



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Fisheries Management Plan for Southern North Sea Demersal Non- Quota Species

Engagement Report

October 2024

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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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Summary

The following report presents an overview of engagement carried out by the Marine Management Organisation's (MMO) Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) team and of the stakeholder feedback received that supported the development of the Southern North Sea demersal non-quota species (NQS) FMP.

The Southern North Sea NQS FMP forms part of the next round of FMPs being developed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), for English waters.

Throughout 2023, the MMO's FMP team used a series of engagement methods as part of both formal and informal engagement to:

- Raise awareness about development of the Southern North Sea NQS FMP for English waters amongst stakeholders; and
- Present draft FMP content such as evidence requirements and proposed management interventions to stakeholders to gather feedback, alternatives, and additional evidence that should be considered.

Stakeholder identification

One of the first steps before formal stakeholder engagement could begin was to identify relevant stakeholders to be involved in the development of the FMP. To do this, stakeholder analysis was carried out which involved first creating a list of all possible stakeholders relevant to the FMP and then assigning a category to each stakeholder (Collaborate, Consult, or Inform) based on various factors (See Annex 1). Those who were deemed to fall under the category of "collaborate" were approached to be part of the Working Group (WG) (See Annex 2). Detailed information on the criteria for stakeholder analysis can be found in Annex 1. The stakeholder list and associated assigned level of engagement was fluid and therefore changed as the FMP developed.

Working Group

To assist in the development of the Southern North Sea NQS FMP, the FMP team set up a WG. The purpose of the WG was to advise the FMP alongside the MMO as the lead delivery partner. In addition, the WG had the function of a forum for engagement on the FMP, and members were encouraged to seek opportunities to engage the wider fishing industry (commercial and recreational) and other key stakeholders where appropriate to feed their views into the FMP's development.

The WG membership comprised of individuals who represented different sectors of the fishing industry such as inshore, offshore, recreational and other government department representatives from Defra and Cefas (See Annex 2). These individuals were encouraged

to take part in WG meetings that were agreed to be held online due to the large geographic spread of members. Members who could not attend online meetings were encouraged to provide feedback to us via email and one-to-one telephone conversations. Although efforts were made to ensure that there was appropriate attendance at every WG meeting, external factors such as weather, work commitments and technology meant that some WG members were unable to attend meetings.

Throughout the preparation phase of the development of the FMP, MMO sought feedback and input from the group on species prioritisation, drafted elements of the FMP and potential management measures to be proposed in the first iteration. Detailed information on the number of attendees and links to published meeting notes can be found below in Table 1.

Table 1: Southern North Sea NQS FMP WG meeting dates, attendance and links to meeting notes. ‘OGDs’ = Other Government Departments; ‘Other’ = attendees from non-governmental organisations, academia or independent facilitators.

Date	Purpose of Meeting	MMO	Inshore	Attendees				Total	Link to Meeting Notes
				Offshore	Recreatio	OGDs	Other*		
10/10/2023	First WG meeting	2	3	3	0	1	0	9	WG1
08/11/2023	WG meeting to discuss proposed management measures	3	1	1	1	1	0	7	WG2
16/01/2024	WG meeting to provide feedback	2	1	3	0	1	0	7	WG3

	from online survey and a run-through of the draft FMP								
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Following the meeting on 8 November 2023 which focussed specifically on the proposed management measures, minutes were circulated and those members not present for the meeting were given the opportunity to comment on the measures and provide feedback. No responses were received at this stage.

The WG were given the opportunity to review the full draft FMP and also provided with opportunities for follow up phone call conversations with WG members who requested it. Offering several channels for WG members to provide feedback gave them the chance to provide it in a way that was most appropriate to them. The FMP team received feedback on the draft FMP from many of the WG members.

Southern North Sea coastal engagement

A series of in-person engagement events were used throughout the development of the FMP to gather views from stakeholders across the Southern North Sea area.

4.1 November – December 2023

As a critical first step in developing the Southern North Sea NQS FMP, MMO’s FMP team hosted several in-person events with stakeholders along the Southern North Sea coastal area. Drop-in sessions at venues and quayside visits were used to optimise levels of engagement with a variety of stakeholders. Representatives from the commercial, recreational sectors and wider stakeholders with an interest in the FMP were invited to attend engagement events through direct contact, industry groups, social media posts and website blogs. The information gathered during this engagement gave MMO an initial steer on what stakeholders wanted to see prioritised within the FMP, including species and management measures.

The first of these events took place in Whitstable, within ICES area 4c, on 17 November. Following on from the Whitstable event, engagement in ICES area 4c continued between 5 and 7 December in Harwich, West Mersea, Lowestoft, Wells and King’s Lynn. Engagement in ICES area 4b ran on 7 and 8 December and sessions were held in Bridlington, Hartlepool and North Shields. The FMP team spoke to individuals such as vessel owners and industry group representatives.

Across all the in-person events held in November and December 2023, 30 stakeholders, from inshore and offshore commercial sectors and the recreational sector, were engaged with and their views obtained regarding this FMP. The chart below shows the number of attendees at each of the in-person events.

Location	Number of Attendees
Whitstable	10
Harwich	4
West Mersea	11
Lowestoft	2
Wells	1
King's Lynn	0
Bridlington	0
Hartlepool	3
North Shields	1

Stakeholders were introduced to the Southern North Sea NQS FMP and asked questions on the species that were most important to them and what potential management measures they would like to see within the FMP. Detailed feedback from this engagement can be found in the [2023 Stakeholder Feedback Summary Document](#). How this feedback fed into the development of the FMP is highlighted below.

Online engagement

5.1 Stakeholder webinars

Alongside the in-person engagement in 2023, the FMP team hosted an online session open to all stakeholders with an interest in the FMP who could not attend the coastal sessions. A total of 11 stakeholders attended the online webinar, with attendees from both commercial and recreational fisheries.

5.2 Angling Trust forum

On 14 December 2023 the Angling Trust held an online forum to engage specifically with recreational anglers. The focus of the forum was to discuss the proposed management measures, and for recreational anglers to provide their views on the FMP. A total of 12 anglers attended this online session. A high-level summary of the feedback from recreational sea anglers can be found in Section 6 and detailed feedback can be found in the [2023 Stakeholder Feedback Summary Document](#).

5.3 Online survey

In an effort to obtain the views of as many interested stakeholders as possible, we launched an online survey to glean opinions on the proposed management measures as well as the perceived importance of the various species that are within the scope of this FMP. The online survey was open from 22 December 2023 until 9 January 2024, during which time 34 responses were received from both commercial and recreational fishers, as well as representatives from Fish Producer Organisations, eNGOs, and members of the public. The results of the online survey have been included in the feedback summary in section 6, below.

Feedback on proposed management measures

Feedback on proposed management measures from all stakeholder engagement carried out for the development of the FMP is summarised below.

6.1 Restricting future flyseining effort

221kW restriction

- The majority of stakeholders felt that this would be an effective measure.
- Some members raised concerns that restricting vessel engine power would affect most of the UK fleet, given that these are largely converted beam trawlers. Nevertheless, this measure is thought likely to be the most effective at reducing the impact of flyseining, where often vessels are considered much too large and powerful for the area in which they are operating.

Gross tonnage limitation

- The majority of stakeholders felt that this would be a fairly effective measure, but as with engine size there were concerns from some members that this would affect a lot of UK vessels.
- Most stakeholders feel that, like engine power, limiting the size of flyseining vessels will be effective at reducing their impact on the FMP species.

Introduction of 100mm mesh as standard

- Whilst the majority of stakeholders feel this would be an effective measure, some raised concerns that this is not compatible with the new Statutory Instrument stipulating 80mm.

Introduction of a permitting scheme

- The majority of stakeholders feel this approach would be effective.

Restrictions on time spent in areas 4b and 4c

- The majority of stakeholders stated this would be an effective approach, however some feel it unnecessary given the amount of time flyseiners are operational.

Seasonal closures

- The response here was similar to above, although again some stakeholders feel it an unnecessary measure, reporting that flyseining vessels operate seasonally in any event. It was, however, felt amongst the majority that seasonal closures would be more effective than restricting the time spent in the area.

Overall engine size limitations

- Any limitations on engine size would need to be properly checked and enforced to ensure compliance.

Early adopter scheme for REM

- The majority of stakeholders feel that this would be effective, although concerns that REM would only really be effective on larger vessels.

General feedback on flyseining proposals

- Some stakeholders stated that flyseining should be prohibited altogether due to the impact on smaller fish species.
- The proposals should be looked at in conjunction with the discards proposals.
- There needs to be evidence to support these proposed measures.

6.2 Advancement of emerging cephalopod fisheries

- Stakeholders were mostly in agreement that measures are required to support the collection of data on emerging fisheries, including supporting of other, alternative, fishing practices.
- There are emerging squid fisheries in some areas around the English coast.
- There is a need to assess species distribution, but resourcing is difficult at present.
- Retaining the common cuttlefish fishery is important for job security.
- Octopus are being caught in greater numbers; a fishery for octopus would be beneficial.

6.3 Education, voluntary guidelines and codes of conduct

- Measures need to be consistent across the Channel and Southern North Sea FMPs.
- Smoothhound ought to be included in this FMP as a species of interest.
- Historic data may be available from paper records held by angling clubs.
- Recreational stakeholders are interested in understanding more about species displacement and reasons for decline in numbers.
- Some stakeholders were concerned that voluntary guidelines such as safe handling and recommended gears within the recreational sector will be ineffective and should be mandatory.

6.4 Minimum Conservation Reference Sizes

- The majority of recreational stakeholders were in favour of the introduction of MCRS for lesser-spotted dogfish and smoothhound.
- Stakeholders raised concerns around the 5% threshold for bass, and the fact that large numbers of dogfish are caught solely to facilitate the retention of bass. It was also highlighted that, as dogfish are generally either discarded or used for bait, data around catch is poor. Some believed implementing a MCRS for dogfish would be beneficial given the high survivability of the species.

Wider stakeholder engagement

7.1 FMP team presentations to wider stakeholders

Regional Fisheries Groups (RFGs)

The FMP team utilised the existing RFG meetings to update stakeholders on the progress of the FMP's development. The team attended a meeting with fishermen in area 4c on 12 October 2023, during which a presentation was given regarding this FMP.

Meeting minutes are available here:

[RFG Meeting Notes South East 4c 12.10.2023](#)

To mitigate stakeholder fatigue and avoid the need for separate events, in addition to the RFG meeting referred to above, the FMP team also attended several existing RFG drop-in sessions in order to discuss the FMP:

- 19/09/23 – North Shields RFG drop-in engagement
- 20/09/23 – Hartlepool RFG drop-in engagement
- 23/10/23 – Lowestoft Emerging Fisheries Workshop
- 24/10/23 - Scarborough RFG drop-in engagement
- 24/10/23 - Whitby RFG drop-in engagement

Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authorities (IFCA)

The FMP team involved the relevant IFCAs in the development of the FMP through meetings to discuss proposed management and also monthly updates for IFCA officers working at Northumberland, North Eastern and Eastern IFCAs.

Finfish Industry Advisory Group

The FMP team attended regular Finfish Industry Advisory Group (FIAG) meetings to update members on the progress of the FMP. FIAG provides a forum to discuss sustainability and management of UK finfish non-quota species fisheries. Detailed meeting minutes from the meetings that the FMP attended can be found below. The FMP team attended a FIAG meeting on 16 December 2023 but received no feedback on the day.

UK Association of Fish Producer Organisation (UKAFPO) meetings

The FMP team attended regular UKAFPO meetings to update the association of fish PO's. The following meetings were attended by the Southern North Sea NQS FMP team:

- 19 October 2023
- 18 January 2024

Meeting minutes are shared with attendees after but not formally published so no direct links are available.

7.2 Recreational fishers

In addition to the event hosted by the Angling Trust outlined above, the FMP team set up a meeting with the Angling Trust's Policy and Advocacy Manager to gather views on the FMP and issues faced by recreational anglers.

Key issues involved the inclusion of smoothhound in the FMP, growing charter boat sector, the desire for a voluntary code of conduct and the impact of bottom towed gears on inshore species.

7.3 Environmental Non-government Organisations (eNGOs) meeting

Meetings were held with eNGOs alongside Defra and other FMP delivery leads. A meeting took place on 16 January 2024 to discuss the FMP programme progress to date. Separate discussions also took place with representatives from some eNGOs.

7.4 Business-as-usual engagement

The FMP Team had many business-as-usual meetings with various stakeholders relevant to the development of the FMP such as National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations (NFFO), IFCA's, NE, Fishing into the Future and the Future of Our Inshore Fisheries groups. These discussions helped to strengthen stakeholder relationships and to provide the FMP team with other channels of communication to wider stakeholders.

7.5 FMP mailbox

During the development of the FMP, there was a dedicated mailbox set up for stakeholders to send in any queries around the FMP or give feedback on the content. This mailbox was monitored daily, and responses were aimed to be given within 10 working days. All comments regarding FMP content have been covered by other meetings and therefore no specific comments are highlighted here.

Communications overview

The MMO's FMP team and its supporting MMO communications officer developed and maintained core material relevant to this FMP. This material included lines to take and frequently asked questions to ensure consistent messaging went out to all stakeholders

and evolved as the project progressed. Where appropriate, the MMO also utilised core material created and managed by the Defra FMP team for the wider FMP programme. These core documents supported the production of communications material used for the following:

- Fishing News
- Angling industry press.
- Monthly mail chimp sent out to interested stakeholders with updates on FMP progress and engagement events.
- Monthly IFCO/MO FMP update.
- Direct communications with groups such as Producer Organisations, Fisherman Associations, Blue Marine Foundation.
- Updates to pre-existing networks – Regional Fisheries Groups (RFGs), Finfish Industry Advisory Group (FIAG), Future of Inshore Fisheries (FOIF) etc.
- Newsletters (fishers bulletin (fortnightly), Defra stakeholders bulletin (monthly), Stakeholder bulletin (monthly)).
- Social media (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram to displaying key dates for consultation/engagement workshops etc.) And IFCA social media platforms can be used.
- GOV.UK Southern North Sea NQS FMP web page

The MMO aimed to ensure that the information and updates were disseminated in a clear, accessible, and timely manner and that particular attention was paid to ensure that the language used was appropriate to the audience.

Annex 1: Stakeholder analysis scoring criteria

The scores will be given by the Fisheries Management Plan team during a workshop and checked by Principle Marine Officers for local expertise. Each stakeholder is given a score for the following:

Influence: (Stakeholders ability to influence the projects' ability to successfully deliver its objectives)

- 5) Ability to directly stop the FMP process e.g. FMP securing approval. Mostly this score used for government department stakeholders from whom we need sign off e.g. Defra, ALBs and DAs
- 4) Ability to significantly influence or steer the development of the FMP
- 3) Moderate ability to influence the FMP (positive or negative)
- 2) Minimal ability to influence the FMP
- 1) No influence

Impact: (Stakeholder may be impacted/ affected both negatively and positively by project outcomes)

- 5) Major impact as a consequence of FMP outcomes to stakeholder e.g. stopping incomes
- 4) Significantly impacted by the consequences of FMP outcomes
- 3) Moderately impacted by the consequences of FMP outcomes
- 2) Minimal impact from the consequences of FMP outcomes
- 1) No impact to stakeholder

Expertise: (May hold academic or practice-based expertise relevant to the project)

- 5) Up to date in depth knowledge relevant to the project
- 4) Good knowledge
- 3) Moderate knowledge
- 2) Minimal knowledge
- 1) No knowledge

Interest: (May have expressed an interest in the project/ potential outputs and whose interest we wish to encourage)

- 5) Significant interest in the FMP
- 4) Good interest in the FMP
- 3) Moderate interest in the FMP
- 2) Minimal interest for the FMP
- 1) No interest for the FMP

Note: The MMO have assumed that a lack of overt interest does not necessarily equate disinterest within the commercial fishing sector as research states this is instead more likely to be linked to disempowerment, so interest has been assumed as universally high when it comes to the commercial sectors

Target aspirations for the stakeholder groups

Collaborate: Primary and key stakeholder who will be directly affected both positively and negatively by the FMP outputs. The MMO will work collaboratively with the group, engaging with them regularly to update them on relevant policy, and providing guidance and support through regular meetings and digital contact. Regular and direct engagement

will help build a partnership based on trust and collaboration. These stakeholders will be kept fully informed on the FMP programme and project specific details.

High level of influence and impact

Target for expertise = 4 or over

Target for influence = 4 or over

Target for Impact = 4 or over

Target for interest = 4 over

Consult: Secondary and some key stakeholders. This includes people or groups that are indirectly affected, either positively or negatively, by the FMPs output. This includes people who have a strong interest in the effort for academic, philosophical, or political reasons, even though they and their families, friends, and associates are not directly affected by it. The MMO will pursue 'semi' pro-active arrangements with them. They will also reach out to seek informal input with them when appropriate. Concerns will be considered, and feedback obtained on issues that affect stakeholders, these concerns can be fed back to the WGs.

Medium to high level of influence and impact

Target for knowledge = 3 or below

Target for influence = 3 or below

Target for impact = 3 or below

Target for interest = 3

Inform: Secondary stakeholder. This group includes people or groups who have shown some interest but will only be indirectly affected and hold no influence or obvious expertise. These stakeholders are privy to the most passive level of engagement.

Low level of influence and impact

Target for expertise = 2

Target for influence = 2

Target for impact = 2

Target for interest = 2

Annex 2: Southern North Sea NQS FMP and WG member lists

Table 2: Southern North Sea NQS FMP WG member list*.

Organisation/Area of interest	Role on Group
Marine Management Organisation FMP team	Chair
Marine Management Organisation FMP team	Secretariat
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	Policy support
Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science	Representation on behalf of Cefas
Anglo Scottish Fish Producers' Organisation	WG member
Eastern England Fish Producers' Organisation	WG member
Humberside Fish Producers' Organisation	WG member
North Shields Fish Quay Co. Ltd.	WG member
Inshore Fisherman (North Shields)	WG member
Inshore Fisherman (Lee-on-Sea)	WG member
West Mersea Fisherman's Association	WG member
Whitstable Industry Representative	WG member
New Under Ten Fishermen's Association	WG member
North Sea Fishermen's Organisation	WG member
Angling Trust Recreational Anglers	WG member
Professional Boatman's Association Charter Vessels	WG member

*This list reflects those people who accepted to be on the WG, not who attended.

