



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Fisheries Management Plan for Queen Scallop

Engagement Report

October 2024

We are the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We are 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.



© Crown copyright 2024

This information is licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/defra

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at FMPconsultations@defra.gov.uk

Contents

Summary	4
Sessions and representation	4
Event Format	5
Feedback on draft FMP objectives, measures and overall approach	5

Summary

This report presents a summary of engagement and feedback gathered by Defra to inform the development of the draft queen scallop FMP in English waters.

Between November 2023 and March 2024 Defra attended and hosted a series of online sessions as part of informal engagement to:

- Raise awareness about development of the queen scallop FMP for English waters amongst fishery managers and stakeholders; and
- Present draft FMP aims, objectives, and proposed management interventions to gather feedback to determine whether they are fit for purpose and set the right direction of travel for English and wider UK Queen scallop fisheries.

Sessions and representation

Engagement activities with interested parties during the development of the draft FMP ranged from Defra providing updates and opportunities to gain feedback and further discussion at existing forums, and specific meetings organised to focus on the developing FMP. An open-door policy and contact details for Defra were also provided for those wishing to become involved outside of these formal meetings.

A summary of the sessions where the key draft elements of the queen scallop FMP were presented and discussed is provided below. There were over 100 attendees across all sessions, representing fisheries management and enforcement authorities, scallop catching and processing sectors and Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (eNGOs):

- Defra hosted webinar to introduce the tranche 3 round of FMPs, including the queen scallop FMP: November 2023.
- Meetings of the existing Queen Scallop Management Group, formed of representatives from the UK shellfish catching and processing sectors and UK Fisheries Administrations: September 2023 and February 2024.
- A session with representatives invited from all UK Fisheries Administrations and Crown Dependencies: Feb 2024.
- A session with interested representatives from eNGOs, offered to members of the existing Defra/ eNGO group: Feb 2024.
- Update provided at the Scallop Industry Consultation Group (SICG) meeting: March 2024.
- Attendance at existing monthly Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority (IFCA) meeting, open to MMO coastal and operations officers and IFCA officers around the country; March 2024.

Event Format

Given the narrow scope of the English queen scallop FMP and limited stakeholder interest, engagement sessions took place online via MS Teams and through direct email contact.

Promotion of the sessions and discussions took place via direct emails to existing groups or meeting organisers, as well as via email with interested parties through the Defra shellfish mailbox, available for attendees and those with an interest in the FMP to share further thoughts and feedback.

During the sessions, Defra presented an overview of what an FMP is, why Defra had prioritised queen scallops for an FMP and the proposed approach to developing and applying an England only FMP given the geographic nature of the UK fishery. The presentation also provided an overview of the proposed draft FMP objectives and measures, and a timeline for the draft FMP to be finalised and ready for public consultation.

After the initial presentation, open discussions and an opportunity for attendees to provide feedback took place which largely focused on the following topics:

- Whether the proposed FMP objectives and measures seemed appropriate for English and potentially wider UK queen scallop fisheries, both in terms of delivering commitments to achieve sustainable fisheries and in practice regarding for example compliance, enforceability, and potential unintended consequences.
- Were there alternative or additional objectives or measures that should be considered for the FMP.
- Were the proposed short-term management interventions for the English queen scallop fishery appropriate and correctly prioritised.
- Whether it was appropriate to mirror some of the objectives and measures included in the published king scallop FMP (in English and Welsh waters).

Feedback on draft FMP objectives, measures and overall approach

This section summarises feedback received during the above sessions and discussions, as well as from direct email contact with interest parties.

Proposed approach

There was general support for the overarching aim of the FMP, which is to identify where there may be opportunities to increase protection to queen scallop stocks in English waters in the short-term, whilst the evidence base improved and development of longer-term management progressed to restore and maintain queen scallop stocks at sustainable levels. It was agreed that this FMP should seek to build on the work carried out previously

at a UK level to develop management measures for managing queen scallop fisheries sustainability.

This would include:

- Aligning the development and introduction of management for queen scallops with the process for introducing management in the king scallop fishery.
- Introducing early management measures to provide increased protection, such as an increased Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) and gear restrictions.
- Developing a more formal approach to stock surveys in collaboration with scientists from around the UK, commissioning research to address evidence gaps and utilising existing data.
- Encouraging a joined-up approach to management for UK stocks.

Whilst the above principles were widely supported, concerns were raised around the narrow scope of the FMP, being England only. The need for UK wide management, as the only means of ensuring stocks were managed sustainably and to ensure effective collaboration, was reiterated. Despite such concerns, there was support and appetite for the English queen scallop FMP to potentially set some of the groundwork for future UK wide management, building on previous work at UK level to develop management, whilst providing some additional protection to stocks in the meantime.

Draft FMP objectives

5 proposed FMP objectives were presented at the various sessions, on which there was broad support both in their relevance to queen scallops and the approach to mirror some of the objectives included in the published king scallop FMP given the links between them. No significant gaps or additional objectives for inclusion in the draft FMP were identified, and the actions proposed to achieve the objectives were supported. It was reiterated that a UK approach to management would be needed to fully achieve these objectives.

Some specific feedback on the proposed individual objectives was gathered and summarised, as follows:

- A high level of support for improving the evidence base and ongoing data collection and monitoring for queen scallop fisheries was expressed. Examples of existing best practice and stock assessment surveys and data collection in UK and Isle of Man waters was suggested as a starting point for this work.
- Questions were raised around whether worthwhile queen scallop stock surveys could be completed in English waters only, or whether collaboration with other UK Fisheries Administrations to put in place a wider, UK level assessment approach would be required. It was highlighted that previous Cefas work looking at stock assessments for the Irish Sea, indicated that it would be difficult to assess only English stocks, and a wider UK approach would be preferable. This is also recommended by the ICES scallop working group.

- Whilst there was support in principle to working towards a formal ICES stock assessment, a cautious approach was suggested due to the fluctuating and limited life span of queen scallops and potential impacts of applying existing ICES categorisation to these data-poor stocks.
- There was general support for increasing protection to stocks in the short term, although it was not clear how this could be achieved (in addition to increasing the MCRS in English waters) unless a UK wide approach is taken.
- General agreement around the need for assessing environmental impacts of queen scallop fishing, particularly as this is a priority measure in the king scallop FMP.
- The inclusion of an objective around exploring the impacts of changes in marine spatial use on queen scallop fisheries was welcomed, given existing concerns over the risks to the queen scallop fishery in the Irish Sea from planned wind farm developments, both in terms of where the wind farms may be located e.g. over key fishing grounds, and the increased pressure on marine spatial use. It was suggested that spatial overlaps between queen scallop fishing activity and windfarm developments should be mapped and published within the draft FMP to provide additional context around this proposed objective.

Draft FMP measures

4 proposed management measures were presented at the various sessions, along with the rationale for their inclusion in the draft FMP, including an increase to the MCRS for queen scallop in English waters.

Whilst there was a high level of support for the proposed suite of measures, with no objections raised, suggestions were put forward at more than one session for an additional measure around gear specifications to be included in the draft FMP. The rationale for this was due to there currently being no such technical specifications in place in English or UK waters for gears used to target queen scallops and to support the proposed MCRS increase to ensure bycatch of undersized queen scallops and other species is minimised. It was also noted that there was a potential impact of gear on the wider environment.

A new draft measure around exploring potential options for introducing gear specifications for queen scallop fishing in English waters has been included in the draft FMP, as a direct result of the feedback received.

Other specific feedback on the proposed individual measures was gathered and summarised, as follows:

- Concerns were raised around the future sustainability of the queen scallop fishery in the Irish Sea if fishing effort is not effectively controlled. The Western Waters Effort Regime, which sets day at sea effort limits, only applies to vessels of 15 metres or over which leaves the under 15 metre fleet unlimited. Management of fishing effort by under 15 metre vessels needs to be considered.
- There was some uncertainty around how an increase to queen scallop MCRS in English waters only could be successfully implemented and enforced.

- Views were expressed that introducing a higher MCRS in English waters only, might encourage the adoption of the higher size outside of English waters, so seems worthwhile providing it can be enforced. Counter to this, it was also highlighted that an increased MCRS in English waters only could risk fishing effort moving to other waters to avoid the higher size. It was recognised that the practicalities, along with the benefits and risks still needed consideration and there are examples from other regions with differing MCRS as to how this increase could be managed.
- There was support for aligning development and implementation of queen scallop measures with those introduced under the English and Welsh king scallop FMP (where appropriate). For example, any proposed changes to the Western Waters effort regime for king scallop fisheries would also affect queen scallop fisheries, so would need to be considered in parallel.
- It was suggested that a greater focus on controlling new entrants into the fishery was needed, such as through a permit scheme, due to concerns around the open nature of the fishery. It was highlighted that given there were only a small number of vessels currently targeting queen scallops, any small increase in fleet capacity may significantly impact stocks. It was recognised that this is an important issue, however questions were raised as to how any such permit scheme could be achieved on an England only basis.
- It was felt important to explore marine spatial prioritisation under the FMP.
- There was acknowledgement that this FMP is an important step in the management of UK queen scallop fisheries. Increased management in English waters alongside the existing suite of measures in Isle of Man waters will provide protection for of a large proportion of the stock area.

To conclude, despite the recognised limitations of an England only queen scallop FMP there is support for short-term actions to increase protection in English waters and for prioritising queen scallop stock management. There is also support for taking advantage of the commitment and actions to improve king scallop management, as set out in the published king scallop FMP, to deliver this work in parallel.