



Department
for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Consultation on the proposed Celtic Sea and Western Channel pelagic Fisheries Management Plan

February 2026

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

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



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Introduction

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

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

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

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

This FMP is a joint plan with the Welsh Government.

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

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

The Celtic Sea and Western Channel pelagic FMP

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

This consultation is seeking your views on:

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

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

This consultation is particularly relevant to:

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

Using and sharing your information

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

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

If you have any comments or complaints about the consultation process, please send them to consultation.coordinator@defra.gov.uk

Background: Fisheries Management Plans

Why are we publishing FMPs?

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

What are FMPs?

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

How FMPs work

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

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

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

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

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

FMPs and other coastal States

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

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

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

Approach to the development of the FMPs

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

Development of the FMPs and engagement with stakeholders has been tailored according to the specific needs of each plan and balancing variable views across sectors. We have worked to bring some sectors into the process at an earlier stage ensuring genuine collaboration. Specifically, as part of Defra's marine Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment programme, this FMP used marine natural capital approaches in its development. More detail on this approach is outlined in the supporting [Evidence Statement](#) to the FMP.

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

We are learning valuable lessons from the implementation of our published plans and recognise stakeholder involvement and ongoing collaboration underpins successful

delivery of the FMPs. This approach will continue with delivery partners working closely with industry groups and other stakeholders to ensure co-design of management actions.

Summary of draft Celtic Sea and Western Channel pelagic FMP

The FMP is a jointly managed plan between Defra and the Welsh Government. It has been co-developed with a 'partnership' group set up for this purpose, that involved expert input from the MMO, Cefas, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales (NRW), JNCC, IFCA, the fishing industry, recreational fishers, academics and eNGOs. The FMP covers stocks of sardine, anchovy, herring, horse mackerel, and greater silver smelt within English and Welsh waters of The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) areas 7e, 7f, 7g, and 7h. It outlines proposals to maintain the sustainable management of these 5 pelagic fisheries in the long-term. It also identifies evidence gaps and considers research to enhance current management and ensure that sustainability is maintained.

Pelagic fisheries in the English and Welsh waters of the Celtic Sea and Western Channel contribute socially and economically to coastal communities and are also considered ecologically important as forage fish species (prey for many other sensitive and protected species).

The Celtic Sea herring, horse mackerel, greater silver smelt stocks covered by this FMP have sufficient information to assess maximum sustainable yield (MSY). However, there is limited information to assess MSY for sardine, anchovy and Western Channel and Bristol Channel herring. Therefore, the policy goals of the FMP including the actions and management measures, reflect the different requirements for each stock with the overarching aim to deliver sustainable management of the FMP species while supporting environmental, social and economic sustainability, for the benefit of coastal communities and wider society, based on the best available evidence.

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

Evidence

FMP stocks have different levels of available data as categorised by ICES. The level of data for sardine, anchovy and Western Channel and Bristol Channel herring is insufficient for ICES to assess the stocks in relation to MSY, whereas for Celtic Sea herring, horse mackerel, and greater silver smelt the scientific evidence is considered sufficient to enable assessment of the stocks and provide advice in relation to an MSY approach.

Sardine and anchovy are non-quota species (NQS). The two herring stocks, horse mackerel and greater silver smelt are managed by Total Allowable Catches (TACs) set

jointly by the UK and EU. Limits are agreed annually before the start of the fishing season. Through international fisheries negotiations the UK seeks to agree outcomes which reflect the objectives of the Act relating to sustainable TAC setting and the principles of the JFS.

The species covered by this FMP are forage fish, which are important prey for many larger predators including demersal fish, seabirds and marine mammals. They have varying life cycles and habitats.

Fishing methods for these stocks within the FMP area vary between stock and country, but consists mostly of pelagic trawls, ring-nets, purse seines, with few instances of drift and static nets. While some of the stocks in the FMP are occasionally caught as bycatch in demersal trawls this gear type isn't considered part of the target fishery, so have not been scoped into the FMP and supporting assessments. The landing obligation applies to some of these fisheries, and there are existing technical measures for managing them. Local measures are managed by the IFCAs. There are also voluntary measures in place to manage sardine fisheries in Cornwall.

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

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

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

To ensure effective management of sardine, anchovy, herring, horse mackerel, and greater silver smelt fisheries in English and Welsh waters, this FMP sets out eight goals that address key areas. These goals were developed to directly reflect the priorities identified by the FMP Partnership, respond to the issues and opportunities highlighted by the current evidence, and align with legislative and regulatory requirements. These goals are subject to consideration of consultation responses and will be prioritised appropriately to ensure realistic and measurable outputs.

For sardine, anchovy, and Western Channel and Bristol Channel herring stocks there is insufficient scientific evidence to enable the relevant authority or authorities to assess stocks and provide advice in relation to MSY principles. Therefore, this FMP sets out policies to maintain (sardine, anchovy) or increase (Western Channel and Bristol Channel herring) levels of these stocks, including the steps to obtain the scientific evidence necessary to enable an assessment of the stocks' MSY.

For the Celtic Sea herring, Western horse mackerel, and greater silver smelt stocks there is sufficient evidence available to provide advice in relation to MSY. Therefore, this FMP

sets out policies that at least contribute to maintaining (greater silver smelt) or restoring (Celtic Sea herring, Western horse mackerel) these stocks to sustainable levels.

Achieving MSY alone is unlikely to be sufficient to deliver the whole vision for the FMP (e.g. responding to wider ecosystem, economic and social considerations), therefore there are other policy goals that aim to address these considerations. The eight policy goals of this FMP are to:

1. Harvest sardine, anchovy and Western Channel and Bristol Channel herring stocks sustainably, with the overall aim of maintaining or increasing levels of the stocks.
2. Harvest Celtic Sea herring, horse mackerel and greater silver smelt stocks sustainably, with the overall aim of maintaining or restoring biomass of the stocks above the level capable of producing MSY or a suitable proxy.
3. Seek to improve the evidence base for all stocks, including to allow for an assessment of MSY or a suitable proxy where necessary.
4. Identify and support implementation of ecosystem-based fisheries management approaches appropriate for pelagic fisheries in the Celtic Sea and Western Channel.
5. Understand and reduce the impacts of fisheries covered by this FMP on non-target species, including by minimising, and where possible, eliminating bycatch of sensitive species.
6. Reduce the impact of fishing on climate change and support the fishing industry to adapt to the impacts of climate change.
7. Improve understanding of, and help realise, the economic, social and cultural benefits of pelagic fisheries included in this FMP.
8. Facilitate a collaborative and adaptive management approach to support fair, effective, and transparent decision-making for sustainable and resilient pelagic fisheries.

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

Proposed management of sardine, anchovy, herring, horse mackerel, and greater silver smelt fisheries in the Celtic Sea and Western Channel

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

In summary, the short-term actions focus on:

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

- for sardine: consider developing the current harvest control rule for sardine into a constant harvest rate method to enable an MSY-approach assessment of the stock
- for herring: explore actions or measures to protect and enable recovery of habitats that have been identified as important to their life stages.
- for all stocks: gather and use the best available scientific evidence and advice to support management decisions and determination of fishing opportunities. This includes:
 - outlining research needs for producing or improving stock assessments where needed, including relating to ecosystem-based approaches.
 - supporting and ensuring these fisheries are considered within existing bycatch monitoring, mitigation programmes and initiatives.
 - considering assessments of the different bycatch monitoring and mitigation methods, how they apply to gears prevalent within these fisheries and their appropriateness for deterring or mitigating bycatch of sensitive mobile species.
 - continuing to work with the inshore fleet targeting these stocks to better understand and capture the challenges they face in relation to fishing opportunities for FMP stocks.

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

- consider a review of the overall effectiveness of current stock management approaches in contributing to the broader goals of the FMP.
- for non-quota species:
 - consider whether to expand the geographic range of any of the current local-scale technical measures used for non-quota species to the scale of the FMP area.
 - assess the potential transition to quota-based management for sardine (and potentially anchovy), building on existing voluntary measures.
- for all stocks support current and future evidence gathering to:
 - improve stock assessments
 - support the identification and implementation of the most appropriate ecosystem-based management approaches
 - understand the impacts of climate change support the industry to adapt to climate change
 - understand the social, economic and cultural benefits of the fisheries associated with the FMP, accounting for the wide range of beneficiaries
- support work and collaborate with stakeholders to:
 - help preserve cultural identity surrounding small-scale, traditional fishing practices
 - explore ways to ensure equitable access to fishing opportunities for current and future generations
 - explore where capacity could be increased to support safe and sustainable growth in these fisheries, where appropriate.

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

Implementation

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Defra is legally required to consider the environmental impact of policies, plans and programmes. The Environment Act 2021 sets out environmental principles to guide policy making. The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations 2004) require any qualifying public plans, programmes, and strategies to undergo Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) during their preparation and prior to publication if they are likely to have a significant effect on a European marine site (either positively or negatively). FMPs are plans or programmes for the purposes of the SEA Regulations 2004.

What is the Environmental Report and how was it developed?

The SEA considers the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the policies and actions set out in the draft Celtic Sea and Western Channel pelagic FMP. The Environmental Report (ER) sets out the findings of this process. The report describes the current state of the environment (the baseline) and the likely significant effects of proposals in the draft FMP to the baseline. The assessment identifies where the draft FMP

could make a positive impact on the baseline and hence our marine environment. Where the FMP may have negative effects on the baseline, the report suggests actions to mitigate and/or monitor these effects. Defra developed the ER for the draft FMP. The scope and level of detail was informed through an early consultation with our statutory Consultation Bodies: Natural England, NRW, Environment Agency, and Historic England together with further advice from the JNCC, as an advisor to the UK government and devolved governments on UK-wide nature conservation. We drew on published information on the state of the environment and the potential impact of fishing on environmental features.

Summary of the draft Celtic Sea and Western Channel pelagic FMP Environmental Report

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

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

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

Our SEA concluded that current evidence shows the pelagic fishery has an impact on the marine environment primarily through bycatch of unwanted species, this includes species with various levels of protection like seabirds. There is also an impact of prey reduction on these protected species. Additionally, there is a risk of fishing related litter, often related to the loss of fishing gear as well as landings of non-target pelagic species from demersal trawls. Demersal trawls would pose risks to the seafloor integrity.

The draft FMP has considered these impacts and sets out proposals to monitor, and where required, introduce mitigation to address these impacts.

The assessment of likely negative effects identified as low risk of significant adverse effects on the environment from implementing individual policies and actions. The policies and actions, will, where appropriate, be developed to avoid any potential negative effects identified by the assessment progress. The environmental effects of implementing the draft Celtic Sea and Western Channel pelagic FMP policies and actions will also be monitored to identify unforeseen adverse effects at an early stage, so appropriate remedial action can be undertaken.

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

Regulatory Impact Assessment

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

For the purposes of the Celtic Sea and Western Channel pelagic FMP consultation, we have drafted a de-minimis assessment (DMA) that outlines our rationale and approach to assessing the potential impact of the plan on business. This DMA is a supporting document.

Whilst the FMP identifies measures that could be introduced post-consultation, these proposed measures will be developed further and do not currently have sufficient detail for any economic analysis to be done. These proposed measures could be regulatory or deregulatory, and positive or negative to business, hence it is not possible to estimate impacts.

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

How to respond to this consultation

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

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

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

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

The consultation survey has three parts:

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

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

Duration of the consultation

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

Responses

Responses can be:

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

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

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

Enquiries

If you want to submit a consultation response, please contact:

FMPconsultations@defra.gov.uk

If you have any general enquiries, please contact: FMPs@defra.gov.uk