Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Proposed Fisheries Management Plan for Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal species

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Contents

Abbreviations

BMI – bycatch mitigation initiative

Blim - limit reference point for spawning stock biomass

BMP – Bycatch Monitoring Programme

BPA - precautionary reference point for spawning stock biomass

Btrigger - value of spawning stock biomass that triggers a specific management action

Cefas – Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science

CSPZ – Celtic Sea protection zone

Defra – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

DG – devolved government

eNGO – environmental non-governmental organisation

EU – European Union

FMP – fisheries management plan

FU – functional unit. Nephrops are assessed across Europe as individual stocks in functional units.

GES – good environmental status

HCR – harvest control rule

HPMAs – highly protected marine areas

ICES – International Council for the Exploration of the Sea

IFCA – inshore fisheries and conservation authority

INNS – invasive non-native species

Itrigger – Index Trigger Value, a proxy value for Btrigger from more data limited stock assessments

JFS – Joint Fisheries Statement

JNCC – Joint Nature Conservation Committee

MAPs – multi annual plans

MarESA – marine evidence-based sensitivity assessment

MCRS – minimum conservation reference size

MCZ – marine conservation zones

MMO – Marine Management Organisation

MPA – marine protected area

MPS – Marine Policy Statement

MSY – maximum sustainable yield

nm – nautical miles

NRW – Natural Resources Wales

PO – producer organisation

QAM – quota application mechanism

REM – remote electronic monitoring

RFMOs – regional fisheries management organisations

SAC – special areas of conservation

SCF – Specialised Committee on Fisheries

SEA – strategic environmental assessments

SNCB – statutory nature conservation bodies

SPA – special protection areas

SRZ – sole recovery zone

SSB – spawning stock biomass

t^{-1} - pounds per tonne

TAC – total allowable catch

TCA – Trade and Cooperation Agreement

the Act – the Fisheries Act 2020

UK - United Kingdom

UKMS – UK Marine Strategy

VMS - vessel monitoring system (i-VMS refers to inshore)

Executive summary

The fisheries management lan (FMP) for the Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal species is one of 43 FMPs set out in the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS). In this document we'll refer to it as 'this FMP' or 'the FMP'.

This FMP has been prepared for the purposes of the Fisheries Act 2020 (referred to in this document as 'the Act') in accordance with:

- the requirements in the JFS
- section 6 of the Act
- the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the SEA regulations)

The Act requires the relevant authority or authorities to prepare and publish FMPs in accordance with the list and timetable included in the JFS. The relevant authorities for this FMP are the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Welsh Government.

What is an FMP?

An FMP is an evidence-based action plan that charts a course to sustainable fisheries. They are long-term plans that must be reviewed and, if necessary, revised at least every 6 years. 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. FMPs will be reviewed and updated to ensure they respond to new evidence and practical experience to remain effective.

Why an FMP for Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal species?

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. 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 or economically important, or have ecological significance, or are a combination of these. 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 was developed by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) on behalf of Defra and the Welsh Government.

Stakeholder engagement

This FMP was developed in collaboration with fisheries stakeholders, including:

- scientific researchers
- inshore fisheries and conservation authorities (IFCAs)
- commercial and recreational fishers

In preparing this FMP, MMO also engaged with:

- coastal communities
- supply-chain businesses
- environmental non-governmental (eNGOs) organisations
- government agencies

Further detail on engagement is provided in the supporting FMP engagement report.

FMP vision

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). The policy goals set out in this FMP suggest how this could be achieved, by:

- using an evidence-based approach to underpin decision-making, which seeks to fill evidence gaps, and revise and review management in light of new evidence
- understanding the impact of FMP fisheries on the wider ecosystem and marine environment
- ensuring the long-term social and economic viability of fisheries
- adapting sustainable fisheries management in light of climate change

Policy goals

The FMP uses the best available scientific evidence to assess the status of FMP stocks, identifies existing management approaches and sets out policies and actions to manage FMP fisheries now and in the future.

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 policy goals are as follows.

1. Development of multi-year recovery plan 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 (Lophius spp.) 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. Towards an ecosystem-based management of fisheries.
9. Support sector adaptation and resilience.
10. Reduce the contribution of fishing to climate change and supporting the fishing industry to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP

The Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP is a joint plan between Defra and the Welsh Government. It 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.

This FMP has been prepared and published to comply with requirements in the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) and in section 6 of the Fisheries Act 2020, and to contribute to achieving the 8 fisheries objectives in the Act.

In addition to meeting the requirements of the Act, the FMP also supports wider commitments:

- on protecting the marine environment, restoring biodiversity, and addressing climate change
- to meet the requirements of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, also known as the Strategic Environmental Assessment regulations (SEA regulations)

The Environment Improvement Plan 2025 restated the commitment to deliver FMPs.

Each FMP also supports commitments under:

- the UK Marine Policy Statement (MPS)
- the UK Marine Strategy (UKMS)
- the marine wildlife bycatch mitigation initiative (BMI)
- UK Marine Plans
- the Climate Change Act 2008

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
- Welsh National Marine Plan

The objectives of the FMP align with the MPS objectives in terms of the shared ambitions to deliver:

- long-term stock sustainability and a diverse and healthy marine environment
- economic prosperity to coastal communities and across the seafood supply chain
- opportunities for stakeholders to engage in and collaborate on management decisions
- decision-making underpinned by scientific and socio-economic evidence, with decisions monitored to ensure they are effective

The FMP has been prepared and published to comply with the Welsh Ministers' duty to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems under 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).

Implementing any of the FMP policies and exercising the UK's regulatory autonomy, this FMP relates to stocks which are shared with the EU. The fisheries authorities will consider the obligations of the UK/European Union (EU) Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA). This includes having regard to the principle of introducing proportionate and non-discriminatory measures and basing fisheries management measures on the best available scientific evidence. Whilst retaining regulatory autonomy, the fisheries authority shall consider the rights and interests of the EU, including economic costs, in the design of management measures.

Description of the fisheries and stocks

A species is a group of organisms that can interbreed to produce fertile offspring. A fish stock is a population of fish of the same species that lives in a specific geographic area. A fishery can refer to the part of a stock which is targeted for capture in a particular geographic area or by a particular fishing method.

FMP species and stock overview

The species in the FMP, which are demersal and thus live on or near to the seafloor, comprise stocks that meet one or more of the following criteria in the FMP area:

- the stock may be at risk of significant over-exploitation without management action, including the requirement of recovery plans, or where current management measures are outdated or not meeting the management goal
- the stock and its associated fisheries are socially or economically important
- the stock has ecological significance, including factors such as its fisheries' impact on the ecosystem and interactions with non-target species including protected species.

Social and economic importance refers to factors such as:

- employment levels
- local income
- recreational fishing interest
- contribution to coastal communities
- legal, governance and regulatory structures

When applied, the criteria identified a minimum of 40 species and 2 deep water shark genus groups. Given the complexity and number of species and stocks included in the scope of the FMP, the FMP has aggregated species by order. The exception to this is elasmobranchs, which have been organised into 'skates and rays', encapsulating rajiformes, and 'deep water sharks', encapsulating squaliformes, carcharhiniformes and hexanchiformes). This helps with structuring the approach with targeted species or stock-specific management included within each order.

ICES categorises fish stocks into 6 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. Category 1 involves full analytical assessments, while categories become progressively more data-limited, with category 6 comprising stocks with negligible or only bycatch landings. More detail regarding the ICES stock assessment terminology referenced below can be found in Seafish's Guide to fish stock assessment and ICES reference points.

In total, there are 37 stocks with ICES advice in the scope of this FMP (note not all species have advice provided by ICES, and some species will have multiple defined stocks). Of the 37 stocks, 20 have sufficient available scientific evidence to enable an assessment of the stock's MSY; 17 do not.

Most of the remaining named species in this FMP do not have sufficient evidence to enable an assessment of MSY or any ICES or other advice for the FMP area, either because they are not thought to occupy the FMP area due to water depth, are only caught as bycatch in numbers small enough considered not to be a risk to the stock, or they are prohibited species. Policy goal 5 has more detail on the species of elasmobranchs this FMP proposes to consider.

Gadoids

Pollack (Pollachius pollachius)

- ICES stock code: pol.27.67. Subareas 6–7 (Celtic Seas and the English Channel).
  - based on current ICES advice: data category 1, MSY advice in place, spawning-stock size is below $B_{trigger}$ and between B_{PA} and $B_{lim.}$ Updated ICES advice due in 2026.

Cod (Gadus morhua)

- ICES stock code: cod.27.7e-k. Divisions 7e–k (western English Channel and southern Celtic Seas).
  - based on current ICES advice: data category 1, MSY advice in place, spawning-stock size is below $B_{trigger}$, B_{PA} and $B_{lim.}$ Updated ICES advice due in 2026.

Whiting (Merlangius merlangus)

- ICES stock code: whg.27.7b-ce-k. Divisions 7b–c and 7e–k (southern Celtic Seas and western English Channel).
  - based on current ICES advice: data category 1, MSY advice in place, spawning-stock size is below $B_{trigger}$, B_{PA} and B_{lim}. Updated ICES advice due in 2026.

Haddock (Melanogrammus aeglefinus)

- ICES stock code: had.27.7b-k. Divisions 7b–k (southern Celtic Seas and English Channel).
  - based on current ICES advice: data category 1, MSY advice in place, spawning-stock size is below $B_{trigger}$ but above B_{lim} and B_{PA}. Updated ICES advice due in 2026.

Saithe (Pollachius virens)

- ICES stock code: pok.27.7-10. Subareas 7–10 (Southern Celtic Sea and the English Channel, Bay of Biscay, Atlantic Iberian waters, Azores grounds).
  - based on current ICES advice: data category 5, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2028.

Roundnose grenadier (Coryphaenoides rupestris)

- ICES stock code: rng.27.5b6712b. Subareas 6 and 7 and divisions 5.b and 12.b (Celtic Seas and the English Channel, Faroes grounds, and western Hatton Bank).

    - based on current ICES advice: data category 5.2, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2026.

Blue ling (Molva dypterygia)

- ICES stock code: bli.27.5b6712. Subareas 6–7 and 12 and in Division 5.b (Celtic Seas, Faroes grounds, and western Hatton Bank).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 1, MSY advice in place, spawning-stock size is above B_{lim} & $B_{trigger}$. Updated ICES advice due 2026.

Flatfish

Sole (Solea solea)

- ICES stock code: sol.27.7e. Division 7e (western English Channel).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 1, MSY advice in place, spawning-stock size is above B_{lim}, $B_{trigger}$ and B_{PA}. Updated ICES advice due 2026.
- ICES stock code: sol.27.7fg. Divisions 7f and 7g (Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 1, MSY advice in place, spawning-stock size is above B_{lim}, $B_{trigger}$ and B_{PA}. Updated ICES advice due 2026.
- ICES stock code: sol.27.7h-k. Divisions 7h–k (Celtic Sea South, southwest of Ireland).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 5, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2026.

Plaice (Pleuronectes platessa)

- ICES stock code: ple.27.7e. Division 7e (western English Channel).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 3, MSY proxy advice in place, stock-size index is below $I_{trigger}$. Updated ICES advice due 2027.
- ICES stock code: ple.27.7fg. Divisions 7f and 7g (Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 3, MSY proxy advice in place, stock-size index is below $I_{trigger}$. Updated ICES advice due 2026.
- ICES stock code: ple.27.7h-k. Divisions 7h–k (Celtic Sea South, southwest of Ireland).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 3, MSY proxy advice in place, stock-size index is above $I_{trigger}$. Updated ICES advice due 2026.

Megrim (Lepidorhombus whiffiagonis)

- ICES stock code: meg.27.7b-k8abd. Divisions 7b–k, 8a–b, and 8d (west and southwest of Ireland, Bay of Biscay).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 1, MSY advice in place, spawning-stock size is above B_{lim}, $B_{trigger}$ and B_{PA}. Updated ICES advice due 2025.

Four-spot megrim (Lepidorhombus boscii)

- ICES stock code: ldb.27.7b-k8abd. Divisions 7.b–k, 8.a–b, and 8.d (west and southwest of Ireland, Bay of Biscay).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 5, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2028.

Anglerfish

White anglerfish (Lophius piscatorius) (hereafter referred to as 'anglerfish')

- ICES stock code: mon.27.78abd. Subarea 7 and in divisions 8a–b and 8d (southern Celtic Seas, Bay of Biscay).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 1, MSY advice in place, spawning-stock size is above B_{lim}, $B_{trigger}$ and B_{PA}. Updated ICES advice due 2026.

Black-bellied anglerfish (Lophius budegassa) (hereafter referred to as 'monkfish')

- ICES stock code: ank.27.78abd. Subarea 7 and divisions 8a–b and 8d (Celtic Seas, Bay of Biscay).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 1, MSY advice in place, spawning-stock size is above B_{lim}, $B_{trigger}$ and B_{PA}. Updated ICES advice due 2026.

Nephrops

Nephrops (Nephrops norvegicus)

- ICES stock code: nep.27.7outFU. Subarea 7, outside the functional units (southern Celtic Seas, southwest of Ireland).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 5, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2026.
- ICES stock code: nep.fu.22. Divisions 7f and 7g, Functional Unit 22 (Celtic Sea, Bristol Channel).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 1, MSY advice in place, stock size is below $B_{trigger}$. Updated ICES advice due 2025.
- ICES stock code: nep.fu.2021. Divisions 7g and 7h, functional units 20 and 21 (Celtic Sea).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 1, MSY advice in place, stock size is above $B_{trigger}$. Updated ICES advice due 2025.

Skates and rays

Blonde ray (Raja brachyura)

- ICES stock: rjh.27.7afg. Divisions 7a and 7f–g (Irish Sea, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 5, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2028.
- ICES stock code: rjh.27.7e. Division 7e (western English Channel).

    - based on current ICES advice: data category 5, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2028.

Thornback ray (Raja clavata)

- ICES stock code: rjc.27.7afg. Divisions 7a and 7f–g (Irish Sea, Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 3, MSY proxy advice in place, stock-size indicator is above $I_{trigger}$. Updated ICES advice due 2026.
- ICES stock code: rjc.27.7e. Division 7e (western English Channel).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 5, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2028.

Cuckoo ray (Leucoraja naevus)

- ICES stock code: rjn.27.678abd. Subareas 6 and 7, and in divisions 8.a–b and 8.d (West of Scotland, southern Celtic Seas, and western English Channel, Bay of Biscay).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 2, MSY advice in place, biomass is above B_{lim} & $B_{trigger}$. Updated ICES advice due 2026.

Spotted ray (Raja montagui)

- ICES stock code: rjm.27.7ae-h. Divisions 7a and 7e–h (southern Celtic Seas and western English Channel).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 3, MSY proxy advice in place, stock-size is above $I_{trigger}$. Updated ICES advice due 2026.

Small eyed ray (Raja microocellata)

- ICES stock code: rje.27.7de. Divisions 7d and 7e (English Channel).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 5, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2028.
- ICES stock code: rje.27.7fg. Divisions 7f and 7g (Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea North).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 3, MSY proxy advice in place, stock-size indicator is above $I_{trigger}$. Updated ICES advice due 2026.

Sandy ray (Leucoraja circularis)

- ICES stock code: rji.27.67. Subareas 6–7 (West of Scotland, southern Celtic Seas, English Channel).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 5, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2028.

Undulate ray (Raja undulata)

- ICES stock code: rju.27.7de. Divisions 7d and 7e (English Channel).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 2, MSY advice in place, biomass is above B_{lim} & $B_{trigger}$. Updated ICES advice due 2026.

Shagreen ray (Leucoraja fullonica)

- ICES stock code: rjf.27.67. Subareas 6–7 (West of Scotland, southern Celtic Seas, English Channel).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 5, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2028.

Common skate complex (blue skate (Dipturus batis) **and flapper skate** (Dipturus intermedius)

- ICES stock: rjb.27.67a-ce-k. Subarea 6 and divisions 7a–c and 7e–k (Celtic Seas and western English Channel).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 6, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2028.

White skate (Rostoraja alba)

- ICES stock code: rja.27.nea. Subareas 1-10, 12 and 14 (the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 6, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2027.

Given that the skates and rays in the FMP area are not fully allocated to ICES assessment units (due to spatial distribution and lack of data), the FMP will also consider blonde ray, thornback ray and small-eyed ray in Division 7h, and undulate ray in Divisions 7f-h. In addition to the assessed species and stocks above, long-nosed skate (Dipturus oxyrinchus) is also deemed of relevance to this FMP.

Skate and ray species reported in landings data but that have not been observed in scientific surveys in the area are not included in the FMP. This is because landings reports are likely to be due to misidentification. For the purposes of the FMP, only members of the order Rajiformes are considered, as they are the main commercial species and included in TAC management. Thus, this iteration of the FMP does not include stingrays (order Myliobatiformes) or electric rays (Torpediniformes).

Red seabream

Red seabream (Pagellus bogaraveo) also known as blackspot or western seabream.

- ICES stock code: sbr.27.6-8. Subareas 6–8 (Celtic Seas and the English Channel, Bay of Biscay).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 6.3, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2026.

Deep water sharks

Kitefin shark (Dalatias licha)

- ICES stock code: sck.27.nea. Subareas 1-10, 12 and 14 (the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters).

    - based on current ICES advice: data category 6, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2027.

Leafscale gulper shark (Centrophorus squamosus)

- ICES stock code: guq.27.nea. Subareas 1–10, 12, and 14 (the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 6, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2027.

Portuguese dogfish (Centroscymnus coelolepis)

- ICES stock code: cyo.27.nea. Subareas 1–10, 12, and 14 (the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters).
    - based on current ICES advice: data category 6, ICES currently advise a precautionary approach. Updated ICES advice due 2027.

The following deep water sharks do not have any scientific advice from ICES or otherwise in relation to the FMP area:

- deep water catsharks (Apristurus spp.)
- frilled shark (Chlamydoselachus anguineus)
- gulper sharks (Centrophorus spp.)
- longnose velvet dogfish (Centroscymnus crepidater)
- black dogfish (Centroscyllium fabricii)
- birdbeak dogfish (Deania calceus)
- great lanternshark (Etmopterus princeps)
- velvet belly lanternshark (Etmopterus spinax)
- mouse catshark (Galeus murinus)
- bluntnose six-gill shark (Hexanchus griseus)
- sailfin roughshark (Oxynotus paradoxus)
- knifetooth dogfish (Scymnodon ringens)
- Greenland shark (Somniosus microcephalus)

Geographic area

The FMP covers English and Welsh waters of ICES divisions 7e, 7f, 7g and 7h (see figure 1).

The policy goals of this FMP will be implemented by both English and Welsh fisheries authorities within their respective waters as appropriate. The MMO has the responsibility for managing fisheries and carrying out assurance activities in English waters out to 200nm and leads on managing fishing activities between 6 to 200nm. Within the FMP area, Southern, Devon and Severn, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Inshore Fisheries and

Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) deliver additional fisheries conservation and management within the inshore 0 to 6 nm zone (see figure 1). Furthermore, English waters are divided into 11 marine plan areas and covered by 6 marine plans.

This FMP was developed in line with the South West Inshore and Offshore Marine Plan and the South Inshore and Offshore Marine Plan.

Welsh Ministers are responsible for the development and implementation of national fisheries policies, as well as the implementation and enforcement of relevant UK fisheries legislation within the Welsh Zone. The Welsh Zone comprises both inshore (up to 12 nm) and offshore areas, as defined as the sea adjacent to Wales within British fishery limits, up to the median line between English and Irish waters (Section 158, Government of Wales Act 2006). This FMP was developed in line with the Welsh National Marine Plan.

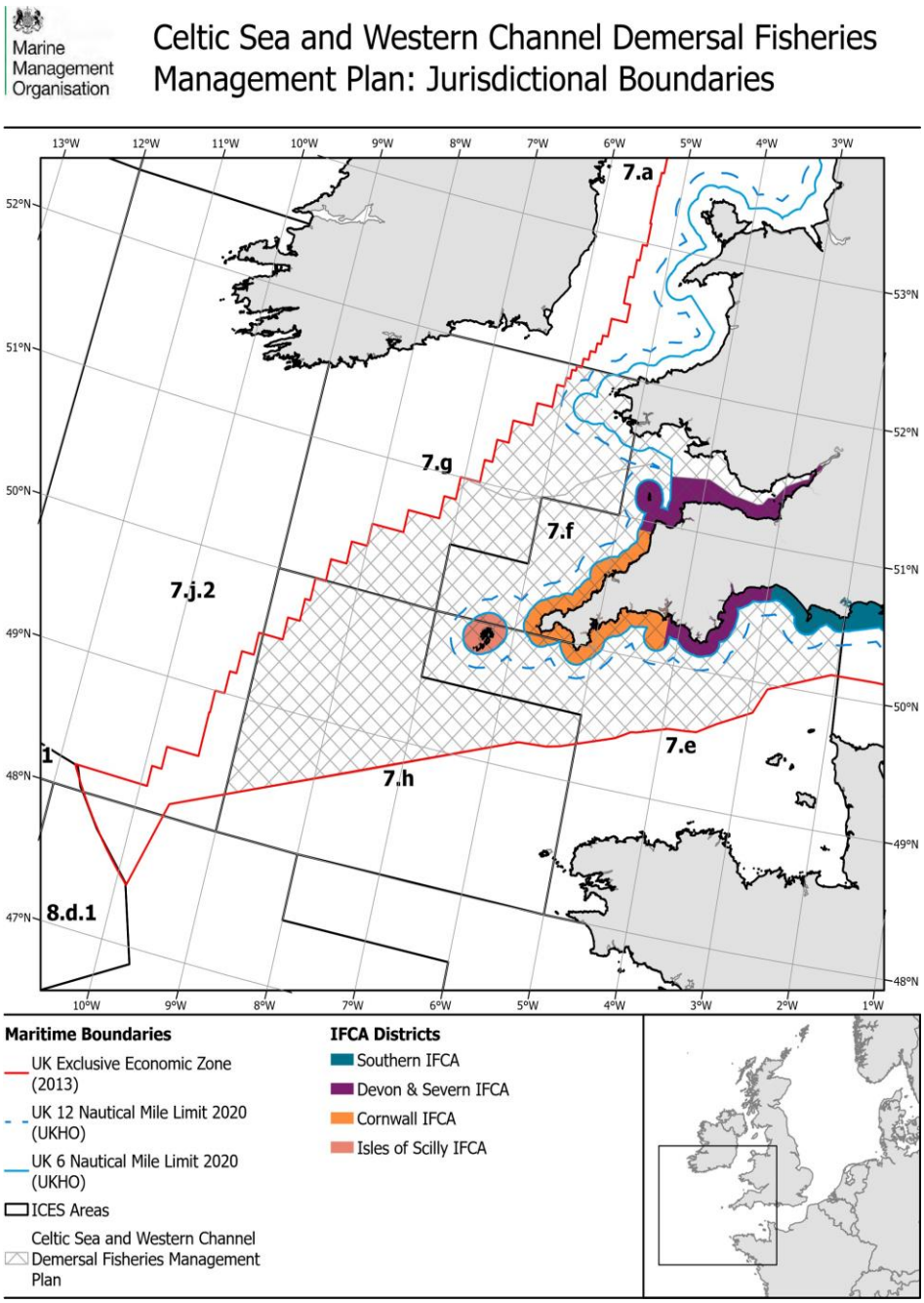

Figure 1. Jurisdictional boundaries and IFCA districts in the FMP scope. (Collins Bartholomew, ICES and MMO copyright and database right 2025).

Figure 1 shows the geographic extent of the FMP area. The map shows Wales and the southwest of England, the Western Channel and Celtic Sea ICES divisions 7e, 7f, 7g and 7h. The following IFCA districts are marked along the coastline: Cornwall, Devon and Severn, Isles of Scilly, and Southern. Other territorial sea boundaries and the UK exclusive economic zone line are also marked.

This FMP applies to all vessels operating within the FMP area. Commercial UK and EU vessels operating within this area have access to the shared stocks in the scope of this FMP under the UK-EU TCA.

Species biology and distribution

The following section provides an overview of the biological and ecological characteristics of the various FMP species groups. More detailed information can be found in the supporting evidence statement.

Gadoids

Pollack, cod, whiting, haddock, saithe, roundnose grenadier and blue ling all belong to a sub-group called Gadidae (also referred to as 'gadoids'). Pollack display a range of spatial behaviours and can be found aggregated around physical structures and in open water. Although there are currently no available maturity estimates for pollack in the FMP area, data from other areas suggests that maturity occurs at approximately 3 years.

Much like other gadoid species, juvenile cod are often found in inshore waters, while adults inhabit deeper waters. Most cod spawning in the Celtic Sea are found off northern Cornwall in March and April. There is also some spawning in the Irish Sea and in the western English Channel (Ellis 2012).

Both whiting and haddock can be found across a range of seabed substrates, including sand and mud. Whiting is fast growing, reaching maturity at 2 years of age. Similarly, Celtic Sea haddock reach maturity at around 2 to 3 years of age, with spawning season extending from February to May. Haddock larvae tend to hatch within 1 to 3 weeks, depending on water temperature.

Saithe is largely absent from most southern areas of the Celtic Sea and English Channel and therefore little is known about the ecology and stock structure of saithe in the region.

Roundnose grenadier can be found near the seabed and are considered to be a poor swimmer and therefore are unlikely to make extended migrations. Growth is typically slow, and females grow to larger sizes than males. Although specific spawning areas have not been identified, available information suggests that spawning times vary geographically (Lorance 2008).

The absence of blue ling in survey data from the FMP area is likely to be an artefact of the depth range of surveys in the area. Although the species is known to form spawning aggregations (Large 2010), there are no known spawning areas within the FMP area (Lorance and Vieira, 2023).

Flatfish

Sole, plaice, megrim and four-spot megrim all belong to the large sub-order of flatfish called Pleuronectiformes (referred to as flatfish in this document).

Sole spawn between April and May in the FMP area and typically use estuarine habitats and coastal zones as nursery grounds (Cefas, 2000; Ellis 2012). Female and male sole mature at lengths of about 28 centimetres (cm) and 23 to 24cm, respectively. Like several other flatfish species, sole usually remain in shallow waters as juveniles, moving further from shore and into deeper water as they grow.

Plaice are known to spawn between December and March in the FMP area (Cefas, 2000). Female and male plaice mature at lengths of about 31cm to 33cm and 25cm, respectively.

Megrim and four-spot megrim have a preference for muddy bottom habitats. There is some sex separation, with juvenile and mature males generally being found in deeper waters and immature females being found in shallower waters. Spawning takes place from January to March, with peak spawning in the Celtic Sea (ICES divisions 7b to 7k) in March along the shelf-edge south and south-west of Ireland.

Anglerfish

Anglerfish and Monkfish belong to an order called Lophiiformes. Anglerfish is a medium-sized, demersal fish which is usually less than 140cm in length. Monkfish tend to be smaller, often less than 90cm in length and are typically less abundant. Limited information is available in relation to spawning and nursery grounds of both anglerfish and monkfish, however both species are thought to spawn along the edge of the continental slope or shelf (Ellis 2012) which would generally be outside the FMP area. Like anglerfish, the timing of spawning for monkfish varies spatially.

Nephrops

Nephrops is a crustacean widely distributed on muddy, soft sediment around the British coast at depths of up to 800 metres although there are no records of this species being found in the English Channel. Nephrops typically reach sexual maturity at 2 to 3 years of age, and they have an annual reproductive cycle.

Skates and rays

Skates and rays are elasmobranchs and although the size of FMP skates and ray species varies, all species are morphologically similar. The fecundity of skates and rays is somewhat uncertain, although annual fecundity is thought to increase with length and females generally mature at a larger size than males. Little is known about the egg-laying season, but it is thought to peak in late spring-early summer for thornback ray, whilst cuckoo ray may deposit eggs over much of the year. The embryos require several months to develop, with development time likely being linked to sea temperature.

Red seabream

Red seabream is a ray-finned fish belonging to the family Sparidae. Juvenile nursery areas are typically found in shallow waters, while adults are found in deeper offshore areas. Red seabream has a complex life-history with a mix of male, female and hermaphroditic individuals in the population. An individual's transition from male to female is thought to occur at larger sizes.

Deep water sharks

Deep water sharks are also part of the elasmobranchs group and they typically inhabit depths greater than 500 metres (ICES, 2020), occupying a range of environments. Deep water sharks generally have slow growth rates and low fecundity, which makes them highly vulnerable to environmental changes and human-induced impacts. (see, for example, Vieira 2019; Finucci 2024).

Commercial fishery overview

The following section summarises evidence provided by MMO and Seafish to describe and assess the state of the fishery. Further information can be found in the supporting evidence statement.

The elasmobranch values within the figures and tables presented include all FMP skates and rays and deep-water sharks. As a result of low recorded landings in the FMP area, only a select group of skates and rays are considered for further management (see the 'FMP species and stock overview' section for more details).

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). The below presented data for FMP species include all stocks of species in the scope of the FMP caught within the FMP area of ICES divisions 7e, f, g and h. Note these comprise of landings proportioned to the UK Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which does not include the full ICES division nor is it inclusive of the complete stock boundaries. The information provided below on landings weight and value have been extracted from commercial fisheries landings data for the years 2019 to 2023 to enable comparisons to be made between available data for both UK and EU vessels. However, where it has been considered necessary to provide additional context for the current state of the fishery or stocks, a more extended data set from 2013 to 2023 has been applied. This information has been presented to give an overview of the commercial importance of the FMP species.

Between 2019 and 2023, the total commercial fisheries landings from UK waters by UK and EU vessels amounted to around 5,615,400 t. Landings of FMP species accounted for approximately 833,200 t of the total.

Landings by UK and EU vessels

Total UK and EU combined landings (over a reference period from 2019 to 2023) of FMP species within the FMP area amounts to 130,749 t, valued at £464.85 million.

By weight of landings, the UK and EU landings were split at 44,750 t (34.2%) and 85,999 t (65.8%) respectively. EU vessels' landings represented a value, equating to £281.31 million (60.5%), with UK vessels' landings £183.54 million (39.5%).

Pounds per tonne (t^{-1}) of landings was higher in UK vessels over this reference period with UK landings at £4,102 t^{-1} and the EU landings at £3,271 t^{-1}. The difference in proportional landed value can be attributed to the higher value of sole landings by UK fleets.

From 2019 to 2023, UK vessels landed 8,950 t at £36.71 million of FMP species on average annually; EU vessels landed 17,200 t at £56.26 million. However, there is an overall declining trend of EU landings, falling from 26,804 t in 2013 to 13,128 t in 2023, with the most notable reduction between 2017 and 2018 from 22,577 t to 18,313 t.

Landings value did not decline in proportion to the decrease in landed weight but instead exhibited near annual high then low cycle averaging £89.20 million ranging from £73.41 million to £105.06 million.

In contrast, UK vessel landed weight of FMP species remained comparatively stable from 2013 to 2023, ranging from 8,233 t to 10,781 t, exhibiting a slight decline from 2016 onwards.

The UK vessel landed value however exhibited an observable rise, increasing from £26.77 million to £39.66 million during this period.

Pounds per tonne of landings over this reference period for both UK and EU vessels have increased from 2013 to 2023 with the UK increasing by £1,979 t^{-1} from £2,547 t^{-1} in 2013 to £4,526 t^{-1} in 2023; and the EU by £1,357 t^{-1} from £2,356 t^{-1} in 2013 to £3,713 t^{-1} in 2023 offsetting some changes in landings weight.

Landings between UK and EU fleets differ in species composition driving the difference in landed value.

Landings by group or species

An overview of the landings of each group by weight and value is provided in tables 1 to 4. The figures provide a visual representation of the landings of FMP groups from over the whole dataset, from 2013 to 2023.

In 2023 (see table 3), the flatfish within the scope of the FMP had the highest commercial value, amounting to £43.00 million. This figure is primarily driven by landings of sole (£34.62 million), followed by megrim (£5.07 million) and plaice (£3.31 million).

Anglerfishes were the second most important group, worth a total of £22.01 million.

Gadoids list third, worth £12.49 million, comprised of haddock (£4.88 million), whiting (£4.26 million) and pollack (£2.53 million).

Nephrops had moderate commercial importance (£4.88 million), with landings value of more significance for EU fishers (£3.90 million).

The value of the elasmobranchs group in 2023 was £6.04 million.

Table 1. Total (UK and EU vessel) landings of FMP groups by weight (tonnes) from 2019 to 2023.

Group	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Average
Anglerfishes	5,755	5,964	6,758	6,898	6,249	6,325
Elasmobranchs	3,948	3,752	3,574	3,525	3,243	3,608
Gadoids	9,848	8,637	9,047	7,605	5,876	8,203
Nephrops	3,227	1,141	1,380	1,178	946	1,574
Flatfish	6,301	6,290	7,207	6,827	5,583	6,442
Red seabream	1	1	0	1	1	1

Table 2. Annual landed weight of each FMP group as a proportion (%) of annual total landed weight by UK and EU vessels from 2019 to 2023 (figures have been rounded and may not total exactly 100%).

Group	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Average
Anglerfishes	19.8%	23.1%	24.2%	26.5%	28.5%	24.4%
Elasmobranchs	13.6%	14.6%	12.8%	13.5%	14.8%	13.9%
Gadoids	33.9%	33.5%	32.4%	29.2%	26.8%	31.2%
Nephrops	11.1%	4.4%	4.9%	4.5%	4.3%	5.9%

Group	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Average
Flatfish	21.7%	24.4%	25.8%	26.2%	25.5%	24.7%
Red seabream	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 3. Total (UK and EU vessel) landings of FMP groups by value (£ million) from 2019 to 2023.

Group	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Average
Anglerfishes	19.50	18.85	22.51	24.47	22.01	21.47
Elasmobranchs	6.19	5.68	6.12	6.35	6.04	6.08
Gadoids	18.27	15.37	16.46	15.57	12.49	15.63
Nephrops	17.22	5.00	6.10	7.30	4.88	8.10
Flatfish	35.51	36.65	41.91	51.36	43.00	41.69
Red seabream	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01

Table 4. Proportion (%) of annual total landed value of FMP groups by UK and EU vessels from 2019 to 2023 (figures have been rounded and may not total exactly 100%).

Group	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Average
Anglerfishes	20.2%	23.1%	24.2%	23.3%	24.9%	23.1%
Elasmobranchs	6.4%	7.0%	6.6%	6.0%	6.8%	6.6%
Gadoids	18.9%	18.8%	17.7%	14.8%	14.1%	16.9%
Nephrops	17.8%	6.1%	6.5%	6.9%	5.5%	8.6%
Flatfish	36.7%	44.9%	45.0%	48.9%	48.6%	44.8%
Red seabream	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Landings by gear

Mobile benthic gear (90.9%) (demersal and beam trawls) and drift and fixed nets (6.2%) account for most of the landings of FMP species in the FMP area. A reference period of

2019 to 2023 is given for the below figures, as this is more reflective of the current fisheries.

Landings across the other gears remain relatively stable. By weight and for the reference period of 2019 to 2023: demersal trawls landed 78,604 t (60.1%), beam trawls landed 40,291 t (30.8%) and drift and fixed nets landed 8,109 t (6.2%).

The remaining gears combined totalled 3,761 t (2.9%), and this was comprised of: demersal seine (1.2%), dredge (0.9%) and handlines (0.6%).

By value, mobile benthic gear (90.0%) and drift and fixed nets (5.8%) account for most of the landings of FMP species in the FMP area. Broken down by value for the reference period of 2019 to 2023, demersal trawls landed £222.29 million (47.1%), beam trawls landed £202.68 million (42.9%), and drift and fixed nets landed £27.22 million (5.8%). The remaining gears combined totalled £12.70 million (2.7%) and this was comprised of: dredge (1.5%), handlines (0.6%) and demersal seine (0.5%).

By weight, beam trawls, drift nets and other gears remained relatively consistent over the full dataset (2013 to 2023). However, demersal trawls exhibited a large drop in landings from 25,976 t to 11,908 t.

By value, drift nets and other gears remained relatively consistent over the full dataset (2013 to 2023). Demersal trawls, which typically target gadoids, exhibited a large drop in landings value from £56.37 million to £36.27 million. By contrast, beam trawls have increased landings value from 2013 to 2023, from £25.65 million to £43.46 m, which aligns with the increased landings of sole over this period.

For the UK fleet, the predominant fishing gear used are beam trawls, landing 22,700 t (50.7%) for the reference period 2019 to 2023. Demersal trawls landed 13,225 t (29.6%) over this period, followed by drift and fixed nets landing 6,483t (14.5%).

For the EU fleet, the predominant gear used are demersal trawls landing 65,379 t (76.0%) and beam trawls landing 17,591 t (20.5%) for the reference period 2019 to 2023. The EU fleet comprises of significantly less drift and fixed nets than the UK fleet with 1,627 t (1.9%) landed over the same period. EU demersal seines landed 1,250 t (1.5%).

Economic and social data for the commercial fishery

Figure 2 reflects the economic dependence of UK vessels as a percentage of revenue associated with value of landings of stocks or species in the FMP managed area, compared to total fishing income. Most vessels are less than 20% dependent on FMP species economically. Vessels with an economic dependence of 20 to 40% on the FMP stocks or species more than halved in number, from 144 vessels in 2016 to just 68 vessels in 2023. Similarly, vessels that have 5% to 20% of their total fishing income derived from the FMP species also decreased in number, from 200 vessels in 2016 to 129 in 2023.

Proportionally, it was vessels belonging to these 2 economic dependence groups that primarily contributed to the reduction in overall fleet size from 2016 to 2023.

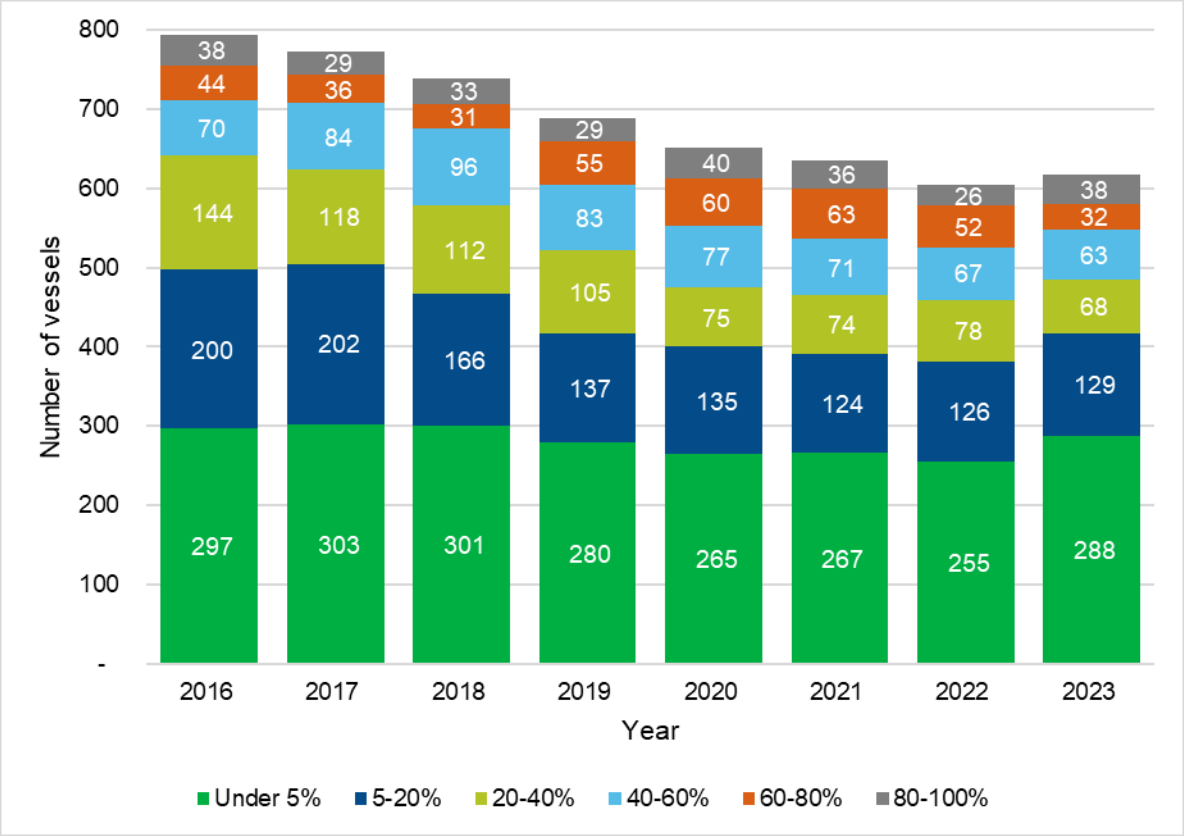

Figure 2. Number of UK vessels involved in the Celtic Sea demersal fishery within the FMP area by level of economic dependence on the FMP (2016 to 2023). Legend at bottom of chart represents the dependency these vessels have on stocks within this FMP.

UK import and export statistics were provided by Seafish for products of main commercial species:

- nephrops
- megrim
- plaice
- sole
- cod
- haddock
- monkfish
- pollack (European)
- rays and skates
- saithe
- whiting

Between 2021-2023, most cod, haddock, whiting, plaice, skates and rays and pollack supply available to the UK was destined for the domestic market. A higher proportion of the nephrops, monkfish, saithe, megrim and sole supply available to the UK is destined for the export market (see figure 3).

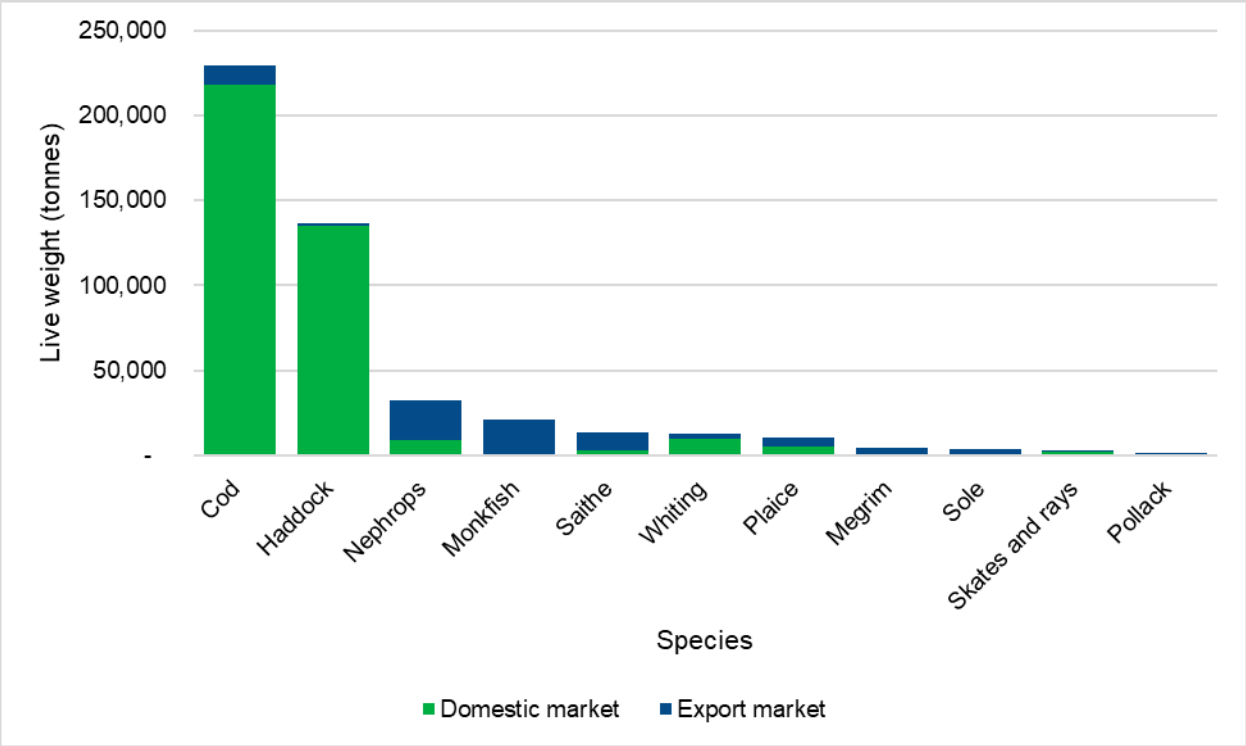

Figure 3. Average annual supply and market destination of selected species by live weight (tonnes) 2021 to 2023.

Recreational fisheries

Recreational catch data specific to most of the FMP species is limited, with exceptions for pollack, whiting and certain skate and ray species.

There are 13 FMP species of recreational interest, with data available through the Sea Angling Diary. Pollack in the FMP area is highly important to the recreational sector, with pollack being a key target species for both shore and boat fishers. Furthermore, charter boat operators reportedly rely on pollack for their business in some areas and seasons. In 2023, 66% of the total recreational catch of pollack was fished within the FMP area. Figure 4 shows that the vast majority of pollack is caught in ICES division 7e (approximately 310t on average per year), with around 66% of this retained. Divisions 7g and 7h are omitted from figure 4 as, respectively, 78% and 91% of the average annual recreational catches of species included in this FMP within these areas are attributed to pollack.

Significantly more cod is caught in the coastal areas, 7e and 7f (see figure 4). In all locations, most of the cod caught (61 to 94%) is retained for consumption. Cod is an important target species for sea anglers, with the divisions covered by the FMP accounting for 15 to 20% and 10 to 20% of the total kept and returned tonnage, respectively.

From 2016 to 2023, cod and pollack showed a downward trend in recreational catches, both kept and returned (see figure 5).

The FMP area accounts for 40% of the total recreational catch of plaice within England and Wales, with most of this species being caught and returned in 7e (see figure 4). The tonnage of plaice released appears to have remained relatively consistent from 2016 to 2023, however, since 2019, the volume of this species being retained has decreased (see figure 5).

Whiting is also predominantly caught in 7e and around 26% of the catch in the FMP area is retained (see figure 4). Catches of FMP landed whiting contributed to 20% of the total catches by sea anglers within England and Wales in 2023.

Skates and rays are popular with recreational fishers; notable recreational species that are within scope of this FMP include thornback, blonde, undulate ray. Recreational fishers catch more ray species in 7f followed by 7e, where most sea angling occurs. Low rates of retention were recorded for the ray species caught in the FMP area (see figure 4).

Catches of FMP landed thornback ray contributed to 58% of the total catch within England and Wales in 2023, highlighting the importance of this fishery within the FMP area for sea anglers.

Although wider recreational interest is recorded for FMP landed saithe, sole and haddock, these species have low to negligible uptake.

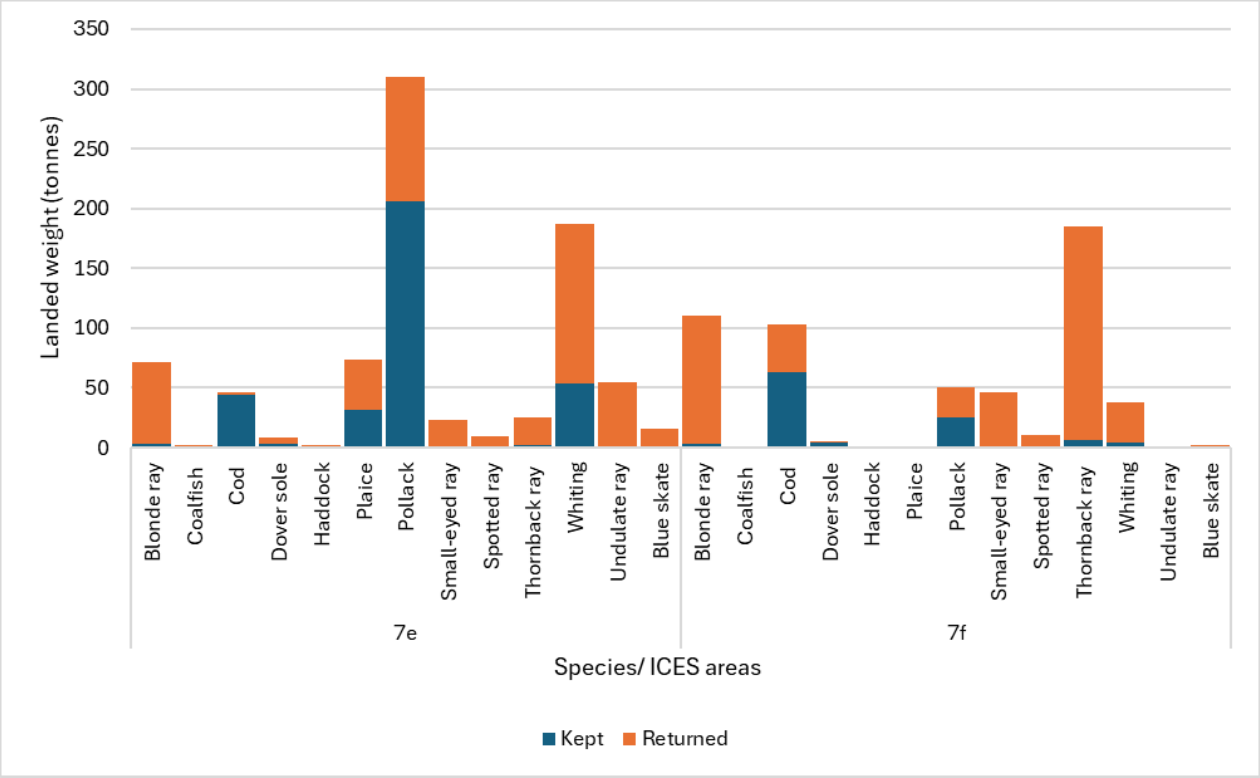

Figure 4. Average annual weight (tonnes) of recreational catches of FMP species in 7e and 7f (2016 to 2023). UKSAIL data used. Coalfish includes combined catches of saithe and coley; dover sole includes common sole and black sole.

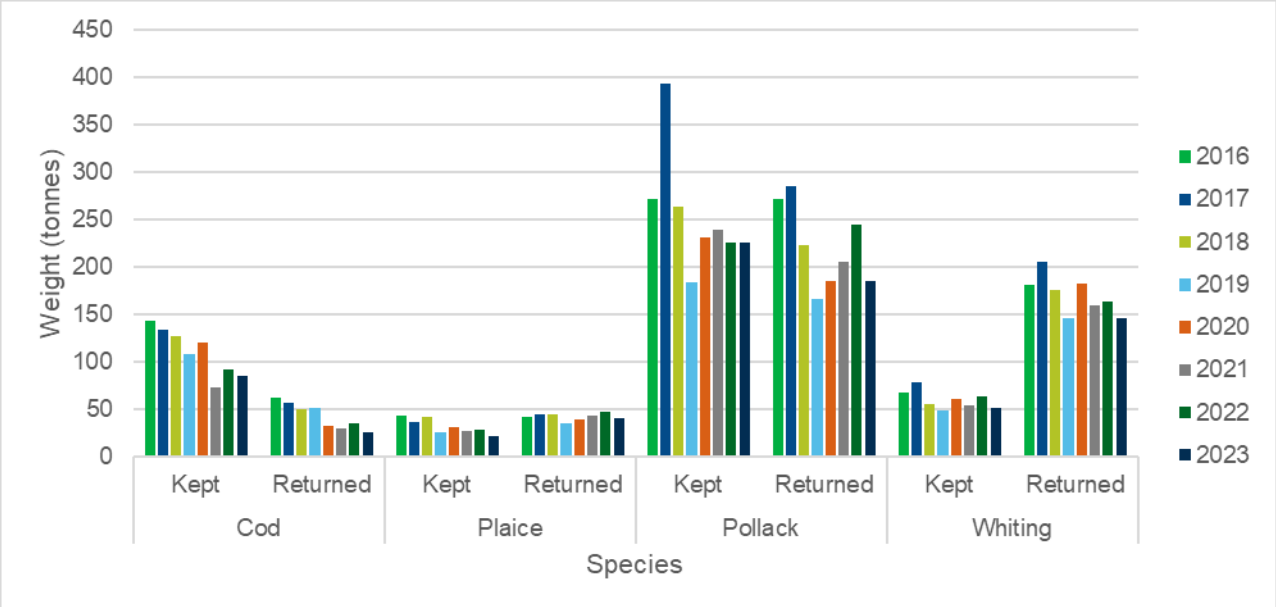

Figure 5. Annual weight (tonnes) of named FMP species kept and returned by recreational fishers from 2016 to 2023. UKSAIL data used.

Fisheries management

Current fisheries management

Due to the range of species within scope, the FMP fisheries are governed by various regulatory mechanisms. Some legislation is applied at a UK level for all UK Nations or for England and Wales, while some legislation is England or Wales specific. Many of the species are shared stocks with other coastal states and are therefore subject to total allowable catch (TAC) agreement through the UK-EU TCA. The Western Waters Multi Annual Plan (MAP) sets out various management requirements in relation to named demersal fish stocks fished within North Western and South Western Waters, known together as Western Waters. As an independent coastal State, the UK is now a contracting party to Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) and has established fisheries agreements with coastal states such as Norway and the Faroe Islands, which include species within scope of this FMP.

The area within scope is also subject to management through the Celtic Sea Protection Zone (CSPZ) measures, which regulate demersal fishing activity, including bottom otter trawls and bottom seines.

There are also various IFCA byelaws in place, which provide additional management such as area restrictions, gear use, vessel size, and minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) measures. IFCA byelaws can also apply to recreational anglers.

In addition to the above, fishing activity is also controlled by fishing vessel licence conditions.

Deep water sharks and specific skates and rays species are listed as prohibited species. The list of 'Absolute Prohibited Species' in the UK relevant to the FMP is included in the Written Record of fisheries consultations between the United Kingdom and the European Union for 2025 (see annex 4).

Prohibited species

Skates and rays:

- blue skate (Dipturus batis)
- flapper skate (Dipturus intermedius)
- white skate (Raja alba)

Deep water sharks:

- frilled shark (Chlamydoselachus anguineus)
- gulper sharks (Centrophorus spp.)

- Portuguese dogfish (Centroscymnus coelolepis)
- longnose velvet dogfish (Centroscymnus crepidater)
- black dogfish (Centroscyllium fabricii)
- birdbeak dogfish (Deania calcea)
- kitefin shark (Dalatias licha)
- great lanternshark (Etmopterus princeps)
- velvet belly (Etmopterus spinax)
- mouse catshark (Galeus murinus)
- bluntnose six-gill shark (Hexanchus griseus)
- sailfin roughshark (sharpback shark) (Oxynotus paradoxus)
- knifetooth dogfish (scymnodon ringens)
- Greenland shark (Somniosus microcephalus)

There is a separate FMP concerning Celtic Sea and Western Channel pelagic species, which includes various regulatory overlaps with this FMP. Management of Skates and Rays also overlaps with the North Sea and English Channel Skates and Rays FMP.

UK Marine Policy Statement and marine plans in English waters

This FMP overlaps with marine plans in England and Wales. The marine plans provide a policy framework and a clear, evidence-based approach to inform decision making by marine users and regulators on where, when or how activities might take place within the marine area, balancing environmental, economic and social factors. The impact of these has been considered in the Environmental Report. The preparation of this FMP has had regard for the prevailing Marine Plans (as required by section 58(3) of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009).

Measures developed under this FMP take account of the requirements of the relevant marine plan. Similarly, decisions on wider marine access and use made under a marine plan should consider the objectives of any relevant FMP. Marine spatial planning and FMP policies need to be developed in a joined-up way to ensure more effective use of the marine space and resources.

Harvest strategy

A harvest strategy is a pre-agreed framework that sets out how fisheries management decisions will be made based on stock status, including monitoring, assessment, and decision rules that link scientific evidence to management action.

In line with the Act (section 6(3)), the fisheries authorities will seek to manage fishing opportunities at a level that allows a stock to be above biomass levels capable of producing MSY. This approach will be consistent with the best available scientific advice, taking into account best available evidence on the effects of fishing activity. Other principles include references to the UK's wider international obligations for the conservation and sustainable use of the marine environment, and the need to apply an ecosystem-based approach in line with the Act and its ecosystem objective.

Further considerations should be made on a fishery-by-fishery basis to consider opportunities to minimise the negative impacts of fishing on non-target species. Mixed fisheries advice provided by ICES should also be considered, as should the implementation of a mixed fishery and ecosystem-based approach to the management of fisheries within the scope of this FMP.

Through annual international fisheries negotiations, the UK seeks to agree outcomes which reflect the objectives of the Act relating to sustainable TAC setting, where possible within the negotiating forum. Other considerations, including technical measures, are available in the Written Record of fisheries consultations between the United Kingdom and the European Union for 2024.

For stocks with no or limited ICES advice, the annual negotiations provide a framework to improve the availability of data or assessment methods to inform future scientific advice through the Specialised Committee on Fisheries (SCF).

Current UK technical measures

This section sets out the various legislation or regulations relevant to this FMP, taking into account the FMP's spatial area and species within scope.

Statutory guidance on the technical conservation and landing obligation (discard ban) regulations, including how the rules apply, exemptions, selling undersize fish, reporting requirements and quota management are available in the technical conservation and landing obligation rules and regulations from 2022 onwards.

Western Waters Multi Annual Plan (Western Waters MAP)

Multi annual plans (MAPs) (as retained and amended in UK law) continue to apply to various sea basins or to species types and, where sufficient scientific advice exists for the relevant listed species, set out approaches to managing exploitation.

The Western Waters MAP sets out various management requirements in relation to named demersal fish stocks fished within North Western and South Western Waters, known together as Western Waters. The Western Waters MAP includes the FMP area and outlines management measures for some of the FMP species.

The list below sets out these FMP species, including the relevant ICES area and technical measure where stated:

- roundnose grenadier in ICES Subarea 7
- megrim in ICES division 7b–k
- anglerfish in ICES division 7b–k
- haddock in ICES division 7b–k
- whiting in ICES division 7b, 7c and 7e–k
- blue ling in ICES subareas 6 and 7 and division 5b
- norway lobster in ICES subarea 7; Plaice; ICES division 7e
- pollack in ICES subarea 7
- common sole in ICES division 7e

For common sole, there are technical measures in place. As per Article 12 (Effort limitation for sole in the Western Channel) of the Western Waters MAP, the TACs for sole in the Western Channel (ICES division 7e) under the plan shall be complemented by fishing effort limitations. The fisheries administration must decide annually on the maximum number of days at sea for vessels present in the Western Channel and deploying beam trawls of mesh size equal to or greater than 80 mm. The maximum number of days at sea referred to above shall be adjusted in the same proportion as the adjustment in fishing mortality corresponding to the variation in the TACs.

Prohibition of multiple trawls

The Prohibition of Fishing with Multiple Trawls Order 2003 sets out mesh size restrictions in relation to multiple trawling activity within British fishery limits. The order states that for ICES area 7, mesh sizes must not be less than 80mm.

Gear selectivity requirements

Regulation EU 2019/1241, which has been retained in UK law and is now assimilated, specifies gear selectivity requirements relating to specific species within this FMP. The requirements range from cod end and square mesh panel size, including gear requirements for mixed fish catches, to engine and vessel sizes. The regulation also specifies discard criteria for certain species.

Minimum conservation reference sizes (MCRS)

MCRS is a legally enforceable minimum size for fish and shellfish in the UK, ensuring the health of fish stocks by allowing them to breed at least once before being caught.

Regulation EU 2019/1241 (annex VI), which has been retained in UK law and is now assimilated, specifies MCRS requirements relating to specific species within this FMP.

Closed area for conservation of cod

Regulation EU/2019/1241 (annex VI Part C) sets out a prohibition of fishing activity in ICES divisions 7f and 7g from 1 February to 31 March each year.

Celtic Sea Protection Zone (CSPZ) technical measures

The CSPZ technical measures specify fishing gear requirements for bottom otter trawls and bottom seine fishing within the Celtic Sea. The measures do not specify fish species; however, the zone includes the area covered by this FMP. The measures are aimed at improving selectivity and specify gear requirements for the Inner and Outer Protection Zone. They specify cod end sizes as well as twine thickness.

Sole Recovery Zone

The Sole Recovery Zone (SRZ) is a designated area, primarily in the Western Channel (ICES division 7e), where fishing effort is restricted to help recover sole stocks. This is done by applying effort controls to vessels 10 metres and overusing certain regulated gears, including beam trawls of a certain mesh size and static nets.

Lyme Bay restrictions

The Lyme Bay Fisheries and Conservation Reserve is a Marine Reserve in Lyme Bay within which the deployment of bottom towed fishing gear is prohibited.

South Devon inshore fishing grounds

South Devon inshore fishing grounds include trawling and dredging restrictions in order to protect static gear, especially crabbing nets.

North Devon Fishermen’s Association voluntary code

The North Devon Fishermen's Association has promoted voluntary measures to support sustainable skate and ray fisheries, including the 'ray box' concept, which involves specific fishing gear modifications such as rock hopper discs and new mesh designs to improve selectivity and survival rates.

Small-eyed ray sentinel fishery

The small eyed ray sentinel fishery is a self-sampling initiative in the western English Channel, focused on collecting scientific data about the small-eyed ray (Raja microocellata). While the sentinel fishery itself is primarily a monitoring and evidence-gathering initiative, it incorporates and supports the development of technical measures.

There is a limited quota in ICES division 7e to allow for scientific data collection for those participating.

Landing obligation

The landing obligation applies to all fishing vessels. It stipulates that all quota species (of all sizes) must be landed and counted against quotas unless exemptions apply, such as the survivability exemption, which allows specific, unwanted catches to be discarded only if there is strong scientific evidence that the fish have a high chance of surviving the capture and release process.

Regional inshore fisheries management

The IFCAs in England are responsible for producing byelaws within their districts to manage fisheries up to the 6nm limit. IFCAs have general byelaws in place outlining vessel specification restrictions for fishing within specified areas.

Each IFCA may have specific byelaws that apply to their district, which can include additional gear restrictions, closed areas, and effort controls to manage fishing pressure on stocks.

Southern IFCA byelaws specify various gear restrictions, including a bottom towed restriction in certain areas.

There is also a byelaw specifying MCRS for various species within scope of this FMP, including cod, plaice, pollack, sole, whiting, and skates and rays.

Devon & Severn IFCA byelaws specify various gear restrictions, including area-based prohibitions, which include a prohibition in areas around Lundy Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), Skerries Bank and Surrounds MCZ and Bideford to Foreland Point MCZ.

Cornwall IFCA byelaws specify various gear restrictions, including bottom towed gear prohibitions in all marine Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) within the district and within the Manacles MCZ. There are also restrictions on vessel size within certain areas.

The byelaws also include MCRS for 2 species within scope of this FMP: red seabream and megrim.

The Isles of Scilly IFCA byelaws include vessel length, catch tonnage limitations, and towed gear restrictions, including towed gear area restrictions.

MMO byelaws

MMO has the power to make byelaws within 0 to 200nm. For the management of fishing activities, MMO leads on management between 6 to 200nm, with the IFCAs leading in the 0 to 6nm area.

There are three MMO byelaws concerning fishing gear restrictions within the scope of this FMP.

MMO byelaws prohibit bottom towed gear within the following Marine Protected Areas (MPAs): the Land's End and Cape Bank European Marine Site, the Start Point to Plymouth Sound and Eddystone European Marine Site, and the South Dorset Marine Conservation Zone.

Measures in Wales

The geographical scope of this FMP includes the parts of the Welsh waters that overlap with ICES divisions 7f and 7g. Responsibility for fisheries management in the Welsh zone is devolved to the Welsh Government although international negotiations is reserved. The Welsh Government also has responsibility for managing the inshore (0-6nm) area and the Byelaws of the former South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee and former North Western and North Wales Sea Fisheries Committee in Welsh waters apply as if made by Welsh Ministers. The Welsh Government utilises powers from various statutes to manage fisheries.

The Sea Fish (Specified Sea Areas) (Prohibition of Fishing Method) (Wales) Order 2012 prohibits fishing for sea fish with fishing boats using bottom towed fishing gear within specified sea areas.

There are several restrictions on demersal gears in the 0-6nm area from shore. Notably, the following measures remain in force:

Byelaw 27 of the South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee. Prohibited area for use of dredges and bean trawls – Skomer. No person shall use in fishing for sea fish any fishing dredge or any beam trawl within the area around Skomer as detailed in the byelaw. The area is also a designated Marine Conservation Zone.

Current monitoring and enforcement

Control and enforcement is the responsibility of the MMO (England), Welsh Government and the IFCAs. Commercial landings data is also publicly available via the UK Sea Fisheries Annual Statistics and fisheries dependent information from the EU Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries.

Within UK waters, there are a series of legal requirements for fishers and buyers to provide records of fishing activities and first sales of fishery products. Vessels of 10 metres or more are required to complete logbook submissions, either on paper or electronically, detailing their catches. Additionally, first-sale buyers must submit sale notes documenting their purchases.[1] For English and Welsh waters, all vessels under 10 metres must record their catches on the 'Record your Catch' application (hereafter referred to as 'Catch App'), web service or phone line. This includes gear type, geographic location, vessel nationality, vessel identification, port where the catch is landed and more. Fishers are encouraged to report their catch to a species-specific level. When identification is not possible, recording is often under a generic species code.

For vessels 12 metres and over, fishing in English waters, remote vessel monitoring is mandatory, using the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) to record their positions. Furthermore, all English and Welsh under-12 metre vessels registered with a commercial fishing vessel licence must have an I-VMS (inshore) device when undertaking a trip to sea.

Environmental considerations

FMPs are subject to legal and environmental obligations arising from legislation such as The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, The Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, UK Marine Strategy (UKMS)[2][3], the UK MPS, the Environment Act 2021, Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, and the Environmental Principles Policy Statement. These policies are aimed at ensuring the health of our seas for future generations and outline our ambitions to restore biodiversity and address climate change.

Defra and Welsh Government commissioned Natural England, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to provide advice on the following considerations:

- potential risks posed by FMP fisheries to the designated features of English and Welsh MPAs
- potential risks posed by FMP fisheries to UKMS descriptors;

[1] If you buy less than 30kg of fish per day directly from a commercial fisher for your own consumption then you do not need to register as a buyer or submit sales notes (Gov.uk Guidance, 2025).

[2] Marine strategy part two: UK marine monitoring programmes - GOV.UK

[3] Marine strategy part three: 2025 UK programme of measures - GOV.UK

The Statutory Nature Conservation Body (SNCB) advice from Natural England covers English territorial waters (from the coast to 12nm) within the FMP area, and the advice from NRW covers Welsh territorial waters (from the coast to 12nm) within the FMP area. The SNCB advice from the JNCC relates to the English and Welsh offshore region (from 12nm to British fisheries limit or the EEZ) of the FMP area.

The SNCB advice by Natural England and the JNCC assessed the following gear types: demersal trawls (including beam, otter trawls and bottom pair trawls), static nets, and drift nets.[4] NRW considered pressures from commercial fishing using demersal trawls (otter and beam) and demersal fixed nets (gill, trammel, and entangling). Demersal pair trawling and demersal longlining were not considered as part of the NRW advice, as these are either prohibited or does not occur within Welsh territorial waters, respectively.

The evidence and advice that has been provided by SNCBs underpins the proposed policy goals and actions of this FMP. While the FMP provides an overview of this advice, details on the methods and data[5] used by the SNCBs to identify risk levels can be found in the environmental report.

Marine Protected Areas

This section describes the impacts on MPA designated features.

Advice for English MPA designated features

Fisheries contained in this FMP have the potential to impact the designated features of MPAs through the bycatch of designated features of MPAs, the direct and indirect removal of prey species on which designated species depend and alteration of habitat. These impacts can affect the designated features of MPAs both inside and outside the boundaries of MPA.

Within the boundaries of English MPAs, MMO and IFCAs assess human activities that could affect the designated features of MPAs and introduce management measures as needed. Therefore, existing assessment and management pathways are already being

[4] At times, evidence may be pooled into ‘demersal trawls,’ ‘static nets’ and ‘drift nets’ where data does not allow for more specific advice.

[5] Much of the evidence presented are a culmination of the UK bycatch monitoring programme, Defra’s Marine wildlife bycatch mitigation initiative, the Clean Catch UK programme, English / Welsh Data Collection Framework’s discard observer programme, OSPAR Quality Status Report, existing surveys and studies, as well as expert opinions. Data and indicative risk ratings may be improved through enhanced observer coverage or widespread REM implementation

undertaken through separate work to mitigate risks from fishing activities within MPA boundaries. No specific additional action is suggested for the FMP within these areas.

The following risk levels (as described low, moderate, high below[6]) to MPAs have been identified from the primary impacts of FMP fisheries using demersal trawls, static nets and drift nets occurring outside of site boundaries on English MPA features.

Risks to MPAs identified include that:

- there is a **moderate risk** of bycatch of marine mammals, seabirds and fish that are designated features of MPAs in **demersal trawls**
- there is a **high risk** of bycatch of marine mammals, seabirds and fish that are designated features of MPAs in **demersal static nets**
- there is a **high risk** of bycatch of seabirds and fish that are designated features of MPAs in **demersal drift nets**
- there is a **moderate risk** of bycatch of marine mammals that are designated features of MPAs in **demersal drift nets**
- there is a **moderate risk** to designated mobile species of MPAs (primarily harbour porpoise) from **reductions in the availability of cod and whiting as prey**

Advice for Welsh MPA designated features

The Welsh Government has been working with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to evaluate the potential impacts of fishing on designated features of MPAs in Wales through the Assessing Welsh Fishing Activities Project. The project provides the framework of environmental evidence needed to support further assessment of the sustainable fisheries management changes being developed and implemented through FMPs. The first NRW comprehensive condition assessments for all ‘wholly’ Welsh Special Areas of

[6] **Low Risk MPAs**: Although there might be a theoretical impact pathway, evidence of an actual occurrence is either absent or suggests minimal impacts at the relevant scales for the considered FMP.

Moderate Risk MPAs: Interactions deemed as moderate risk typically have an evidenced impact or expert judgment indicates a genuine risk. However, the overall impact level might be ambiguous, possibly due to limited spatial overlap between gears and protected features, significant impact fluctuations over space and time, or differences between fisheries in the FMP and those from which the evidence base was derived.

High Risk MPAs: Interactions identified as high risk are those where available evidence or expert opinion suggests a scale that is concerning relative to MPA conservation objectives. The fishing activities managed by the FMP may significantly contribute to these risks.

Conservation and Special Protection Areas in summer 2025, showed no sites were assessed as being in 'unfavourable' condition due to fishing.

NRW has identified the following high and medium risk levels associated with each gear type:

- Demersal trawls
    - There is a high risk inside MPAs from abrasion and penetration to MarESA sensitivity habitats that have been ranked as high.
    - There is a high risk inside MPAs from seabed habitat change on biogenic reefs.
    - There is a medium risk inside MPAs from smothering of MarESA sensitivity habitats that have been ranked as high.
    - There is a medium risk inside and from outside MPAs from Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) spread to habitats.
    - There is a medium risk inside and outside MPAs from harbour porpoise bycatch.

- Demersal fixed nets
    - There is a high risk inside MPAs from abrasion and penetration to MarESA sensitivity habitats that have been ranked as high.
    - There is a high risk inside and outside MPAs from harbour porpoise bycatch.

- Demersal drift nets
    - There is a high risk inside and outside MPAs from harbour porpoise bycatch.

When aggregating all gear types associated with medium or high-risk levels together, the following risk levels have been identified:

- There is a high risk inside and outside MPAs from cod and whiting bycatch affecting harbour porpoise prey availability.
- There is a high risk inside and outside MPAs from lamprey bycatch when they are attached to their host species.
- There is a medium risk inside and outside MPAs to the Severn Estuary SAC from targeting and bycatch of the estuary’s features fish assemblage.
- There is a medium risk inside and outside MPAs from diving seabird bycatch.
- There is a medium risk inside and outside MPAs from salmon and shad bycatch.
- There is a medium risk inside the Carmarthen Bay SPA for the common scoter feature from visual and above water noise disturbance from fishing vessels.

Impacts on UK Marine Strategy descriptors

The UKMS provides the framework for delivering clean, healthy, safe, productive, and biologically diverse oceans and seas. It consists of a three-stage framework for achieving

the established GES benchmark in our seas through protecting the marine environment, preventing its deterioration, and restoring it, where practical, while allowing sustainable use of marine resources.

The SNCBs have identified the following risk levels[OBJ] from the primary impacts of FMP fisheries using demersal trawls, static nets and drift nets interacting with UK MS descriptors:

- There is a high risk to D1, D4 cetaceans and D1, D4 seabirds through bycatch from static nets.
- There is a moderate risk to D1, D4 seals through bycatch from static nets.
- There is a high risk to D1, D4 seabirds through bycatch from driftnets.
- There is a moderate risk to D1, D4 cetaceans and D1, D4 seals through bycatch from driftnets.
  There is a moderate risk to D1, D4 cetaceans, D1, D4 seals, D1, D4 seabirds through bycatch from demersal trawls.
- There is a high risk to D1, D6 seafloor integrity from demersal trawls.
- There is a moderate risk to D1, D4 cetaceans, D1, D4 seals, D1, D4 seabirds through reductions in prey.
- There is a moderate risk to D10 marine litter from demersal trawls including (beam trawls, otter trawls, pair bottom trawls) static nets and drift nets.

The FMP will contribute to policies relating to the wider marine environment, in line with the objectives set out by the Act. A range of current monitoring and evidence programmes[7] gather data to inform about the risks of fishing activity to both MPAs and GES descriptors[8] relevant to this FMP.

Climate change

The Climate Change Act 2008 establishes the target to reach net zero by 2050 and impose a legal framework for ensuring the UK adapts to climate risks. The UK policy authorities have different targets relating to climate change and are developing plans to support the drive towards net zero as well as requirements to adapt to climate change and to deliver this using Climate Change Risk Assessment and National Adaptation Programme reporting cycles.

[7] Marine strategy part two: UK marine monitoring programmes - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[8] Introduction to UK Marine Strategy - Marine online assessment tool (cefas.co.uk)

The future of climate impacts in the FMP area not very well understood. Further research on the impact of climate change on the fisheries covered under this FMP will be carried out. However, it is not currently perceived as within scope of this iteration of the FMP to directly deliver mitigation strategies against climate impacts, but it may be within its remit to support fisheries through national transition to low carbon fishing.

The abundance and distribution of marine species are heavily influenced by environmental factors, including sea temperature. Climate projections indicate that northwest European waters are likely to become less suitable for the more traditional commercial fish species, such as cod, haddock and saithe, and more suitable for species which are more widespread in warmer waters, such as sole, thornback ray and undulate ray. By using an adaptive management approach, regulations can help to minimise the impact of these threats to the FMP stocks.

The climate change objective in the Act ensures that future fisheries management policy can, where appropriate, adapt to any future impacts of climate change on the UK fishing industry to support climate adaptive fisheries management. Further research will be required to predict the scale of impacts to the environment and over what timeframe this will be applicable to the FMP area.

FMP vision

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, where possible, stocks are restored to and maintained above biomass levels capable of producing MSY. This includes ongoing adaptive management, in conjunction with delivery partners and wider stakeholders.

The policy goals set out in this FMP suggest how this could be achieved, by:

- using an evidence-based approach to underpin decision-making, which seeks to fill evidence gaps, and revise and review management in light of new evidence
- understanding the impact of FMP fisheries on the wider ecosystem and marine environment
- ensuring the long-term social and economic viability of fisheries
- adapting sustainable fisheries management in light of climate change

FMP policies

The primary aim of FMPs is to develop and implement policies designed to contribute to restoring or maintaining fish stocks above sustainable levels. As part of this, the role of fisheries managers is to help ensure stocks are harvested sustainably, to protect the near and long-term viability of the FMP stocks and the fisheries that prosecute them.

The shared stock fisheries in this FMP can only be managed sustainably in cooperation with the EU and other coastal states. Relevant fisheries authorities will ensure that any action to implement policies in the FMP will comply with the principles and commitments in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. Wherever possible, the policy authorities will seek first to agree coordinated action with the EU to implement any actions resulting from FMP policies. Normally this will be through annual consultations or through the Specialised Committee on Fisheries as appropriate. Where agreement is not possible, the relevant fisheries authorities may use their regulatory autonomy to implement any measures necessary to manage the FMP stocks sustainably in their waters.

As part of implementing the FMP, the relevant fisheries authorities will review the actions with a view to prioritising and scheduling those actions which best deliver the FMP goals within this iteration of the FMP.

High-level approach to the FMP species and stocks

For stocks where the available scientific evidence is sufficient to enable an assessment of the stock's maximum sustainable yield, section 6(3)(a) of the Act requires the FMP to set out policies that maintain or restore (or contribute to maintaining or restoring) those stocks to sustainable levels, aligning with the Act's Precautionary Objective.

The following stocks currently have a spawning stock biomass level below that considered to be capable of supporting MSY/MSY proxy, as assessed by ICES. This FMP proposes development of multi-year recovery plans with outline actions that contribute to restoring biomass levels above MSY for the following stocks:

- pollack (pol.27.67) – see policy goal 1
- cod (cod.27.e–k) – see policy goal 1
- haddock (had.27.7b-k) – see policy goal 1
- whiting (whg.27.7b-ce-k) – see policy goal 1
- plaice (ple.7e and ple.7fg) – see policy goal 2
- nephrops (nep.fu.22) – see policy goal 3

The following stocks are currently above biomass levels capable of supporting MSY (MSY $B_{trigger}$) or at a stock-size index above $I_{trigger}$ (an MSY $B_{trigger}$ proxy) and are fished above F_{MSY} or an F_{MSY} proxy. Therefore, actions for the following stocks also include managing fishing pressure to below F_{MSY} or F_{MSY} proxy in order to maintain sustainable biomass levels (greater than MSY $B_{trigger}$ or MSY $B_{trigger}$ proxy) in the long-term:

Stocks with biomass above MSY $B_{trigger}$, which are being fished at or above F_{MSY}

- sole (sol.27.7e and sol.27.7fg) – see policy goal 2
- undulate ray (rju.27.7de) – see policy goal 5

Stocks with stock-size index above $I_{trigger}$, which are being fished at or above an F_{MSY} proxy

- thornback ray (rjc.27.7afg) – see policy goal 5
- spotted ray (rjm.27.7ae-h) – see policy goal 5

The following stocks are currently above biomass levels capable of supporting MSY (MSY $B_{trigger}$) or at a stock-size index above $I_{trigger}$ (an MSY $B_{trigger}$ proxy) and are fished below F_{MSY} or an F_{MSY} proxy. Therefore, actions for the following stocks also include maintaining fishing pressure below F_{MSY} or F_{MSY} proxy in order to maintain sustainable biomass levels (greater than MSY $B_{trigger}$ or MSY $B_{trigger}$ proxy) in the long-term:

Stocks with biomass above MSY $B_{trigger}$, which are being fished below F_{MSY}

- anglerfishes (mon.27.78abd and ank.27.78abd) – see policy goal 4
- blue ling (bli.27.5b671) – see policy goal 1
- cuckoo ray (rjn.27.678abd) – see policy goal 5
- megrim (meg.27.7b-k8abd) – see policy goal 2
- nephrops (nep.fu.2021) – see policy goal 3

Stocks with stock-size index above $I_{trigger}$, which are being fished below an F_{MSY} proxy

- plaice (ple.27.7h-k) – see policy goal 2
- small-eyed ray (rje.27.7fg) – see policy goal 5

The following stocks are either ICES category 5 or unassessed or provide advice in relation to MSY principles.

For stocks where the available scientific evidence is not sufficient to make an assessment of the stock's maximum sustainable yield, section 6(3)(b)(i) and 6(4) of the Act requires the FMP to specify policies for maintaining or increasing levels of stocks which have been determined using the precautionary approach. In line with section 6(3)(b)(i) of the Act, the FMP sets out policies to maintain or increase the biomass of these stocks. The available scientific evidence is not considered sufficient to enable an MSY assessment of the FMP stocks listed below.

Additionally for stocks where the available scientific evidence is not sufficient to make an assessment of maximum sustainable yield, section 6(3)(b)(ii) of the Act requires the FMP to specify proposed steps for obtaining the scientific evidence necessary to enable an assessment of the stock's maximum sustainable yield to be made (and if no such steps are proposed, to set out the reasons for that).

The FMP will seek to improve the evidence base for these stocks in favour of supporting future assessments, with a view to obtaining sufficient scientific evidence to enable an assessment of MSY for the following stocks. The FMP policies outline the proposed steps for obtaining sufficient evidence to enable an MSY assessment to be made for the following stocks:

- sole (sol.27.7h-k) – see policy goal 2

- blonde ray (rjh.27.7afg and rjh.27.7e) – see policy goal 5
- thornback ray (rjc.27.7e) – see policy goal 5
- small eyed ray (rje.27.7de) – see policy goal 5

If steps are not being proposed to obtain scientific evidence sufficient to enable an assessment of maximum sustainable yield, section 6(3)(b)(iii) of the Act requires the FMP to state the reasons why. The FMP will still seek to improve the evidence base for these stocks in order to support future assessments. The FMP policies outline the reasons why, in this iteration of the FMP, steps are not being proposed at this time to obtain the evidence sufficient to enable an MSY assessment for the following stocks:

Stocks with a precautionary approach and ICES data category 5

- roundnose grenadier (rng.27.5b6712b) – see policy goal 1
- saithe (pok.27.7-10) – see policy goal 1
- four-spot megrim (lbd.27.7b-k8abd) – See policy goal 2
- nephrops (nep.27.7outFU) – see policy goal 3
- sandy ray (rji.27.67) – see policy goal 5
- shagreen ray (rjf.27.67) – see policy goal 5
- red seabream (sbr.27.6-8) – see policy goal 6) – see policy goal 6.

Stocks with a precautionary approach and ICES data category 6

- common skate complex (blue skate and flapper skate) (rjb.67a-ce-k) – see policy goal 5
- white skate (rja.27.nea) – see policy goal 5
- kitefin shark (sck.27.nea) – see policy goal 5
- leafscale gulper shark (guq.27.nea) – see policy goal 5
- Portuguese dogfish (cyo.27.nea) – see policy goal 5

Species and deep water shark genus groups unassessed or occurring in an area outside of a stock unit, therefore with no scientific advice from ICES or otherwise in relation to the FMP area

- blonde ray ICES division 7h – see policy goal 5
- thornback ray ICES division 7h – see policy goal 5
- small eyed ray ICES division 7h – see policy goal 5
- undulate ray ICES division 7fgh – see policy goal 5
- long-nosed skate – see policy goal 5
- deep water catsharks – see policy goal 5
- frilled shark – see policy goal 5
- gulper sharks – see policy goal 5
- longnose velvet dogfish – see policy goal 5
- black dogfish – see policy goal 5
- birdbeak dogfish – see policy goal 5
- great lanternshark – see policy goal 5

- velvet belly lanternshark – see policy goal 5
- mouse catshark – see policy goal 5
- bluntnose six-gill shark– see policy goal 5
- sailfin roughshark– see policy goal 5
- knifetooth dogfish – see policy goal 5
- Greenland shark– see policy goal 5

To note, for the prohibited species described in the fisheries management section the FMP proposes no further management of these during this iteration.

Policy goal 1: development of multi-year recovery plans for FMP gadoid stocks

Policy rationale

Pollack, cod, haddock, and whiting

In line with section 6(3)(a) of the Act, this policy aims to contribute to restoring pollack (pol.27.67), cod (cod.27.e–k), haddock (had.27.7b-k) and whiting (whg.27.7b-ce-k) spawning stock biomass to sustainable levels (above MSY $B_{trigger}$) and ensure fishing mortality is set at levels which should restore stocks to levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield. To achieve this the FMP aims to deliver comprehensive multi-year recovery plans to manage fishing pressures at a level suitable to enable stock recovery, including the identification of harvest control rules (HCRs) for bycatch quotas. This will take place alongside ongoing work towards implementing discard reduction schemes and the increased adoption of more selective gear in fisheries that bycatch these gadoids. Recovery efforts will require additional evidence gathering and international cooperation.

Gadoids (primarily haddock, whiting, pollack and cod) are, or have been, commercially important stocks to UK and EU fishers in the last 12 years. Opportunities to land these stocks have reduced considerably over this timeframe, notably impacting the quantity and value of annual landings. These are prosecuted by commercial fishers in mixed fisheries and are primarily landed by demersal trawls. There are also targeted gillnet and rod and line fisheries for these gadoids. Pollack and whiting are also species of particular recreational fishing interest. See Description of fisheries section for more details.

In addition, the FMP sets out steps to support the continued restoration of pollack stocks through short-term targeted actions, which will run in parallel to the multi-year gadoid recovery plans. Pollack has been prioritised with immediate to short-term actions in order to address current concerns centred on the stock and prospects for the fishery.

Roundnose grenadier, saithe and blue ling

In line with section 6(3)(b) of the Act, this policy aims to maintain stock levels through continued sustainable management for roundnose grenadier (rng.27.5b6712b) and saithe (pok.27.7-10). The FMP does not propose steps to obtain the evidence to enable an MSY assessment for these stocks as such assessments are not appropriate during this iteration of the FMP for the following reasons:

- limited interest in the exploitation of these stocks with relatively low landings (roundnose grenadier: averaged 0.95t; saithe: averaged 37.78t; per year from 2019-2023) of these stocks recorded in the FMP area,
- the FMP area is too shallow to catch deep water species such as roundnose grenadier – therefore due to depth distribution, catches of these species are very unlikely in the FMP area, both by commercial vessels and fishery independent surveys.
- for saithe, sampling levels are low. As no recruitment was observed for saithe within the wider area 7-10, age or length-based assessments are considered inappropriate.

The FMP will however 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. The FMP will remain responsive to any emerging interest in the fishery or broader change in stock condition through strengthened evidence gathering and continued monitoring.

No specific measures are proposed for roundnose grenadier or saithe during this iteration. For roundnose grenadier, this is because the ban on deep water fishing (below 800m depth) in 2016 significantly limited fishing opportunities on this stock, meaning fishing pressure has since been very low. For saithe, we will continue to work with the EU to set TAC as recommended by ICES, through annual negotiations.

For blue ling, in line with section 6(3)(a) of the Act, this policy aims to ensure fishing mortality is set at levels below F_{MSY} which should restore or maintain stocks to levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield.

No specific measures are proposed for blue ling during this iteration. The FMP will review measures on gadoids for alignment with the Northern Shelf Hake FMP where appropriate.

Actions to help achieve this policy goal: short term (0-2 years)

Pollack, cod, haddock, and whiting

The actions proposed below should aid stock recovery through management and strengthened evidence gathering, balance commercial and recreational fishing interests in the stock, in favour of harmonising long-term sustainable management and exploitation

based around stock restoration. These actions are contingent on EU engagement and cooperation.

Action 1.1: Develop a multi-year recovery plan for cod, whiting and haddock stocks

Work with EU to request from ICES a mixed fishery rebuilding plan for the recovery of cod, whiting and haddock. This mutually agreed plan, evaluated by ICES, would set out the HCRs of these stocks to reduce fishing pressure on them to below F_{MSY} in the short term and allow them to rebuild eventually to above MSY $B_{trigger}$ in the medium to long term. This plan should set out catch limits on other stocks caught in the mixed fishery which would allow fishing pressure on these three stocks to be reduced below F_{MSY}. The plan may also set out technical measures for the different fisheries which could be implemented to further reduce fishing pressure on these three stocks, such as changes to gear configuration, move on rules or fishery closure recovery periods.

Action 1.2: Develop a multi-year recovery plan for pollack

The FMP recommends a separate recovery plan for pollack following reasons:

- pollack is biologically distinct to the other three species, preferring coastal and offshore rocky areas, inshore reefs and wrecks for spawning, making it desirable for targeted commercial and recreational fisheries. Its management needs are thought to be sufficiently distinct to benefit from a dedicated recovery plan to justify short-term measures aligned with 2026 ICES stock recovery advice
- pollack is a socially and economically important to UK commercial and recreational fisheries. Given management complexities, governmental stock recovery focus and the stakeholder support for the proposed FMP actions a targeted recovery plan is warranted

Work with EU to request from ICES a rebuilding plan for the recovery of pollack. This mutually agreed plan, evaluated by ICES, would set out the HCRs of this stock to maintain fishing pressure below F_{MSY} in the short term and allow it to rebuild eventually to above MSY $B_{trigger}$ in the medium to long term.

As part of the multi-year recovery plan for pollack, the following measures aimed at addressing the immediate management concerns will be considered in the short term, informed by the latest ICES advice:

- Consider evidence led approaches to commercial, recreational and non-powered vessel management. Explore a range of measures that could be introduced in part or in their entirety. Gather evidence on the effectiveness of these measures and consider whether they should be made mandatory. This may include, but is not limited to:
    - Increase protection for pollack spawning and nursery habitats, by exploring spatial and temporal closures to known pollack spawning and nursery grounds and potential for move-on rules for recreational and commercial fishers.

- Explore overlap, alignment and potential benefits of bass management, such as closed season measures.
- Supported by robust evidence, increase the MCRS of pollack from the current 30cm to an appropriate level, applicable to recreational and commercial fishers. Consult on the impact of sizes recommended through FMP development:
    a) 35cm (commercially supported - size at 50% maturity),
    b) 42cm (commercially supported, equivalent to the MCRS of bass and a size of fish box)
    c) 50cm (Angling Trust and Professional Boatman's Association voluntary recreational MCRS in the Pollack Pact - Pollack FISP Non-Technical Summary).
- Education and engagement programme on current regulations and best practice for strengthening pollack survival and evidence gathering. If and where appropriate, mandate the use of descending devices to reduce post-release mortality
- Reporting and evidence gathering on catches from charter vessels and commercial non-powered vessels (10 metres and under, without engines).
- Seek to ensure regulations apply to all those fishing for pollack fairly and effectively.
- Explore alignment and join-up with the existing bass management group if considered an appropriate forum, for collaboratively managing pollack commercial and recreational fishers.

- Consider further action which can be taken to strengthen evidence gathering and reduce pollack bycatch and discarding in FMP fisheries.
- Best practice guidelines will be made available to support survivorship of returned pollack, these may be extrapolated to guidance for methods and action when fishing at certain depths. The application, uptake and effectiveness of these guidelines will be assessed in the short term for potential further development in the medium term.

These measures will be explored in line with fishing opportunities for pollack delivered against the multi-year recovery plan and assessed against the health of the stock.

Roundnose grenadier, saithe and blue ling

Action 1.3: Continue to determine fishing opportunities informed by the best available scientific advice.
Action 1.4: Continue to work with Coastal State partners in accordance with the policies in the JFS including the Principles of International Fisheries Negotiations with the aim of maintaining the sustainable harvesting of the stock through international negotiations.

The FMP does not propose the introduction of any precautionary management on these stocks at this time. However, should concerns be identified during the delivery of the FMP, precautionary measures will be considered where appropriate.

Actions to help achieve this policy goal: medium to long term

The FMP proposes the following medium to long-term actions to be considered for inclusion in the 2 gadoid recovery plans (developed in the short-term):

Action 1.5: The effectiveness of this recovery plan should be evaluated and the recovery of the three stocks monitored for progress.

If the recovery plan is not achieving its aims for these three stocks, then alternative methods for their ongoing management should be considered (non-quota). The long-term effectiveness of the recovery plan should be evaluated regularly for fine tuning. This would involve reassessing the effectiveness of implemented tech measures and adjusting fishing pressures between different stocks in the mixed fishery as the depleted stocks recover.

Action 1.6: Implement technical measures and HCR identified in the development of the multi-year recovery plans.

Supplement the delivery of these through national policies such as:

- with discard management reforms in England, by improving catch accounting, updating discard exemptions and looking at ways to reduce discards of these stocks.

Incentivising the uptake of REM, in line with Defra programme timelines for English waters, to strengthen evidence on stock health, assess the effectiveness of technical conservation measures, and contribute to full catch documentation. See Goal 7 which expands on this further. Given the mixed and multi-species nature of Celtic Sea demersal fisheries, the above actions should seek at all times to coordinate with and integrate into wider national and international ambitions to deliver a mixed-fishery and ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management. Further detail is provided in Policies 7 and 8 of this FMP.

Evidence and research needed to support this policy goal: ongoing

Action 1.7: Build cross species evidence.

In addition to the specific actions outlined above for the stock recovery plans, the FMP will contribute to building evidence aimed at informing management measures in the recovery plans, through:

Management measure development

- Catalogue current and emerging initiatives and government policy relating to gadoid management. Applying outputs to ensure informed, coordinated decision-making across recovery efforts.

- Undertake a review of global management examples (e.g., US gadoid FMPs) to identify best practices for multi-year recovery planning.

Recruitment and spawning research

- Investigate environmental and biological inhibitors of stock recruitment and spawning success.
- Improve understanding of spawning and nursery grounds, including key environmental requirements.
- Model potential future recruitment scenarios required to enable stock recovery.
- Assess the influence of climate-driven changes on recruitment rates and habitat suitability.

Habitat and ecosystem health

- Assess essential fish habitats and nursery areas, adjusting cod recovery boxes where supported by evidence.
- Explore measures to protect these habitats from climate change and other marine pressures.
- Explore how to enhance gadoid stock health through improvements in ecosystem condition.

Scenario Planning and Risk Analysis

- Model and assess alternative recovery scenarios, including choke risks and effects on other fisheries.
- Evaluate cost-benefit trade-offs of different recovery approaches to inform management options.

Pollack-Specific Evidence Building

The below evidence needs will directly support the delivery and evaluation of short-term actions for pollack. Conducted through collaboration with commercial fishers, and with the recreational fishing sector to develop evidence-led management measures.

Technical Measures and Gear Trials

- Explore mesh size adjustments for demersal trawls and gillnets.
- Consider trials for innovative gear approaches, such as:
    - Minimum hook sizes for commercial pole-and-line, recreational, and charter vessels.
    - Descending devices to improve post-release survival rates.

Survival and Recovery Monitoring

- Measure recovery rates of pollack returned using descending devices at varying depths.
- Compare recovery percentages against depth/time parameters to inform guidance.

Roundnose grenadier and saithe

The FMP will put in place steps to strengthen evidence for roundnose grenadier and saithe to allow for options for potential fisheries management in future iterations of the FMP to consider further actions for these stocks. This will include:

- roundnose grenadier – a plan for building evidence on this stock will be delivered in the medium to long-term. The FMP will then review the feasibility of requesting ICES to conduct a benchmark assessment of the stock in future iterations of this plan.
- saithe – a plan for building evidence on this stock in the medium to long-term. The FMP will establish steps to improve evidence in line with improving this assessment in the medium term and implement monitor fishery uptake against a potential future TAC which is being considered by the specialised committee (SCF) on fisheries.[9]

Relevant Fisheries Act 2020 objectives

The relevant Act objectives are:

- bycatch objective
- sustainability objective
- precautionary objective
- scientific evidence objective
- ecosystem objective

Policy goal 2: harvest flatfish stocks sustainably, with biomasses maintained above the level capable of producing MSY

Policy rationale

The aim of this policy is to develop a roadmap to contribute to the long-term sustainable management of FMP flatfish stocks. Sustainable management of these stocks will continue to determine fishing opportunities informed by the best available scientific advice.

In line with section 6(3)(a) of the Act, this policy aims to restore plaice (ple.7e and ple.7fg) spawning stock biomass to sustainable levels (above MSY $B_{trigger}$) and to contribute to maintaining FMP fishing mortality to below F_{MSY}. To achieve this the FMP proposes the

[9] Benchmark workshop on selected haddock and saithe stocks (WKBGAD)

development of a comprehensive multi-year recovery plan to manage fishing pressure at a level that will support stock recovery.

In line with section 6(3)(a) of the Act, this policy aims to contribute to maintaining FMP fishing mortality for plaice (ple.27.7h-k) below F_{MSY} proxy and maintain spawning stock biomass at sustainable levels (above $I_{trigger}$). This will be achieved through the development of a long-term management plan for flatfish, with the aim to strengthen the evidence base for plaice.

In line with section 6(3)(a) of the Act, this policy aims to contribute to reducing fishing mortality for sole (sol.27.7e and sol.27.7fg) to below F_{MSY} and maintain spawning stock biomass at sustainable levels (above MSY $B_{trigger}$). This will be achieved through the development of a long-term management plan for flatfish.

In line with section 6(3)(a) of the Act, this policy aims to contribute to maintaining FMP fishing mortality of megrim (meg.27.7b-k8abd) below F_{MSY} and maintain spawning stock biomass at sustainable levels (above MSY $B_{trigger}$). This will be achieved through the development of a long-term management plan for flatfish.

In line with section 6(3)(b) of the Act, this policy aims to maintain stock levels through continued sustainable management of sole (sol.27.7h-k). This will be achieved through the development of a long-term management plan for flatfish. The FMP will strengthen evidence gathering with the aim of pursuing an MSY assessment for sole 7h-k. The steps for achieving this are outlined in the actions.

In line with section 6(3)(b) of the Act, this policy aims to maintain stock levels through continued sustainable management of four-spot megrim (lbd.27.7b-k8abd). This will be achieved through the development of a long-term management plan for flatfish. The FMP does not propose steps to obtain the evidence to enable an MSY assessment for these stocks for the following reasons:

- very few landings (0.06t; per year from 2019 to 2023) of this stock are recorded in the FMP area, though noting four-spot megrim reporting is mostly under a shared megrims code,
- the FMP area comprises a very small proportion of the total stock area, therefore, the FMP has a limited ability to influence stock health,
- limited interest in the exploitation of these stocks by fishers raised during engagement.
- insufficient species-specific recording of landings under the group TAC to base assessment on,
- data gaps are considered too large to address during the timeframe of this iteration.

However, 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. The FMP will remain responsive to any emerging interest in the fishery or

broader change in stock condition through strengthened evidence gathering and continued monitoring.

The landed value of flatfish has increased in the FMP area over the last decade, from a value of £24.15 million in 2013 to approximately £43 million in 2023. Sole is a cornerstone of the FMP fisheries, with approximately £251 million of sole being landed in the FMP area over this timeframe; see fisheries description section for details. The commercial fishing industry showed a strong desire to ensure that sole remains a sustainable and viable fishery into the future.

Sole and plaice are commonly caught commercially in the FMP mixed fisheries; typically, plaice are taken as bycatch in beam trawls targeting sole[10], which generates high discards of plaice. Given these stocks are typically caught in the same area, management decisions for one species must consider the impact on the other. The long-term management strategy for flatfish will consider how to balance sustainable sole landings against the need to restore the plaice stocks.

The FMP will review measures on flatfish for alignment with the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel flatfish FMP and Channel demersal NQS FMP where appropriate.

Actions to help achieve this policy goal: short term

Action 2.1: Develop a multi-year recovery plan for plaice ple.7e and ple.7fg.

Work with EU to request from ICES a rebuilding plan for the recovery of plaice ple.7e and ple.7fg. This mutually agreed plan, evaluated by ICES, would set out the HCRs of these stocks to maintain fishing pressure below F_{MSY} in the short term and allow it to rebuild eventually to above MSY $B_{trigger}$ in the medium to long term.

In cooperation with the EU, set out a roadmap for further evidence gathering in order to address known plaice 7e and 7fg evidence gaps as identified by ICES, such as a quantitative mixed fisheries analysis. This action is contingent on EU engagement and cooperation.

Action 2.2: Develop a long-term management plan for flatfish.

Sustainable management will be achieved through the continuation of current management and the development of a long-term management plan for flatfish. This may include:

[10] frontcover7ek; Frontiers | Trends in the abundance of Celtic Sea demersal fish: Identifying the relative importance of fishing and environmental drivers

- Assess the effectiveness of existing MCRS in line with appropriate technical measures for all flatfish.
- Explore what measures can be taken to reduce plaice discard rates and discard survivorship.
- Assess the effectiveness of the SRZ in 7e to inform medium to long-term management decisions.
- Exploring the merits of single area licences or other measures to address issues arising from sole misreporting.
- Exploring the merits of targeted scientific REM projects for gathering evidence on sole, plaice and megrim landings in support of the long-term management strategy, strengthening plaice stock data and improving species-specific reporting.
- To better understand and protect essential fish habitats such as spawning and nursery areas, with a focus on conservation areas beneficial to plaice stock restoration.
- Designing evidence-led medium-long term measures informed by the strengthened evidence base developed through outputs from genetic connectivity research on sole 7hjk and Sole 7e.
- To strengthen evidence gathering and species-specific reporting for caught megrims – in support of exploring medium-long term ambition of evaluating the megrim TAC. Support measures to address discarding of unwanted four-spot megrim catches.

Actions to help achieve this policy goal: medium to long term

Action 2.3: Consider evaluating sole and plaice fishery interactions.

Consider measures to reduce the impacts on plaice stocks in the sole fishery, aiming to contribute recovering plaice stocks to sustainable levels. Deliver actions on reducing the impact of sole fisheries on plaice stocks, including further evidence gathering actions for flatfish management in the long-term.

Action 2.4: With sufficient supporting evidence, consider exploring the separation of the megrim TAC.

Action 2.5: Improve stock assessment for plaice 7hjk.

Evidence and research needed to support this policy goal: ongoing

Action 2.6: Strengthen the evidence base in support of a stock assessment.

- Steps for strengthening the evidence base in support of a stock assessment of sole 7hjk:
    - In line with the ICES advice, support development of reliable information on younger fish, fishery-independent indices, and strengthen sampling of age and length data in Division 7h.

    - Cooperate with the EU in closing these evidence gaps, in support of commissioning a future ICES assessment of this stock.
    - Work is currently being undertaken through the SCF to inform and support improved stock assessments for sole 7h-k. The outcomes of this research may support future conversations around stock realignment; therefore, management of the FMP will need to take these possible outcomes into consideration.
- Support the ICES benchmark process of the plaice stock in 7fg through evidence gathering. Aim to undertake a category 1 assessment for the stock which will require closing identified plaice 7fg evidence gaps, such as insufficient and inconsistent age data, incomplete discard sampling, and limited survey coverage.
- Gathering and strengthening evidence on essential fish habitats and nursery areas for flatfish. Evaluating the effectiveness of existing recovery boxes for plaice as a measure to support stock recovery. Exploring what measures and actions may need to be taken to protect these areas from anthropogenic pressures. Explore how plaice stock health and resilience can be strengthened through improving broader ecosystem health.
- Improving the evidence base by exploring the merits of separating out the Megrim grouped TAC.

Relevant Fisheries Act 2020 objectives

- Bycatch objective
- Sustainability objective
- Precautionary objective
- Scientific objectives
- Ecosystem objective

Policy goal 3: harvest nephrops stocks sustainably and manage nephrops bycatch

Policy rationale

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. Sustainable management of these stocks will continue to determine fishing opportunities informed by the best available scientific advice.

In line with section 6(3)(a) of the Act, this policy aims to restore the nep.fu.22 spawning stock biomass to sustainable levels (above MSY $B_{trigger}$). To achieve this the FMP aims to develop a comprehensive multi-year recovery plan to manage fishing pressures at a level suitable for enabling stock recovery.

In line with section 6(3)(a) of the Act, this policy aims to contribute to maintaining stock levels which will result in fishing mortality for nep.fu.2021 below F_{MSY} and maintain spawning stock biomass at sustainable levels (above MSY $B_{trigger}$). This will be achieved through exploring functional unit management and development of HCRs.

In line with section 6(3)(b) of the Act, this policy aims to maintain stock levels through continued sustainable management of nephrops (nep.27.7outFU). The FMP does not propose steps to obtain the evidence to enable an MSY assessment for these stocks as such assessments are not appropriate during this iteration of the FMP for the following reasons:

- nephrops (nep.27.7outFU) are considered to be outside of established functional units and not a specific stock. These landings are suspected to be part of existing functional units.

The FMP will seek to contribute to the evidence base by assessing these landings and assessing whether recommendations to existing functional unit boundaries are required.

This policy aims to further conversations on functional unit level management as recommended by ICES, reduce bycatch of FMP recovery stocks caught in nephrops fisheries, integrate management with experiences gained in the North Sea nephrops discard reduction scheme and work collaboratively with industry to define the challenges in improving gear selectivity.

There are various options around FU management, including full TAC management at FU level (with TAC levels varying between FU area and responsive to stock health), or using a technical measure 'toolbox' approach, whereby a pre-determined set of measures – deemed to be appropriate for the fishery in question – are triggered by stocks reaching agreed reference points. Developing a harvest strategy which is related to stock level reference points (e.g. MSY $B_{trigger}$) could allow for more agile management of the fishery by enacting measures only when scientific evidence suggests that action needs to be taken to maintain or improve stocks in a specific area.

Nephrops are caught as part of a mixed fishery with demersal fish and result in bycatch of FMP recovery stocks. Therefore, the FMP has identified actions to evidence and improve understanding of the impacts on FMP recovery stocks and consider appropriate mitigative measures.

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. Management interventions would therefore need to consider the specific needs of local fisheries that are more dependent on particular FUs, as well as transient vessels. A balance is required between socio-economic considerations and wider environmental goals for managing nephrops fisheries.

Actions to help achieve this policy goal: short term

Action 3.1: Develop a multi-year recovery plan for nep.fu.22.

Work with EU to request from ICES a mixed fishery rebuilding plan for the recovery for nephrops fu.22. This mutually agreed plan, evaluated by ICES, would set out the HCRs of these stocks to reduce fishing pressure to below F_{MSY} in the short term and allow them to rebuild to above MSY $B_{trigger}$ in the medium to long term. These actions are contingent on EU engagement and cooperation.

Functional unit management

Action 3.2 Undertake an in-depth options appraisal for FU management of nephrops.

Exploring available options for management (for instance, limiting effort, building on lessons learnt from North Sea nephrops trials on discard reduction schemes), opportunities, impacts, consequences and cost/benefit analysis.

Action 3.3: Develop appropriate harvest strategies for each FU.

Do so alongside a toolbox of suitable measures which could be adapted to each FU and which would be available for use in a stock depletion / collapse scenario.

Action 3.4: Evaluate evidence of catches from nep.27.7outFU.

Review reporting accuracy for catches outside functional units 20-22, and if appropriate request ICES review existing functional unit boundaries.

Bycatch management

Action 3.5: Gather evidence on FMP species bycatch within the nephrops fishery.

In particular, strengthen monitoring and reporting of bycatch in nephrops fisheries, with a particular interest in gathering data on catches of FMP recovery species (cod, haddock, whiting, pollack and plaice) and introduce management to reduce unwanted bycatch. Consider if appropriate:

- increasing the minimum catch composition classifying a targeted nephrops fishery to prevent exploitation of other bycaught stocks, in addition to exploring and assessing the effectiveness of selectivity measures for reducing unwanted bycatch of recovery stocks in nephrops fisheries.
- review the current management for nephrops, and if appropriate, consider supporting a shift to alternative management approaches, such as effort limitation and building on lessons learned from the North Sea nephrops trials on discard reduction.

Action 3.6: Apply experience learned from the discard reduction scheme in the North Sea nephrops fishery.

Focus discards reforms and reduce unwanted bycatch by encouraging selective fishing practices and identifying the barriers to taking up more selective gears.

Action 3.7: Establish ways to work collaboratively with industry.

Do so to understand issues within the nephrops fisheries and ensure the sustainable management of recovery stocks in the long-term.

Actions to help achieve this policy goal: medium to long term

Action 3.8: Develop and implement HCRs for each functional unit.

Based on the outcomes of short-term actions progressing functional unit management and the recovery plan for fu.22, develop and implement HCRs for each functional unit to sustainably manage fishing pressures on the stocks.

Action 3.9: Continued monitoring and evidence gathering in nep.27.7outFU.

Do so to build on the evidence of catches outside of the Celtic Sea functional units. Evaluate whether these catches are a consequence of misreporting or, if appropriate, consider a request to ICES for an evaluation of the current functional unit geographical boundaries.

Action 3.10: Consider supporting the introduction of REM to demersal trawlers.

Also consider if nephrops vessels would benefit from tailored monitoring objectives.

Relevant Fisheries Act 2020 objectives

- bycatch objective
- sustainability objective
- precautionary objective
- scientific evidence objective
- ecosystem objective

Policy goal 4: harvest anglerfish stocks sustainably, with biomasses maintained above the level capable of producing MSY

Policy rationale

The aim of this policy is to contribute to sustainable management and exploitation of anglerfish stocks. Sustainable management of these stocks will continue to determine fishing opportunities informed by the best available scientific advice.

In line with section 6(3)(a) of the Act, this policy aims to contribute to maintaining stock levels and fishing mortality for anglerfishes (mon.27.78abd and ank.27.78abd) to below F_{MSY} and maintaining spawning stock biomass at sustainable levels (above MSY $B_{trigger}$).

This policy goal also aims 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 metres 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. See Fisheries Description section for details.

Anglerfish are a jointly managed stock with quota opportunities currently determined through the bilateral negotiations between the UK and the EU. They are also included in the Western Waters MAP, which sets out objectives of restoring and maintaining populations above levels which can produce MSY, contribute to the elimination of discarding, and implement an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management.

Currently, commercial landings of anglerfish are recorded under a joint species landing code (anglerfishes nei). They are managed as a combined species TAC encompassing both monkfish and anglerfish. The use of combined species TACs prevents the effective management of each stock and can lead to overexploitation. Consequently, the FMP suggests actions to improve species-specific recording and move towards single-species TACs. It should be noted that the EU record anglerfish catches under ANK (black-bellied anglerfish) and MON (white anglerfish).

Actions to help achieve this policy goal: short term

Action 4.1: Improve on species-specific reporting of anglerfish, production and distribution of ID guides and fisher education.

Action 4.2: Consider how to support and enable fishing opportunities for anglerfishes in a mixed fishery setting, whilst managing sustainable landings of FMP recovery stocks.

Actions to help achieve this policy goal: medium to long term

Action 4.3: As part of the international approach, work with ICES and Coastal States partners towards agreeing a long-term management approach for anglerfish.

Action 4.4: Collaborate with the EU to discuss and consider the benefits and risks associated with species-specific TACs.

Action 4.5: Consider actions domestically to avoid over exploitation of Anglerfish this may include considering separating out the Monkfish and Anglerfish Group TAC.

Relevant Fisheries Act 2020 objectives

- Sustainability objective
- Precautionary objective
- Scientific objectives
- Ecosystem objective

Policy goal 5: Manage elasmobranch fisheries sustainably and manage bycatch

Policy rationale

The aim of this policy goal is to maintain elasmobranch 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 and species. Sustainable management of these stocks will continue to include determining fishing opportunities informed by the best available scientific advice.

Skates and rays

Stocks covered by the North Sea and English Channel Skates and Rays FMP

This FMP has developed actions that will be aligned, during delivery, with the North Sea and English Channel Skates and Rays FMP because they cover overlapping species, shared stocks, and geographic areas. This joint management helps avoid excessive burdens, improve reporting, and reflect stakeholders' preference for simpler, unified rules across boundaries.

In line with section 6(3)(a) of the Act, this policy aims to contribute to maintaining stock levels which will result in reducing fishing mortality for thornback ray (rjc.27.7afg) and spotted ray (rjm.27.7ae-h) below F_{MSY} proxy and maintaining spawning stock biomass at sustainable levels (above $I_{trigger}$).

In line with section 6(3)(a) of the Act, this policy aims to contribute to maintaining stock levels which will result in maintaining fishing mortality of cuckoo ray (rjn.27.678abd) and undulate ray (rju.27.7de) below F_{MSY} and maintain spawning stock biomass at sustainable levels (above MSY $B_{trigger}$).

In line with section 6(3)(a) of the Act, this policy aims to contribute to maintaining fishing mortality of small-eyed ray (rje.27.7fg) below F_{MSY} proxy and maintain spawning stock biomass at sustainable levels (above $I_{trigger}$).

In line with section 6(3)(b) of the Act, this policy aims to maintain stock levels through continued sustainable management of the stocks set out below. This will be achieved through precautionary management. The FMP will strengthen evidence gathering with the aim to improve datasets to support an MSY assessment for the following assessed stocks:

- blonde ray (rjh.27.7afg and rjh.27.7e)
- thornback ray (rjc.27.7e)
- small eyed ray (rje.27.7de)

Stocks not covered by the North Sea and English Channel Skates and Rays FMP

In line with section 6(3)(b) of the Act, this policy aims to maintain stock levels through continued sustainable management of the sandy ray (rji.27.67) and shagreen ray (rjf.27.67). We recommend MSY assessments for these assessed stocks are not appropriate during this iteration of the FMP. There are not enough landings of this species/stock to generate the data to make an MSY assessment. It is also noted that the parts of the FMP spatial area in which they can occur is a relatively small proportion of the range of the assessment unit.

In line with section 6(3)(b) of the Act, this policy aims to maintain stock levels through continued sustainable management of long-nosed skate stocks. The FMP does not propose steps to obtain the evidence to enable an MSY assessment for these stocks as such assessments are not appropriate during this iteration of the FMP because much of the stock range outside the FMP spatial area due to depth distribution.

In line with section 6(3)(b) of the Act, this policy aims to maintain stock levels through continued sustainable management of blue, flapper and white skate stocks. These are currently prohibited species, therefore cannot be targeted, caught and landed. Further management is not required to maintain the stock.

Skates and rays are valued across both the recreational and commercial sectors in the UK, with catch-and-release practices commonly being observed among recreational anglers. Commercially, skates and rays are also prominent, with UK and EU vessels landing a total of 36,626 t of skates and rays within the FMP area, with a value of £61.13 million between 2013 and 2023. Notably, several species, such as small-eyed ray, blonde ray, cuckoo ray, undulate ray, shagreen ray, and sandy ray, had over 50% of their total landings originating from the FMP area, highlighting its significance for these stocks.

Currently, the majority of skates and rays species within this FMP are managed under a combined (multi-species) TAC. However, the scientific advice notes that the current group TAC management of skates and rays prevents effective control of single stock exploitation rates. In line with the Southern North Sea and Channel skates and rays FMP, this FMP has identified actions directed towards identifying improvements to the current group TAC management, exploring alternatives for the associated species.

This policy goal seeks to contribute to improving understanding of these stocks and support future management. Management opportunities may include, but are not limited to, the consideration of length-based management approaches, voluntary guidelines, and spatial or temporal measures to promote population growth. Fisheries management will remain responsive to any emerging interest in the fishery or broader change in stock condition through strengthened evidence gathering and continued monitoring.

Actions to help achieve this policy goal

Actions for the following stocks: thornback ray (rjc.27.7afg) spotted ray (rjm.27.7ae-h) cuckoo ray (rjn.27.678abd), undulate ray (rju.27.7de) and small-eyed ray (rje.27.7fg) will be in line with the Southern North Sea and English Channel Skates and Rays FMP (including Policy goal 1: Harvest stocks of blonde ray (in 4b, 4c and 7d), cuckoo ray, spotted ray, thornback ray (in subarea 4, 3a and 7d) and undulate ray sustainably, with biomasses maintained above the level capable of producing MSY) and may include the following:

Action 5.1: Continue to seek to set TACs and determine fishing opportunities based on the best available scientific advice.

Action 5.2: Continue to work with the EU in accordance with the policies in the JFS including the Principles of International Fisheries Negotiations with the aim of agreeing TACs to maintain the sustainable harvesting of the stocks through international negotiations.

Action 5.3: Continue to work with the EU on existing joint commitments, in particular the existing Written Record commitment on exploring alternatives to the current group TAC management that is on-going through the SCF, this covers all jointly managed group TACs, which include the FMP stocks.

Actions for the following stocks: thornback ray (rjc.27.7e), blonde ray (rjh.27.7afg and rjh.27.7e), small-eyed ray (rje.27.7de), sandy ray (rji.27.67) and shagreen ray (rjf.27.67) will be in line with the Southern North Sea and English Channel Skates and Rays FMP. These actions also apply to long nosed skate.

If determined to be appropriate, these measures would aim to provide protection primarily for the data-limited stocks. Where there are benefits to doing so, certain management measures will be considered more widely across all FMP stocks. There is an existing UK-EU commitment on alternative approaches to the current group TAC management, whilst this commitment covers all stocks that are currently managed by a group TAC, this could provide particular benefit to the data-limited stocks. These may include the following:

Action 5.4: Continue current management for these stocks. (ongoing)

Action 5.5: Consider alternative approaches to the current group total allowable catches by gathering evidence required to support the on-going joint work with the UK and EU to identify improvements to the current group TAC management. (short/medium term)

Action 5.5: Consider the implementation of minimum conservation reference sizes (MCRS) to provide protection to juvenile skates and rays allowing more to reach maturity and reproduce, positively promoting population growth and therefore increasing stock levels. (medium/long term)

Action 5.6: Consider the implementation of a maximum conservation reference size to protect both immature fish and the most fecund part of the stock. (medium/long term)

Action 5.7: Introduce voluntary guidelines to improve handling and identification of the FMP stocks in order to improve survivability, species-specific reporting and evidence gathering and support compliance with management and regulation. (short/medium term)

Action 5.8: Explore and, where appropriate, implement spatial and temporal closures to protect essential habitats for skate and ray species; protect breeding and juvenile aggregations of skates and rays, allow more to reach maturity and reproduce, increase the level of the stocks. (medium/long term)

Actions to enable an assessment of MSY for the blonde ray (rjh.27.7afg and rjh.27.7e), thornback ray (rjc.27.7e) and small eyed ray (rje.27.7de) stocks will be in line with the Southern North Sea and English Channel Skates and Rays FMP and may include the following:

Action 5.9: Explore and prioritise management and evidence gathering to contribute to improving the assessment of blonde ray in 7afg, thornback ray in 7e, blonde ray in 7e and small-eyed ray in 7e, this includes the continuation of the small-eyed ray 7e sentinel fishery ahead of future potential precautionary reopening, as per the UK-EU joint commitment. This will require resource from ICES and so improvement in any future assessment will be contingent on that (short-medium/long term)

Action 5.10: Consider the catch per unit effort for the under 10m fleet using iVMS data to support implementation of effort data into fishing records (short-medium/long term)

Action 5.11: Update and distribute skate and ray handling, regulatory and identification guidelines to commercial and recreational fishers to help improve data collection of these species as well as survivability (short-medium/long term)

Action 5.12: Seek to ensure gathered data supports the implementation of MSY or a suitable proxy for all skate and ray stocks (medium/long-term)

Action 5.13: Seek to manage catches so fishing effort remains below MSY or MSY proxy (medium/long-term)

In addition, the FMP will seek to contribute to the evidence base to better understand all skate and ray species in the FMP area to help inform future management decisions, setting out steps to strengthen the evidence base. The FMP will remain responsive to any emerging interest in the fishery or broader change in stock condition through strengthened evidence gathering and continued monitoring. Other evidence-related actions will be in line with the Southern North Sea and English Channel Skates and Rays FMP and may include the following:

Action 5.14: Building on the supporting evidence statement that will be published alongside the final FMP, this document will be regularly updated to establish what evidence is required to meet the wider goals of the FMP as well as any further policy or legislative objectives. Identify how current data channels can be adapted or improved to meet evidence gaps and prioritise evidence gaps based on current evidence baselines and evidence needs.

Action 5.15: Where necessary, establish new data collection channels to close evidence gaps. Investigate opportunities to gather non-traditional or novel sources of data to complement this, including using new technologies. Explore methods to consolidate new data with existing data in a single platform.

Action 5.16: Consider the establishment of a skates and rays management group or another similar forum, which may develop over time to allow for continued engagement in ongoing management of skate and ray fisheries. This is in line with policy goal 7 of the Southern North Sea and English Channel Skates and Rays FMP (*Policy goal 7: Develop partnership working to build capacity for industry to be able to input into matters affecting skate and ray fisheries management*).

Deep water sharks

All of the deep-water sharks in this FMP are data poor and there is not sufficient available evidence to enable an assessment of MSY. Therefore, in line with section 6(3)(b) of the Act, this FMP requires policies to maintain or increase stock levels. All deep-water sharks in the scope of this FMP are currently prohibited species [11], therefore these cannot be targeted, caught and landed.[12] Given that these species are prohibited, we do not propose precautionary management to maintain the stocks. We do not recommend gathering evidence to pursue MSY assessments for the following stocks during this iteration of the FMP as these stocks are much more widely distributed, and have a low spatial and bathymetric overlap with the FMP area:

- kitefin shark (sck.27.nea).
- leafscale gulper shark (guq.27.nea).
- Portuguese dogfish (cyo.27.nea).

Likewise, MSY assessments for the following species are not appropriate during this iteration of the FMP because deep water species are prohibited, meaning that there are not enough landings of this species or stock to generate the data to make an MSY assessment. Additionally, the FMP area is too shallow to catch these deeper water species so catches of these species are unlikely in the FMP area.

- deep water catsharks
- frilled shark
- gulper sharks
- longnose velvet dogfish

[11] The current (2025) EU list of prohibited deep-water shark species and UK and EU Written Record, has re-listed blackmouth dogfish (*Galeus melastomus*). Whilst not listed specifically in the FMP this species does occur in this FMP area.

[12] See definition of species under defined in deep sea TAC and quota regulation 2018/2025

- black dogfish
- birdbeak dogfish
- great lanternshark
- velvet belly lanternshark
- mouse catshark
- bluntnose six-gill shark
- sailfin roughshark
- knifetooth dogfish
- Greenland shark

Nonetheless, the FMP will seek to contribute to the evidence base to better understand these species, where appropriate and relevant, to inform future management decisions. The species that are expected to interact more with fisheries in the FMP area are bluntnose six-gill shark and to a lesser extent velvet belly lanternshark. The FMP will remain responsive to any emerging interest in the fishery or broader change in stock condition through strengthened evidence gathering and continued monitoring.

Relevant Fisheries Act 2020 objectives

- Bycatch objective
- Sustainability objective
- Precautionary objective
- Scientific objectives
- Ecosystem objective

Policy goal 6: build an evidence base for red seabream

Policy rationale

The aim of this policy goal is to improve evidence of the state of red seabream stocks. In line with Section 6(3)(b) of the Act, this policy aims to restore stock levels through continued sustainable management for red seabream – as the stock has been identified as depleted by ICES. The FMP does not propose steps to obtain the evidence to enable an MSY assessment for these stocks as such assessments are not appropriate during this iteration of the FMP for the following reasons:

- the stock is depleted and absent in fishery independent surveys, the ICES advice states that an MSY assessment is not possible until the stock is restored
- limited interest in the exploitation of these stocks was raised by fishers during engagement owing to the stock not being in a commercially viable state for many decades. Very few (averaged 0.71t from 2019-2023) catches due to depletion of the stock

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. The FMP will remain responsive to any emerging interest in the fishery or broader change in stock condition through strengthened evidence gathering and continued monitoring.

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." As part of the ongoing FMP review cycle, future iterations must remain responsive to any changes in the fishery.

Actions to help achieve this policy goal: short term

Action 6.1: Continue to follow the precautionary ICES advice for red seabream management, which is currently a bycatch-only TAC.

Action 6.2: Utilise existing ID guides produced by Cefas and the MMO to improve species specific reporting, identification and recording of western red seabream landings in UK waters.

Action 6.3: Work with the SCF and its Parties by sharing information on red seabream stock trends, including monitoring changes in fishing patterns effort and catch composition.

Actions to help achieve this policy goal: medium to long term

Action 6.4: Investigate the data required to progress further ICES stock assessments of red seabream from Category 6 in the long-term.

Action 6.5: Work within the SCF framework on collaborative EU-UK towards recovering the red seabream stock.

Relevant Fisheries Act 2020 objectives:

- Bycatch objective
- Sustainability objective
- Precautionary objective
- Scientific objectives
- Ecosystem objective

Policy goal 7: explore the potential to reform existing management and approaches to join up and better align management of FMP stocks

Policy rationale

This policy goal 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. While the policy applies broadly across all FMP stocks, and to other species incidentally caught by demersal trawls, it holds particular significance for non-targeted stocks typically landed as bycatch. This policy goal and its respective actions contribute to maintaining or increase the level of the following stocks as required by section 6(3)(b)(i) of the Act:

- roundnose grenadier
- saithe
- four-spot megrim
- nephrops (outside functional units)
- red seabream
- skates and rays
- deep-water sharks

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). In addition, stakeholders expressed a strong desire to develop an early warning system to prevent future stock collapse and build a more resilient fishery.

Actions for implementing mixed and multi-species management:

Mixed fishery management is recognised as an effective tool in fisheries where multiple and different stocks of fish are caught together, meaning that single-stock management for one stock will impact other stocks and the fisheries that target them. The UK and EU made recent commitments, as detailed in the 2024 Written Record[1], to look beyond single stock catch advice and work together through the SCF to define joint approaches to developing mixed fisheries science. Within the Celtic Sea, choke (in which a lower/zero TAC stock inhibits landings of higher TAC stocks within a mixed fishery), is a key issue associated with the poor stock status and bycatch of certain gadoid species (i.e. cod). This can be

potentially addressed through developing effective mixed fishery approaches and improvements to gear selectivity. Simultaneously, wider ecological and economic benefits can be derived from mixed fisheries management, as can the reformation of existing management (particularly the 2021 Technical Conservation Measures) to support integration with other governmental policy and wider, international fisheries management frameworks

Actions to help achieve this in the short term

Action 7.1: Consider the use of mortality maps and extend Cefas High-Resolution Fisheries Data to identify spatial patterns in retained catch compositions for mixed fisheries to define FMP fisheries.

Action 7.2: Continue to develop tools to evaluate mixed fisheries harvest strategies and the use of technical and spatial measures to resolve quota imbalances.

Action 7.3: Consider how mixed fisheries management can support sustainable exploitation of FMP stocks and promote management for FMP recovery stocks.

Actions to help achieve this in the medium to long term

Action 7.4: The Harvest Standard Specification guidance will be considered to contribute to progressing towards the long-term sustainability of the fisheries managed under this FMP. Gather sufficient data to support the implementation of a MSY approach for priority stocks following the best available scientific advice, including the best practices laid out in the Harvest Standard Specification.

Actions for improving existing management:

Actions to help achieve this in the short term

Action 7.5: Begin to evaluate the effectiveness of all existing management in the Celtic Sea and Western Channel applicable to FMP stocks. Broaden scope to other species and harmonise where possible with national and international legislation/policy.

Action 7.6: Explore the potential for developing bespoke management measures for inshore fisheries. Consider actions which support and encourage opportunities for inshore vessels.

Action 7.7: Explore the benefits of gear innovations to improve selectivity (i.e. consider an increase in the minimum mesh size for demersal trawls within the FMP area from 80 mm to 100 mm). Integrate into holistic management delivered in the medium to long term if the evidence supports.

Action 7.8: Alongside stakeholders, begin to develop a focused early warning system for the FMP area aimed at identifying issues with and generating options for declining TAC managed stocks.

Action 7.9: Begin development of HCR geared toward rebuilding recovery stocks, preventing stock biomass levels that are currently sustainable (above MSY $B_{trigger}$) from falling below this and safeguarding wider ecosystem health.

Actions to help achieve this policy in the medium to long term

Action 7.10: Simplify Celtic Sea technical conservation measures where appropriate – in line with outcomes of short-term evaluation and evidence gathering.

Action 7.11: Utilise the Celtic Sea and Western Channel focused early warning system for managing declining stocks to improve management of these stocks, encourage stock recovery or reducing decline, and build resilience / adaptation in the fishery in a timely manner.

Actions to align with wider domestic and international management:

Actions to help achieve this in the short term may include:

Action 7.12: Aligning with the Defra REM programme in English waters.

Action 7.13: Supporting delivery of the Defra catch accounting and alignment with the discard reduction scheme.

Action 7.14: Supporting and creating opportunities to encourage use of the QAM, with particular emphasis on sustainable fishing or evidence building for FMP recovery stocks.

Actions to help achieve this policy in the medium to long term may include:

Action 7.15: Utilising the REM programme in English waters to draw together several programmes for Celtic Sea evidence gathering and management reform. Support the integration of REM for gillnets and demersal trawls along the Defra REM timeline.

Action 7.16: Delivering on the outcomes of Defra policies for catch accounting, discard reduction scheme and the quota application mechanism to encourage and promote sustainable fishing.

Relevant Fisheries Act 2020 objectives

- Bycatch objective
- Sustainability objective
- Precautionary objective
- Scientific objectives
- Ecosystem objective

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

Policy rationale

This policy goal has three aims, which will address the SNCB advice. These are: reduce demersal fishing impact on the marine environment, including MPA features; improve the evidence base to strengthen confidence in future assessments; and progress toward ecosystem-based management of fisheries in the future.

Reducing demersal fishing impacts

This policy seeks to achieve this by minimising the impact of demersal fisheries on the marine ecosystem by taking appropriate measures to reduce benthic impacts of fishing, reduce incidents of bycatch of unwanted species, including of sensitive marine species, maintain prey availability across foodwebs, and work towards ecosystem-based management of fisheries.

All forms of fishing have an impact on the marine environment and marine ecosystems to varying degrees, whether through the removal of target fish species, incidental bycatch of non-target species, the removal of prey that other species forage, interaction with the seabed, or lost fishing gears. Understanding and minimising these impacts is an important part of delivering ecosystem-based management of fisheries. The actions set out below are not specific to a particular fishery but rather apply to demersal fishing in general and should therefore be implemented in synergy with other related FMPs. This policy goal considers wider ecological, environmental, social and economic parameters on the health of stocks.

Current English and Welsh SNCB assessments identify demersal trawls (including beam trawls, otter trawls and bottom pair trawls), static nets, and drift nets as being the most relevant gear types for consideration. Confidence in the available evidence in some instances is low or moderate. In these instances, a precautionary risk rating was assigned. Further information on this can be found in the earlier Environmental Considerations section and the Environmental Report.

Strengthening the evidence base

One aim of the FMP will focus on improving the evidence base, enabling confident assessments of the risks, whilst also taking appropriate action as required. In the short-term, improvements to achieve greater certainty in bycatch estimates would result from a more systematic approach to data collection, including temporal, spatial and demographic information on bycatch. This information could then be used to highlight species and areas most at risk, identifying possible mitigation trials with stakeholders.

Ongoing work focusing on this is being progressed through Defra's Marine Wildlife BMI and the Clean Catch UK programme, although an action plan to deliver the BMI has not yet been published. Building the evidence base through self-reporting of bycatch events may help support future iterations of this assessment. However, the implementation of REM, prioritised by risk (e.g. French and others, 2022), would vastly improve our knowledge of, and ability to mitigate, sensitive species bycatch.

Progressing toward ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries management

This policy goal aims to progress ecosystem-based fisheries management in FMP fisheries. The Act "ecosystem objective" requires fishing and aquaculture activities are managed in a way that minimises negative impacts on marine ecosystems and ensures their resilience to change. This commitment is reinforced in the 25 Year Environment Plan, which positions the ecosystem approach as central to sustainable marine management.

This policy goal will demonstrate the FMP's role in contributing towards meeting policy goal 6 of the UK Environmental Improvement Plan as well as the international commitments and obligations as outlined in the JFS. These include UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, including Target 5 of the Global Biodiversity Framework, the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, and the Food and Agriculture Organization Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

An ecosystem model is currently under development for the Celtic Sea, which this FMP will aim to integrate and build on in future iterations.

Ongoing actions to help achieve this policy goal

Action 8.1: Support ongoing data collection and trials through the continuation and expansion of existing bycatch programmes (such as the UK BMI - Bycatch Monitoring Programme (BMP) and Clean Catch UK). The FMP will help to steer analysis to answer specific questions, including:

- identifying the role and effectiveness of different bycatch and discards monitoring methods, encouraging wider uptake of existing data collection channels (for example, Clean Catch app) in the FMP area.
- improving understanding of bycatch risk, frequency and spatial patterns of sensitive species interactions within the FMP fisheries. Particularly, the improvement of mortality estimates for non-mammal taxa under the BMP in netting and demersal trawls gear, thought to pose a high and moderate risk, respectively.
- assessing the effectiveness of existing mitigation and avoidance measures trialled within the UK and abroad (such as acoustic deterrent devices, hook type, bycatch toolkits, and so on).

Action 8.2: Support Defra's programme to implement REM in English waters.

Actions to help achieve this policy goal: short term

Wider ecosystem considerations may include:

Action 8.3: Introduce greater monitoring and evaluation of mitigation measures for the bycatch of protected species in gillnets, in coordination with existing bycatch programmes.

Action 8.4: Explore and trial, where appropriate, suitable mitigation measures to reduce seabird bycatch in coordination with current bycatch programmes.

Action 8.5: Explore options for strengthening data collection on inshore vessels 12m and under, including with REM.

Action 8.6: Consider an ecosystem focus when using REM to monitor bycatch in the FMP area, particularly for gillnetters and those targeting recovery stocks.

Action 8.7: Increase understanding of benthic disturbance and impacts by supporting improved accuracy of fisheries spatial data. This may be achieved through increased ping frequency or utilising geo-cached data to provide more granular information.

Action 8.8: Work towards implementing the UK Marine Strategy Programme of Measures (POM), which includes the creation of a cross-UK benthic impacts working group.

Action 8.9: Consider steps needed to work towards the implementation of ecosystem-based management of FMP fisheries and align this approach across the FMP programme.

Action 8.10: Build a pathway to integrate wider ecological and environmental evidence into the recovery plans, stock assessments and fisheries advice for the FMP species set out in policy goals 1 to 6, by:

- Acknowledging wider pressures that could be influencing stock health and distribution (e.g., climate change and other marine activities).
- Strengthening evidence gathering and consideration of appropriate protections for FMP stock Essential Fish Habitats.
- Data collection to improve understanding of stock health and population structure
- Quantifying the impact of FMP fisheries on the availability of prey for designated MPA marine features.
- Identifying ecosystem reference points that may be impacted by current MSY advice set through a single-stock advice or current TACs (e.g., impact of fishery on non-target species, predator-prey relations and ecosystem functions).
- Reviewing Cefas work on Essential Fish Habitats and consider how this can be applied to ecosystem-based management of FMP fisheries.

Action 8.11: Build evidence to help determine if an ecosystem-based reference points for fishing advice is appropriate for the FMP stocks over the long term.

Actions to help achieve this policy goal: medium to long-term

Wider ecosystem considerations may include:

Action 8.12: Support academia and industry in the research and innovation of alterative gear options or fishing methods that can help reduce benthic impacts and bycatch of sensitive marine species. Prioritise trialling mitigation measures for gillnets.

Action 8.13: Increase understanding of benthic disturbance and impacts by supporting improved accuracy of fisheries spatial data. This may be achieved through increased ping frequency or utilising geo-cached data to provide more granular information or through the gradual introduction of REM.

Action 8.14: Evaluation of the cumulative impacts of wider marine spatial policies, such as offshore renewables, to determine whether future cross-programme measures may be required to reduce benthic disturbance.

Action 8.15: To strengthen the ecosystem-based management of FMP fisheries, improve the evidence base on the impact of FMP fisheries on the wider marine ecosystem, by:

- Furthering our understanding of the ecosystem role and function of the FMP species.
- Reducing the impact of prey removal of key species, such as juvenile gadoids, seabirds, and mobile MPA features, such as harbour porpoise.

Action 8.16: Build on evidence to understand the impacts of existing spatial and temporal closures for certain FMP stocks on other FMP stocks. Where appropriate, look for join up and harmonisation in such closures to reduce spatial squeeze or increased pressures.

Action 8.17: In Wales, use Assessing Welsh Fishing Activities (AWFA) assessments to review the potential environmental impacts of current fisheries management practices, any FMP linked proposed changes and consider mitigation.

Action 8.18: Consider undertaking targeted evidence collection to support the integration of ecosystem-based management into stock assessments and subsequent fishing advice. This includes the impact of current and alternative fisheries management scenarios on the productivity, resistance[13] and resilience[14] of:

- target species (e.g., how exploitation of FMP species outside of the FMP area is affecting FMP stock health within the FMP area and vice versa);

[13] Resistance characteristics indicate whether a [feature] can absorb disturbance or stress without changing character (MarLIN, MarESA, 2023)

[14] Resilience refers to the ability of a [feature] to recover from disturbance or stress (MarLIN, MarESA, 2023)

- other species (e.g., impact of removing forage fish on other species, bycatch of non-target species)
- ecosystem function (e.g. key structural and functional units within biotopes)

Action 8.19: Assess the impact of different climate scenarios on fish stocks managed under current and proposed advice frameworks.

- Evaluate the most appropriate mechanism for integrating information on the effects of climate change on FMP stocks into ecosystem-based management, including stock assessments and fishing advice.

Action 8.20: Integrate wider ecological, environmental and social and economic evidence into multi-species and multi-fleet management models to understand trade-offs of different management approaches, such as the ongoing work from SEAwise.

Action 8.21: Monitor key ecosystem services to improve understanding of Essential Fish Habitats. Identify and prioritise the spatial management of habitats that:

- are important spawning and nursery grounds for FMP stocks
- support FMP stocks and wider structural and functional species within an ecosystem that contribute to seafloor integrity

Action 8.22: Utilising evidence gathered in the short- and medium-term to enhance management approaches with the intent of achieving long-term viability of stocks and fisheries.

Action 8.23: Consider how an ecosystem-based management could be incorporated into future iterations of this FMP and where these might align with approaches in other FMPs.

Relevant Fisheries Act 2020 objectives

- Bycatch objective
- Sustainability objective
- Precautionary objective
- Scientific evidence objective
- Ecosystem objective

Policy goal 9: support sector adaptation, resilience and engagement

Policy rationale

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.

As set out in the JFS and the Act, the UK fisheries policy authorities hold an ambition to support a modern, resilient, and environmentally responsible fishing industry. This includes managing our fisheries sustainably by balancing environmental, economic, and social considerations, ensuring they are economically viable, while not overexploiting marine stocks. By doing so this this will recognise the importance of the fishing industry to the social and culture heritage of coastal communities.

The JFS notes that the scope of an FMP may be extended as appropriate, to consider wider fisheries management issues covering environmental, social, and economic concerns.

Actions to help achieve this policy goal: short term

These actions may include:

Action 9.1: Consider a mechanism for stakeholder input into decision making across the implementation of measures within this FMP.

Action 9.2: Identify and assess the reliance and key vulnerabilities of different fleets involved in FMP fisheries.

Action 9.3: Gather evidence on economic aspects of the commercial and recreational fisheries to ensure management decisions are informed by the best available scientific evidence.

Action 9.4: Consider how actions developed under this FMP, may contribute to promoting sustainable markets for FMP species.

Action 9.5: Further explore the impacts of MPAs, offshore wind, infrastructure and other marine activities on fishing opportunities and potential displacement due to these pressures. Use these outputs to support the FMP fisheries in adapting to changes in sea use.

Action 9.6: Encourage the uptake of appropriate grant funding, where possible, to support innovation, growth and the sustainability of the stocks, fisheries and coastal communities.

Action 9.7: Consider if a social and economic assessment of the fisheries may help to identify any barriers to the realisation of economic viability to the coastal communities within the FMP area.

Action 9.8: Strengthen data streams through available funding and industry participation. Increase evidence-gathering capacity in the industry through engagement. Through collaboration, improve reporting and monitoring of recreational catch data.

Relevant Fisheries Act 2020 objectives

- Equal access objective
- National benefit objective
- Sustainability objective
- Scientific evidence objective

Policy goal 10: reduce the contribution of fishing to climate change and supporting the fishing industry to adapt to the impacts of climate change

Policy rationale

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 UK's 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. 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.

Addressing these challenges requires a combination of fisheries management, habitat protection, and mitigation of broader climate impacts to help build more resilient stocks and ecosystems. Consequently, these also pose challenges to the sustainability of the fishery and requires adaptation in the management and behaviours within the fishery.

The evidence base underpinning climate change and fisheries is developing, but more work is needed to fully understand:

- the FMP fisheries' contributions to climate change (such as reviewing studies on bottom trawling impacts on blue carbon), and how carbon emissions can be reduced in an economically viable way
- the likely impacts of climate change on fish stock compositions and sizes, as well as fishing communities; and
- the scale and nature of change required to adapt

Furthermore, through the Climate Change Act 2008 and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Paris Agreement, as well as the Climate Change objective of the Act, the UK is legally committed to move towards net zero. While the former two climate agreements are not specific to fisheries, the fishing industry will also need to contribute to this by reducing fuel emissions in the future. This approach will also need to consider policies for improved seabed integrity, improving blue carbon and reducing

carbon emissions. Further research on the impact of climate change on the fisheries covered under this FMP will be carried out. However, it is not currently perceived as within scope of this iteration of the FMP to directly deliver mitigation strategies against climate change but may be within its remit to support fisheries through national transition to low carbon fishing.

The expected changes in species distribution will also have consequences for commercial fisheries, and are likely to affect fishing behaviours, fishing quotas and will require adaptive management. While there is a level of uncertainty in future projections and it is currently proving difficult to produce a robust forecast, the evidence base has made significant progress in the last decade with much greater focus on climate change impacts, adaptation and mitigation both from policy and industry.

There is also a need to maintain consistency of climate research and management with ecosystem-based management and environmental goals (policies 8 and 9) and goals aimed at supporting the fishing sector.

The actions set out below are not unique to this FMP. However, as our evidence base grows, we will better understand the specific impacts of climate change and how to best support vessels in reducing their emissions, while also adapting to stock changes and fishing conditions. These actions are likely to adjust over time and will be refined further.

Actions to help achieve this policy goal: short term

Action 10.1: Gain further understanding of where the FMP fisheries can join up with climate change research and the wider strategy for CO_2 emissions reductions. This should include consideration on how best to maintain collaboration across government, industry, and academic sectors in initiatives to reduce environmental impacts of the FMP fisheries (including CO_2 emissions).

Action 10.2: Consider how to support the fishing sector in meeting governmental climate objectives and policies, such as the Climate Change Act 2008 and the UK Maritime Decarbonisation Strategy. This should include consideration on how to identify where support and funding may exist to enable this.

Action 10.3: Consider outlining a plan to gather further evidence on stock resilience to climate change and identify actions or management which will promote resilience. The plan should include consideration on how ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries management can support resilience and adaptation to climate driven changes in the FMP stocks and fisheries.

Actions to help achieve this policy goal: medium to long-term

Fisheries support and adaptation

Action 10.4: Identify opportunities to develop a more efficient fleet (including improvements to engine design, fishing gear and technological advancements).

Action 10.5: Consider, if appropriate, how to structure future iterations of the FMP around different climate scenarios, exploring how to adapt fisheries opportunities and management around ongoing work on the potential 'winners' and 'losers' of climate change. Understand what this may mean socially and economically for the fishery.

Resilience building of fisheries and ecosystems

Action 10.6: Continue to evaluate the impact of climate change on FMP stocks.

Action 10.7: Identify where climate change mitigation and adaptation measures can be implemented, where appropriate, to reduce impacts on the fisheries.

Action 10.8: Consider future adaptation to the FMP recovery plans and long-term management strategies to align with species sensitivities.

Action 10.9: Consider how longer-term climate projections inform future iterations of this FMPs.

Relevant Fisheries Act 2020 objectives

- sustainability objective
- national benefit objective
- climate change objective
- scientific evidence objective

Implementation, monitoring and review

The actions in this FMP will undergo a subsequent implementation phase where appropriate mechanisms will be required to deliver them. Such mechanisms could include voluntary measures, licence conditions, national and regional byelaws, and statutory instruments. This implementation phase will build on the existing evidence base, any action taken throughout the FMP's development, and the options discussed with stakeholders. A holistic, joined-up approach across FMPs will enhance the effectiveness of their actions, stakeholder participation, and resource utilisation.

This FMP is subject to a statutory review process at a maximum of six years after publication. After this point it will be necessary to evidence what has been achieved through the implementation of those actions. This review process will also build in monitoring for potential environmental effects, to help establish whether any changes are needed in the management of the FMP fisheries.

Indicators for monitoring the effectiveness of the plan

This FMP is intended to allow an adaptive approach and will be reviewed and improved over time as we collect more evidence and collaborate with the fishing sector and wider interests on the sustainable management of these fisheries. Delivery of the actions for this FMP will be monitored, and effectiveness will be measured by the indicators below.

Restoration of fishing the following stocks to sustainable levels will indicate the effectiveness of this plan: pollack (pol.27.67), cod (cod.27.e–k), haddock (had.27.7b-k). whiting (whg.27.7b-ce-k), plaice (ple.7e and ple.7fg) and nephrops in Functional Unit 22 (nep.fu.22).

Maintenance of spawning stock biomass for sustainably fished stocks will indicate the effectiveness of this plan: anglerfishes (mon.27.78abd and ank.27.78abd), blue ling (bli.27.5b671), cuckoo ray (rjn.27.678abd), megrim (meg.27.7b-k8abd), nephrops in Functional Unit 20 and 21 (nep.fu.2021), plaice (ple.7hjk), and small-eyed ray (rje.27.7fg).

Reduction of fishing mortality and maintenance of spawning stock biomass will indicate the effectiveness of this plan: sole (sol.27.7e and sol.27.7fg), undulate ray (rju.27.7de), thornback ray (rjc.27.7afg) and spotted ray (rjm.27.7ae-h).

Progressing toward an MSY assessments for the following stocks will be an indicator of the effectiveness of this plan: sole (sol.27.7h-k), blonde ray (rjh.27.7afg and rjh.27.7e), thornback ray (rjc.27.7e) and small eyed ray (rje.27.7de).

I**mproving the evidence base** for the following stocks will be an indicator of the effectiveness of this plan: roundnose grenadier (rng.27.5b6712b), saithe (pok.27.7-10), four-spot megrim (lbd.27.7b-k8abd), nephrops in ICES Subarea 7, outside the functional units (nep.27.7outFU), sandy ray (rji.27.67), shagreen ray (rjf.27.67), blue skate (rjb.67a-ce-k), white skate (rja.27.nea), common skate complex (rjb.27.67), kitefin shark (sck.27.nea), leafscale gulper shark (gug.27.nea), Portuguese dogfish (cyo.27.nea) and red seabream (sbr.27.6-8). Improving evidence for these stocks will be an indicator of the effectiveness of these plans:

- blonde ray ICES division 7h.
- thornback ray ICES division 7h.
- small eyed ray ICES division 7h.
- undulate ray ICES division 7fgh.
- longnosed skate.
- sailray.
- starry ray.
- common stingray.
- Mediterranean starry ray.
- round ray.
- marbled electric ray.

The goals within the FMP have their own indicators but the overall indicator that will determine the effectiveness of this FMP is maintaining fishing pressure within sustainable levels.

Further reviews of the FMP may also be required if new opportunities present themselves to improve the effectiveness of the plan. The FMP will take advantage of future social datasets to be developed as set out in section 3.2.10 of the JFS, which outlines that a range information will be gathered, including scientific, technical, economic, and social data. The monitoring and evaluation framework for the FMP will continue to be developed and supported by the independent programme evaluation of which will produce a framework for evaluation and monitoring of individual FMPs.

Evaluation and review process for indicators

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 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.