



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Consultation on the proposed Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish Fisheries Management Plan

Date: July 2023

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 in an industry 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 pressure from fishing and climate change. Fishing can also have impacts on our ecosystem, for example, through the 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 the marine environment.

The [Environmental Improvement Plan \(EIP\) 2023](#) 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.

The [Joint Fisheries Statement \(JFS\)](#) sets out how the UK fisheries policy authorities (Defra, and the devolved administrations 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](#).

Defra has learned lessons from the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and recognised the fishing industry's strong desire to take greater responsibility for managing fisheries. Our first plans have been developed very closely by or in close engagement with the fishing sector and with industry bodies.

The first six FMPs have been developed in close consultation with our Arm's Length Bodies, delivery partners, fishers and wider stakeholders and cover different types of fish stocks and fisheries. Each of the first FMPs has piloted a different approach to the development of FMPs so we can learn the best ways to work in collaboration with stakeholders. Some FMPs apply to one administration only, while others cover two or more administrations; the JFS sets out the administrations responsible for each plan.

Our first FMPs are:

- Crab and Lobster;
- King Scallop (developed jointly with the Welsh government);
- Whelk;
- Seabass (developed jointly with the Welsh government);
- Channel Non Quota Species – Demersal Fishing; and

- Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish

The Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP

The proposed Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP covers only English waters.

This present consultation is seeking your views on:

- the draft Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP as required by Schedule 1, Part 3 of the Fisheries Act 2020; prepared by Defra.
- the draft South North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish 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 for the publication of the final FMP.

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; and
- National and local interest groups such as environmental and recreational non-governmental organisations, and industry federations.

Consultations on the five other draft FMPs (see above) and their Environmental Reports are taking place at the same time.

Background: Fisheries Management Plans

Why are we publishing FMPs?

Internationally, FMPs are considered the best way to manage fisheries. Leaving the EU means the UK is no longer bound by the CFP and has an opportunity to reconsider how best the UK's valuable and diverse fisheries are managed. Continuing to champion sustainable fishing and adopting management measures to rebuild and maintain stocks in the long term is central to future management. Goal 6 in the EIP also sets out the importance of FMPs to English fisheries by sustainably managing the harvesting of stocks and supporting the delivery of the appropriate objectives from the UK Marine Strategy.

The Fisheries White Paper, [Sustainable Fisheries for Future Generations](#), 2018 sets out the UK's commitment to reshape fisheries management following our departure from the EU. The Fisheries Act 2020 (the Act) provides a legally binding structure to protect and

recover stocks, support a sustainable fishing industry, and safeguard the environment. It sets out clear objectives to provide the basis against which the fisheries policy authorities of all four UK administrations will manage their fisheries and a commitment to developing FMPs. This commitment was expanded upon in the JFS published in November 2022 which includes a list of 43 FMPs, setting out the lead authority, the stocks covered and a timetable for publication. Through our commitment to FMPs in the Act, we will reform and redefine our domestic fisheries management.

What are FMPs?

An FMP is an evidence-based action plan that sets out the short-term actions and longer-term vision required to achieve sustainable fisheries. The Act requires each FMP to set out policies designed to restore the stock(s) to, or maintain them at, sustainable levels. Each plan will set out a vision and goals for the target fisheries, together with the policies and management interventions necessary to achieve these goals in the shorter term. The plans will apply to all those catching fish in the target stocks, be they from the commercial or recreational sectors. Developed in a collaborative and transparent way the aim is 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.

FMPs may also address wider environmental, economic, and social issues and where appropriate, include elements which go beyond the statutory requirements in the Act. The EIP notes that these plans will promote selectivity, reduce negative impacts on the ecosystem and help to deliver the recovery of stocks.

How FMPs work

Each FMP will set out goals and the actions needed to achieve sustainable fisheries. The approach needed will depend on the goals set out in each plan, our level of understanding and evidence as well as the nature of the stocks and fisheries. Whilst each FMP will focus on specific stock(s), it will also be important to ensure they work together and recognise the management needs of fishermen, or stakeholders who fish stocks covered by more than one FMP. To have an impact on how fisheries are managed, FMPs will need to be implemented.

Fisheries are a devolved competency, currently managed through a combination of regulation (Retained EU Law, and domestic law including statutory instruments), byelaws, licence conditions and voluntary measures. In some cases, this management framework may remain appropriate, at least for the time being. In others, the management may need to change. This might mean the law, byelaws or licence conditions will need to be changed. Or in some cases, new management measures will need to be brought in, either by law, byelaws, through licence conditions or through voluntary measures. Where appropriate, specific engagement and consultation will be carried out on measures to implement FMP actions.

National Fisheries Authorities (Defra and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) for England) are legally required to act in accordance with the policies set out in the plans. Although Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) are not national fisheries

authorities for the purposes of the Act, we will work together on implementation, and they may be bound by any legislation adopted to give effect to the plans if it covers their jurisdiction.

A key feature of FMPs is that they are adaptive. The actions required to implement the FMPs, and indeed the FMPs themselves, will iterate and build over time; this is particularly important where we need to gather additional evidence to inform the development of management measures. Each of the draft FMPs identifies a range of short- and longer-term actions. There will therefore be a rolling programme of implementation over the lifetime of the FMPs. It will take some time to show benefits in terms of improving the sustainability of stocks and fisheries covered by the FMPs.

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. These processes allow the plan to be kept up to date and adapted as knowledge and evidence improves, management measures take effect and generally as things change.

We are keen to continue the collaborative and transparent approach used to develop FMPs into the implementation and then review phases. We are keen to hear from fishermen and stakeholders about how to achieve successful future participation in FMPs through this consultation.

FMPs and other Coastal States

Whilst the UK, as an independent coastal state, has regulatory autonomy to manage our fisheries, the UK is committed to working with other coastal state partners to secure the sustainable management of shared fisheries resources. This commitment was reaffirmed in the JFS. Through annual fisheries consultations with the EU and other coastal states and negotiations in other multilateral and bilateral fora, such as Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) or the Specialised Committee on Fisheries established under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement with the EU (TCA), the UK will seek to achieve, or contribute to the achievement of the fisheries objectives in the Act.

Our FMPs will set out a long-term framework of policy and measures to manage fishing activity to secure the sustainability of stocks and a healthy marine environment. Where appropriate, this will inform the approach to the development of multi-year strategies for conservation and management of stocks proposed by the UK and EU under the TCA with the EU and any similar long-term plans with other coastal states. Our FMPs may also be updated to reflect any agreements negotiated in these international fora.

All regulatory measures to implement the FMPs will be binding on all vessels fishing in UK waters. Under the TCA any measures to be applied to EU vessels fishing in UK waters must be based on best available evidence and applied to both EU and UK vessels. The UK is also required to formally notify the EU of any changes to fisheries management measures likely to affect EU vessels. Defra will also ensure that other states affected by measures introduced through FMPs will be duly notified.

Approach to the development of the FMPs

Defra gathered evidence and met fishing and other stakeholders in 2020 to consider what stocks and fisheries should be prioritised in the JFS. The first six were chosen to cover a range of fisheries, with five FMPs for non-quota stocks/fisheries and one fishery with a mix of quota and non-quota stocks (NQS) chosen.

There is a particular focus on NQS stocks as these are not subject to a Total Allowable Catch (TAC). They are often high value, potentially vulnerable and generally data poor species. We have limited data on NQS, limited management and are therefore unable to accurately assess the health and sustainability levels of all NQS stocks that are targeted in English waters. The Act sets out the precautionary objective in which the absence of sufficient scientific information is not used to justify postponing or failing to take management measures to conserve target species, associated or dependent species, non-target species or their environment.

Importantly, the fishing industry has also recognised these issues and has been keen to put in place better management to ensure the long-term sustainability of the stocks. One of the major requests from the fishing industry post-EU Exit, has been to have closer involvement with fisheries management with a view to moving over time to “co-management”. It will take some time for government, regulators, fishermen and wider stakeholders to adapt to enable co-management, which means taking joint responsibility for setting goals and delivering actions.

The ambition for closer partnership working was recognised in the Fisheries White Paper, and subsequently the JFS set out the vision that industry should play a greater role in managing fisheries. To support this ambition and recognising that there is no blueprint for developing FMPs, particularly for such complex fisheries as exist around the UK, our FMPs have trialled different approaches. A range of different organisations and groups have led the development of the first FMPs, with different approaches taken to wider engagement in their development. As a result, whilst all FMPs are designed to meet the legal requirements set out in the Act, each looks different. We are seeking feedback through this consultation on the differing engagement processes to shape the development of these and other plans in future phases, as well as our future policy.

To support the development of FMPs, views of industry and other interested parties have been collected through a series of coastal visits, meetings, and online engagement. These have been used to inform the content of FMPs and to identify the actions and measures with most support as well as identify those which can be progressed quickly and those requiring further consideration. The consultation is an opportunity to seek wider views on the output of this process. Responses to the consultation will be analysed and used to inform any changes to the draft FMPs ahead of the publication of final plans.

Summary of Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP

Flatfish in the southern North Sea and eastern Channel (lemon sole, witch, turbot, brill, dab, flounder, halibut, plaice and sole) were prioritised to be one of the 6 frontrunner FMPs. This is a multi-species FMP that could be tested for development, which has an overall high economic value, and variety of evidence levels for different stocks to assess and monitor the states of the stocks (quota and non-quota).

Flatfish are a commercially important group of species in the UK. In 2021, the total landed weight of flatfish, in the scope of this FMP, was 1,984 tonnes (liveweight) with a first sale value of £5.5m.

The Flatfish FMP sets out a pathway to the long-term sustainable managed of the flatfish fishery in English waters. The FMP has taken in feedback from engagement with stakeholders on what the concerns and priorities are for flatfish management. The FMP have collated all this information, along with the available evidence to assess the status of the flatfish stocks and flatfish fishery in English waters of the southern North Sea and eastern Channel. The FMP lays out all the existing management and measures in place and sets out the principles for managing to maximum sustainable yield (MSY) for quota stocks, as well as some measures, short and long-term goals to manage the flatfish fishery holistically and sustainably.

This plan has been developed by Defra, whilst engaging and collaborating with stakeholders with an interest in the fishery. The stakeholder engagement was carried out by Defra using existing forums to try and reduce the burden on stakeholders. Bespoke meetings were arranged when new evidence came in to provide as much opportunity for stakeholder to discuss and feedback on the draft FMP. All the engagement carried out assisted in informing the direction of the flatfish FMP, along with the evidence provided by Seafish, Cefas, MMO, Natural England and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC).

Do you have any comments on the process for developing the Southern North Sea and eastern channel mixed flatfish FMP?

Evidence

The flatfish FMP applies to lemon sole, witch, turbot, brill, dab, flounder, Atlantic halibut, plaice and sole in English waters of the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel (ICES areas 4b, 4c and 7d). The plan development has been informed by the biological, social, and economic evidence currently available for the flatfish stocks life history, stock assessment, and fishing and management practices.

Dab, halibut and witch show fluctuating landings by UK vessels over the 7 years 2016-2022. The landings either increase overall or decrease just slightly. However, it is important to caveat that halibut and witch have very low landings so caution must be taken in inferring themes from these. In contrast, the remaining six species (brill, flounder, lemon sole, plaice, sole and turbot) show a general and gradual decrease in landings by UK vessels over the time period. Plaice is the highest landed species by UK vessels (approximately 1,000-5,000t a year across the time series), followed by sole with a range

of approximately 400 to 700t a year. Brill, lemon sole, turbot, flounder and dab all range between approximately 10t and 150t a year. The species in this FMP can be grouped into three as per the spatial distribution of landings within the FMP area:

1. Northern North Sea – witch and halibut
2. North Sea and eastern Channel – dab, lemon sole, plaice, turbot, brill
3. Southern North Sea and eastern Channel – sole and flounder

ICES provide annual catch advice on all stocks within this FMP except for Atlantic halibut. There is a variety of evidence levels across the stocks, with some being treated as category 1 (full analytical assessment) and others category 3 (survey-based assessments to indicate trends). Therefore, there are a number of evidence gaps remain across the stocks.

Improving the evidence base on not just the stock assessment but also the environment impacts, social and economic importance of the flatfish fishery will progress towards sustainable flatfish management.

What are your views on the evidence presented on the current state of the southern North Sea and eastern Channel mixed flatfish stocks in English waters and can you provide other evidence which supports or differs from ours?

Goals for the management of Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish fisheries

This FMP sets out 5 objectives across 4 themes, which are: evidence, sustainable fisheries (fisheries management and wider environment), social and economic, and climate change. A summary of the objectives within these themes can be seen below. Within each objective is a summary of actions that are needed in order for the FMP to achieve the objective.

Evidence:

Objective 1.1: Develop an improved evidence base for quota and non-quota flatfish in the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish fishery.

Sustainable Fisheries:

Objective 2.1: Deliver effective management of the harvesting of flatfish stocks within the southern North Sea and eastern Channel area.

Objective 2.2: To support wider environmental sustainability by understanding how the fishing activities within this FMP impact on the wider marine environment and identify options to minimise negative impacts.

Social and Economic:

Objective 3.1: To better understand the social and economic value of the fisheries to the coastal communities within the FMP area.

Climate Change:

Objective 4.1: Explore options for mitigating risk onto the fishery from the changing climatic conditions.

The overarching long-term vision for the Flatfish FMP, is to introduce long-term sustainable management, that will also consider the marine environment and the social and economic sustainability of the fishery.

What are your views on the goals for the management of flatfish in English waters of the southern North Sea and eastern channel?

Some stocks within this FMP are shared with other coastal states and their management and TAC are subject to international fisheries negotiations. The FMP sets out the principles for TAC setting for the quota species. The principles are summarised below:

- Where MSY indicators are provided by ICES advice, with an advised total catch. UK government should aim to set total allowable catch for quota species in line with the ICES MSY advice.
- Take into consideration environmental, social, and economic factors on a stock-by-stock basis
- Follow the principles within the Fisheries Act 2020 and the Joint Fisheries Statement

What are the benefits and drawbacks (environmental, economic, social) of principles for TAC setting for Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish fishing in English waters? What points would need to be considered when delivering this?

Introduction of Minimum Conservation Reference Sizes (MCRS) measures is intended to protect juvenile fish from being landed through prohibition of landings, thereby by making it undesirable to target this size class of individuals. The recommendation to explore these measures for lemon sole, turbot and brill has been driven by stakeholder concern.

Short-term (1-2 years)

- MCRS for lemon sole – 25cm
- MCRS for turbot – 40cm
- MCRS for brill – 35cm

The FMP will explore the implementation of the above sizes. Evidence is needed to understand the impact on the stocks and fishery. Therefore, whilst this is in development the FMP would recommend aligning with the existing IFCA reference sizes, which would be; lemon sole (25cm), turbot (30cm), and brill (30cm).

What are the benefits and drawbacks (environmental, economic, social) of introducing Minimum Conservation Reference Sizes for lemon sole, turbot and brill in 7d?

The FMP recommends gathering evidence on the potential viable options for management measures for towed gears in the Eastern English Channel, in particular in relation to 0-12nm. This is being considered to reduce fishing pressure on juvenile individuals within the Eastern English Channel. Will need to explore compatibility with MCRS for priority species. Additional time given to weigh impacts of potential measures on inshore fisheries.

However, the FMP does recognise the need to understand the economic and social impacts of these interventions before implementing, as this measure could impact on common sole catches.

What are the benefits and drawbacks (environmental, economic, social) of towed gear measures in 7d?

The FMP lays out steps to improve the evidence base for the stocks within the plan. In particular for Atlantic halibut and sole in 7d. The FMP will seek to commission data collation to better understand the status of Atlantic halibut. As the UK promotes a science and evidence-based approach to management, we acknowledge that the survey work for sole in 7d was disrupted due to Covid-19. The FMP recommends to research and consider, if it is appropriate and necessary, commissioning and re-opening the survey for sole in 7d.

Do you agree that these actions to improve the evidence base are appropriate for the Flatfish FMP?

Implementation

Once formally published, the plan will need to be implemented. This will be an incremental process and Defra will be working closely with industry to develop more detailed implementation plans. Publishing the FMP is the start of a multi-year process, and we will need to ensure that 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.

One of Defra's key aims has been to work closely with stakeholders to develop the frontrunner FMPs. Cross regulator, government and industry groups have been central to the development of the draft FMPs and Defra wants stakeholder involvement to continue beyond their publication. The successful delivery of the FMPs will depend on this on-going collaboration with all stakeholders.

How would you like to be involved in the delivery of the plan and the future management of the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish fishery?

Are there any important connections with or links to other fisheries that we should consider when finalising this FMP or during its implementation process?

In summary, the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP describes existing management measures and the available science and evidence to assess the status of southern North Sea and eastern Channel mixed flatfish stocks (lemon sole, witch, turbot, brill, dab, flounder, halibut, plaice and sole) around England in 2023 to determine a sustainable level of exploitation. At the time of publication, there is a need for more

evidence to determine MSY for the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish fishery around England. The FMP highlights where knowledge and evidence gaps exist to be able to establish sustainable southern North Sea and eastern Channel mixed flatfish fisheries. The management objectives and associated evidence and research plan guide those seeking to fill those gaps over time. The proposed management interventions seek to apply a precautionary approach to managing harvesting whilst our evidence improves. This Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP aims to deliver a step change in moving us towards the long-term sustainable management of southern North Sea and eastern Channel mixed flatfish fisheries in English waters.

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. Defra has determined that the draft South North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP is likely to have significant environmental effects and, therefore, has completed a SEA. Our initial results are documented in the draft South North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP Environmental Report (ER) included within the current consultation. A final version will be published alongside the South North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP, revised to account for comments and/or further information provided during the consultation, and to reflect the final published FMP.

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 South North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP. The 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 South North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP to the baseline. The assessment identifies where the draft South North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish 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 South North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP. The scope and level of detail was informed through an early consultation with our statutory Consultation Bodies: Natural England, Environment Agency, and Historic England together with further advice from the JNCC, as an advisor to the UK government and devolved administrations 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 Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish Environmental Report

The Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish 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 Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish 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 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 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 Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel FMP.

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

Our SEA concluded that current evidence shows the southern North Sea and eastern Channel mixed flatfish fishery has an impact on the marine environment primarily through seabed disturbance. The impact of flatfish fishing in MPAs is managed in the 0-12nm zone in English waters. Management in MPAs beyond the 12nm limit is in development. Further work is required to reduce the impact of flatfish fishing on habitats beyond MPAs to ensure GES targets for seabed integrity (D6) are achieved. The contribution of flatfish fishing to climate change related issues and cultural heritage was also identified as a potential impact

The draft Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP has considered these impacts and sets out proposals to monitor and where required introduce mitigation to address these impacts.

The environmental effects of implementing the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP policies and measures will be monitored to identify unforeseen adverse effects at an early stage, ensuring appropriate remedial action can be undertaken.

Is there any additional evidence we could consider, to inform our environmental baseline? If so, please provide details below.

Are there any other positive or negative environmental effects associated with the policies and actions of the draft Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP that we could consider? If so, please provide details below.

Do you have any comments on the proposed actions set out in the Environmental Report to monitor and/or mitigate any likely significant (negative) effects on the environment of the FMPs?

Do you have any additional comments in relation to the Environmental Report which you have not been able to provide in response to the previous questions? If so, please provide details below.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

We recognise our commitment to balance the economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainable fisheries and have considered the Better Regulation Framework guidance and the better regulation principles of robust evidence, transparency and proportionality when preparing FMPs. Defra is completing regulatory impact assessments to assess the economic impacts of FMPs on businesses and the fishing sector.

For the purposes of the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish 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 Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish 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 specifically 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.

Duration of the consultation

The consultation starts on 17 July 2023 and will end on 1 October 2023. Responses must be received by 23:59 on 1 October 2023.

Responses

Responses can be:

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

Consultation – Flatfish 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.

Confidentiality and Data Protection information

A summary of responses to this consultation will be published on the UK Government's website at: www.gov.uk/defra. An annex to the consultation summary will list all organisations that responded, but will not include personal names, addresses or other contact details.

Defra may publish the content of your response to this consultation to make it available to the public without your personal name and private contact details (e.g. home address, email address, etc).

If you answer 'Yes' in response to the question asking if you would like anything in your response to be kept confidential, you are asked to state clearly what information you would like to be kept as confidential and explain your reasons for confidentiality. The reason for this is that information in response to this consultation may be subject to release to the public or other parties in accordance with the legislation on access to information (this is primarily the [Environmental Information Regulations 2004](#) (EIRs), the [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#) (FOIA), the [General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018](#) (DPA)). We have obligations, mainly under the EIRs, FOIA and DPA, to disclose information to recipients or to the public in certain circumstances. In view of this, your explanation for requesting confidentiality for all or part of your response would help us balance these obligations for disclosure against any obligation of confidentiality. If we receive a request for the information that you have provided in your response to this

consultation to be kept confidential, we will take full account of your reasons for requesting confidentiality of your response, but we cannot guarantee that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances.

If you answer 'No' in response to the question asking if you would like anything in your response to be kept confidential, we will be able to release the content of your response to the public, but we won't make your personal name and private contact details publicly available.

There may be occasions when Defra will share the information you provide in response to the consultation, including any personal data, with external analysts. This is for the purposes of consultation response analysis and provision of a report of the summary of responses only.

This consultation is being conducted in line with the Cabinet Office 'Consultation Principles' and can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultationprinciples-guidance>.

Our privacy notice is uploaded as a related document alongside our consultation document.

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

Consultation questions

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

The consultation survey has four parts:

1. Personal details and confidentiality (required)
2. Questions on the Flatfish FMP
3. Questions on the Flatfish FMP environmental report
4. 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.

If you have an active interest in both documents, Defra encourage you to complete part one and three in full.

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

The JFS can be found here: [Joint Fisheries Statement \(JFS\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/joint-fisheries-statement-2020)

The Act can be found here: [Fisheries Act 2020 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2020/12/section/1)