



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Proposed Fisheries Management Plan for king scallops in English and Welsh Waters

Executive Summary

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Executive summary

Context

English and Welsh waters have some of the best wild sea-fish stocks in the world. Our governments are committed to working with stakeholders to ensure an effective and collaborative transition to sustainable management of king scallop stocks. The FMP will set out management proposals and frameworks that will be underpinned by the objective of the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS)¹ to deliver sustainable stocks, a healthy marine environment and support a vibrant and profitable fishing sector.

Sustainable management of fisheries requires appropriate management of harvesting to protect our diverse stocks. Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) are the flagship policy for improving the management of our fisheries. They are a central requirement of the Fisheries Act 2020² and provide a tool for managing fishing activity to give more sustainable fisheries and driving progress towards this goal.

This FMP has been developed by the Scallop Industry Consultation Group Working Group (SICGWG) on behalf of Defra and the Welsh Government. Feedback from the wider Scallop Industry Consultation Group (SICG) and stakeholder engagement events, as well as the evidence gathered in this plan, has demonstrated a need for better management of our king scallop (*pecten maximus*) fisheries. The aim of this FMP is to contribute to sustainable and well managed king scallop fisheries in England and Wales.

What is an FMP?

An FMP is an evidence-based action plan that charts a course to maintaining or restoring sustainable fish stocks. An FMP sets out goals for the target fishery (or fisheries), together with the policies and management interventions necessary to achieve these goals. Defra and Welsh Government will use FMPs to address environmental, social and economic issues associated with our fisheries, significantly enhancing our ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management. Plans will be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they respond to new evidence and practical experience to remain effective.

1 [Joint Fisheries Statement JFS 2022 Final.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

2 [Fisheries Act 2020 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

Why an FMP for king scallops?

King scallops have been prioritised due to the stock's vulnerability to over-exploitation, the economic value of the fishery and a lack of evidence to assess and monitor the state of the stock properly. King scallop fisheries contribute culturally, socially, and economically to coastal communities through employment and recreational fishing interests. Additional management action is therefore needed to ensure scallop fishing is sustainable by conserving the stock to secure their future and the future of the industry that depend on them.

Stock assessments of king scallops have taken place since 2016. Further data is required to supplement the existing stock assessments to estimate the available biomass accurately for sustainable fishing.

This FMP combines a long-term vision to achieve maximum sustainable yield (MSY) or a similar proxy which reflects the health of the stock. Management measures are required to reach and maintain this goal. This plan brings together existing measures for king scallops and all available science and evidence. The plan highlights where evidence gaps exist and what is required to fill those gaps to enable the necessary protection for stocks now and in the long term.

Fishing for king scallops has an impact on the environment, particularly the seabed. This FMP includes objectives to ensure that the environmental impacts associated with king scallop fishing are understood and where king scallop dredge fisheries are considered to have an adverse impact on the marine environment, action is taken to avoid, remedy or mitigate such impacts.

Current management

Scallops are non-quota stocks which are currently not subject to catch limits. King scallop fisheries already have a range of management measures in place to protect stocks and the environment. Current management in England and Wales is applied at national, regional, and local levels through fisheries licensing³, legislation and byelaws. These measures include technical gear specifications, Minimum Conservation Reference Sizes (MCRS), king scallop licences or permits with conditions, seasonal closures to protect spawning stocks, closures to protect seabed features and days at sea fishing limits for vessels of 15m and over in length fishing in certain areas - referred to as the Western Waters effort regime. The majority of king scallops are caught using

³ [Understand your fishing vessel licence - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

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spring-loaded dredges which are towed along the seabed; other methods include hand gathering by diving and in beam trawls, where scallops are mostly caught as bycatch.

Key goals

During the development of the FMP, there was consensus that a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate for king scallop fisheries due to the fleet's variation, for example, smaller boats working in specific local areas, compared to larger nomadic vessels fishing around the coast. Regional based management is therefore needed, together with improved species and fisheries data to ensure long-term sustainability. This also fits in with the devolved nature of fisheries management.

This FMP identifies the following actions:

Improving the evidence base:

- The king scallop evidence and research plan describes the available evidence, evidence gaps and how gaps could be addressed to improve management. The need for improvements in stock assessment methodologies, indicators and reference points are highlighted for all stocks. The aim of the research plan is to build on existing research and data for king scallops allowing management to be driven by stock dependent harvest strategies, reliable stock assessments and a consistent ongoing data collection and research programme.

Initial management measures:

- This FMP sets out measures to be implemented in the short-term to address sustainability concerns in line with the precautionary objective in the Fisheries Act 2020. The proposals include seeking opportunities for strengthening existing measures, such as extending the scope of seasonal and area-based closures to increase stock protection and, if beneficial, to localised sustainability and management, broad alignment of measures where it is appropriate, such as gear requirements, to avoid unnecessary differences in measures applying across management borders.

Longer term management measures:

- As the evidence base and monitoring of management effectiveness improves, targeted management measures may be developed. Proposed actions include

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exploring and developing science-based output controls⁴, which would limit the proportion of stock that can be removed, and/or input control⁵ measures which would limit fishing effort. This will then inform consultations on proposals for the implementation of new king scallop fisheries management measures. The process of developing and implementing more targeted measures will be iterative and adapt to the outcomes of reviews, such as on the current days at sea fishing limits regime.

Wider issues and environmental impacts

In addition to the ecosystem objective and climate change objective in the Fisheries Act 2020, all FMPs are subject to legal obligations for environmental protection arising from the Habitats Regulations 2017, Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, UK Marine Strategy Regulations 2010, and the Environmental Principles policy statement for the Environment Act 2021.

As set out in the environmental report that accompanies this FMP - the King Scallop FMP includes objectives to ensure environmental impacts associated with king scallop fishing are understood and where king scallop dredge fisheries are considered to have an adverse impact on the marine environment, action is taken to avoid, remedy or mitigate such impacts. The king scallop dredge fishery poses three environmental risks: a) risk to seafloor integrity, b) bycatch of sensitive species and c) litter from fishing gear. Based on current evidence, bycatch of sensitive species and litter from fishing gear are considered low risk while seafloor integrity is perceived to be the higher risk issue.

Working with stakeholders, Defra will consider the evidence and then develop further recommendations on the potential effects of fishing activities (alongside other activities) on seafloor integrity and the state of benthic habitats, including contributing to the implementation and coordination of the Benthic Impact Working Group. This work will consider the issues at a strategic level and within the context of ongoing changes in marine spatial use and environmental protection to achieve the objective of Good Environmental Status under the UK Marine Strategy.

4 Output controls are direct limits on the volume of fish coming out of a fishery and can include the tonnage of fish/shellfish or the number of fish/shellfish that may be caught from a fishery in a period of time such as total allowable catches. FAO *ibid*.

5 Input controls are fisheries management measures that restrict the number and size of fishing vessels (fishing capacity controls), the amount of time fishing vessels are allowed to fish (vessel usage controls) or the product of capacity and usage (fishing effort controls). "A Fishery Managers Guidebook - Management Measures and their Application." FAO Fisheries Technical Paper 424.

Implementation and monitoring

The actions and measures contained within this FMP will undergo an implementation phase where appropriate mechanisms will be required to deliver them. Such mechanisms could include voluntary measures, license conditions, national and regional byelaws, and statutory instruments.

The King Scallop FMP must be reviewed when appropriate and at least every six years. This formal review will assess how the FMP has performed in terms of delivering against the objectives of the Act.

To conclude

This FMP has been prepared to meet the requirements set out in the Fisheries Act 2020 and confirms the obligation set out in section 6(5) of the Act.

This FMP has collated existing management measures and available science and evidence to assess the status of our scallop stocks and determine a sustainable level of exploitation. While existing management measures are contributing positively to stocks in some areas, this is not true across all stock areas, as demonstrated by stock assessments that estimate some scallop stocks are being fished above MSY. The FMP highlights where knowledge and evidence gaps exist to establish sustainable king scallop fisheries. The management objectives and associated evidence and research plan guide those seeking to fill the gaps over time. The proposed management interventions seek to apply a precautionary approach to managing fishing whilst our evidence improves.