of these reviews will inform the development of subsequent versions of the FMP. Reviews could be carried out sooner if relevant evidence international obligations or wider events require a change in the FMP policies.

In addition, the report prepared and published every 3 years in relation to the JFS under section 11 of the Act will also report on the extent to which the policies contained in this FMP have been implemented and have affected the stock levels for the relevant FMP stocks.

The overall indicator that will determine the effectiveness of this FMP is maintaining fishing pressure within sustainable levels. The monitoring and evaluation framework for the FMP will continue to be developed and supported by the independent programme evaluation of the FMP programme, which will produce a framework for evaluation of individual FMPs.

Annex

Table 1:Value of Landings (£m) of Celtic Sea Western Channel demersal species by UK + Crown Dependency and EU vessels in the area covered by the FMP[14].

Year landed	EU27	UK+CD	Total
2013	£63.2	£26.8	£89.9
2014	£54.7	£24.1	£78.8
2015	£50.8	£22.6	£73.4
2016	£64.8	£30.6	£95.5
2017	£62.5	£30.7	£93.3
2018	£54.9	£30.6	£85.5
2019	£62.1	£34.6	£96.7
2020	£51.6	£30.0	£81.6
2021	£55.9	£37.2	£93.1
2022	£62.9	£42.1	£105.1
2023	£48.8	£39.7	£88.5

[14] Fisheries Dependent Information - European Commission &UK sea fisheries annual statistics report 2023