

THE FUTURE OF UK FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

POLICY BRIEF NO. 21 - JULY 2023

OVERVIEW

- Following Brexit and the signing into law of the Fisheries Act 2020, the forthcoming Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) are intended to be the key vehicle for the achievement of sustainable fisheries management in the UK.
- The FMPs hold much promise for improving how the UK manages its fisheries, and stocks shared with other Coastal States. However, a number of significant challenges face UK fisheries which may hinder the implementation and effectiveness of the FMPs if not adequately addressed.
- These challenges include addressing data and evidence gaps, improving the coordination and coherence of fisheries management, enabling fisheries management to be adaptive and suitable to local contexts, and ensuring that the FMPs incorporate wider environmental and social considerations.
- Six frontrunner FMPs are due to be published by the end of 2023 following bespoke development processes that have emphasised stakeholder engagement and collaboration.

BACKGROUND

Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) will be a key mechanism for implementing the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) (1), which sets out how the UK will meet the objectives of the Fisheries Act 2020 (2). An FMP sets out policies for maintaining one or several stocks at sustainable levels, or restoring them to such levels if needed; as well as policies which relate to wider ecological, social, and economic considerations, where appropriate. For stocks fished by both the UK and other Coastal States, FMPs will also help to guide management negotiations.

Under the JFS, the national fisheries authorities are required to identify which stocks require FMPs, and develop these jointly with other national fisheries authorities as needed. 43 FMPs have been proposed (3), with six selected to be “frontrunners” (4): King scallop (English and Welsh waters), crab and lobster (English waters), whelk (English waters), bass (English and Welsh waters), Channel non-quota demersal species (English waters), and Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel mixed flatfish (English waters).

Due to be published at the end of 2023, in advance of the other FMPs, the frontrunners are being used to pilot different approaches to developing FMPs in collaboration with the fishing industry and other

stakeholders. As such, different delivery partners were selected for leading the individual FMP development processes (4). Despite the bespoke development of each FMP, all share the key tenets of stakeholder engagement and co-management, in accordance with the JFS (1).

Once published, progress in implementing the FMPs and their effectiveness will be monitored. Each will be reviewed at least once every six years, or sooner – if required due to new evidence, international obligations, or wider events – to ensure they remain fit for purpose (1). Stakeholders will again be key to this review process.

This briefing synthesises discussions from the APPG event ‘The Future of UK Fisheries Management’ held 24 May 2023 (5). Where additional sources have been consulted in producing this briefing, citations are provided.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

"[FMPs] are not a silver bullet... but they are a very important part of moving us in the right direction." – Fisheries Minister Mark Spencer

FMPs offer a new way to drive the sustainable co-management of UK fisheries, and to address some of the key perennial challenges facing the UK's waters, fisheries, and fishing industry. However, these challenges – which centre on data gaps, coordination across management boundaries, adaptability and suitability, and inclusion of wider social and environmental issues – may also hamper the implementation and effectiveness of the FMPs. As such, they will require careful consideration and consultation as the frontrunner FMPs draw nearer to finalisation, and as the other FMPs undergo development. The following section

highlights what work is being undertaken towards this, and what additional action should be considered by policymakers.

Addressing data and evidence gaps

Filling data and evidence gaps is a common aspiration across the different FMPs, particularly the Channel Non-Quota Demersal Species FMP and the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP. For various FMPs, a key component of the development process has been to identify data gaps specific to their stocks and to create research plans to prioritise action. This will be guided by the precautionary principle as laid out in the Fisheries Act 2020, which requires taking a more risk-averse approach where there is greater uncertainty around negative impacts on fisheries and marine ecosystems.

Given the expense involved in gathering marine data, funding to fill data gaps will be allocated based on prioritisation exercises. Defra is already directing grants towards data collection, for example via the Fisheries Industry Science Partnerships (FISP) scheme (14), with data from this to be channelled into the FMP development process. Policymakers could also support efficient use of resources through regular, effective communication between different government departments and agencies to avoid duplication of effort (15). Meanwhile, public bodies such as Seafish and academic institutions are well-positioned to contribute further to collaborative data collection initiatives.



Improving the coordination and coherence of fisheries management

Within the UK, fisheries management is overseen and carried out by a range of government departments and public bodies including Defra, the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) in England, and those from the Welsh, Northern Irish and Scottish governments. UK fisheries are also affected by regulation and policymaking for other uses of the marine space, such as offshore wind farm developments.

A crucial role of the FMPs will be to enable the establishment of consistent plans across large areas, providing time for management systems in different fisheries to align with each other. For example, under the draft crab and lobster FMP, minimum landing sizes for common and spiny lobster across different regions will be harmonised where appropriate. Defra has said that continuous communication is needed between the different delivery partners for the FMPs, to ensure that these are compatible and complementary where possible. As for marine spatial planning, fishermen have frequently raised this during FMP engagement events, and the FMPs will acknowledge this issue.

The UK must also co-manage stocks shared with other Coastal States. The FMPs will apply to all vessels fishing the stocks they cover, and will support future negotiations with the EU and other European countries. For example, Total Allowable Catches (TACs) proposed in the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel mixed flatfish fishery FMP have been discussed with the EU, and it is intended that this FMP will clearly set an ambition for the UK and EU to annually agreed Maximum Sustainable Yields (MSY) for relevant stocks. Hopes have been expressed that the FMPs will be instrumental in ensuring effective fisheries governance for shared stocks. Project UK, a collaborative stakeholder partnership which is facilitated by the Marine

Stewardship Council (MSC) and is working towards an environmentally sustainable future for UK fisheries (16), has noted that the draft FMPs have already contributed to an improvement in some of the sustainability scores of the Fisheries Improvement Projects (FIPs) it is supporting.

Enabling fisheries management to be adaptive and suitable to local contexts

While fisheries management will need to be suitably coherent across management boundaries, it will also need to be fit-for-purpose for various local contexts. Defra has acknowledged the need to strike a balance between consistency across different management regions, while – in English waters – also giving Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) the freedom to develop appropriate local measures to support FMP objectives. Addressing data gaps will support these efforts, while for some stocks such as brown crab, evidence already exists indicating the need for site-specific measures. Seafish has said that it will work collaboratively with associated working groups and other bodies such as IFCAs to refine the specifics of locally-focused proposals. Localised management could also be supported through mechanisms such as licence conditions and voluntary measures.

The dynamic and changing nature of our seas – especially as the effects of climate change gather pace – also demand that the FMPs can sufficiently support adaptive fisheries management. The JFS acknowledges this in requiring FMPs to be reviewed more frequently than once every six years if information emerges to warrant earlier review (1). The UK Government will also continue to work with the EU – and with specific EU fleets where needed – on an ongoing basis over the coming years. More effective data collection would therefore support reviews, discussions, and negotiations. For example, partners involved in developing the king scallop FMP are aware that there is concern over the possibility that an emerging potting fishery would place extra pressure on stocks.

Ensuring that the FMPs incorporate wider environmental and social considerations

The Fisheries Act 2020 mandates that UK fisheries management brings economic and social benefits to UK communities, minimises sensitive species bycatch, and applies an ecosystem-based approach (2). The FMPs should therefore incorporate such considerations, in addition to legal requirements set out in Section 6 of the Fisheries Act 2020 around sustainable harvesting. This appears to be evident for the draft frontrunner FMPs; for example, the draft shellfish FMPs contain objectives for spatial management, human welfare, the shellfish market, and improving understanding of the shellfish sector's carbon footprint (17). Meanwhile, stakeholder feedback on the goals set out in the Channel non-quota demersal species FMP emphasised the need to pay due consideration to local communities and an ecosystem approach (18).

Opportunities for the FMPs to holistically fulfil the objectives of the Fisheries Act should continue to be explored. For example, efforts could be made to link the FMPs to regional seafood strategies such as Seafish's Seafood 2040 Strategic Framework (19). The UK could also look to examples from abroad, such as the EU Horizon 2020-funded SEAWise project which is working to develop a toolbox for the implementation of ecosystem-based fisheries

management, an approach that takes into account ecological, social, and economic interactions that affect and are affected by fisheries (20).

THE FRONTRUNNER FMPs AT A GLANCE

King scallop FMP (English and Welsh waters)

Who is leading its development?

The Scallop Industry Consultation Group Working Group (SICG WG), an industry-led group formed of representatives from the fishing industry and all the UK fisheries authorities, supported by Seafish. A Scallop Science Group and a Drafting Group were also established to support the SICG WG with developing both the FMP and its Evidence and Research Plan.

Why was it selected as a frontrunner?

In recognition of the work already been undertaken by the SICG WG to enhance future scallop fisheries management.

What stakeholder engagement has been carried out, and how has this fed into key proposals for the FMP?

In 2022, a total of 13 events were held across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, with eight of these in person. There was widespread agreement that a harvest strategy and harvest control rules are needed, the latter being thresholds that dictate how much fishing can take place based on indicators for the health of the stock. However, there was no firm agreement regarding the details of the management framework, for example, whether Total Allowable Catches (TACs) should be applied.

What are the next steps for the FMP?

It is currently making its way through internal Defra and Welsh Government processes. A public consultation will take place later in 2023, ahead of the FMP's publication at the end of the year. Immediately following this, a King Scallop Co-Management Group will be established to oversee implementation of the FMP.



Crab and lobster FMP (English waters)

Who is leading its development?

The Crab and Lobster Management Group (CMG), an industry-led group formed of representatives and stakeholders from across the crab and lobster supply chain, supported by Seafish.

Why was it selected as a frontrunner?

To simplify the crab and lobster management landscape, following recent declines in crab stocks and low numbers of lobster in some areas (6,7).

What stakeholder engagement has been carried out, and how has this fed into key proposals for the FMP?

Throughout 2022, a series of stakeholder activities were carried out online or in-person across the country. 530 individuals joined these in total, including representatives from across the catching, processing and supply chain sector, researchers, local and national regulators, and NGOs. Stakeholders expressed a strong desire for collaborative and inclusive management, and for regional approaches.

What are the next steps for the FMP?

As the FMP nears finalisation, two key focus areas will be moving from data deficiency to a "data-rich future", and management of soft shelled brown crab for whelk bait.

Whelk FMP (English waters)

Who is leading its development?

The Whelk Management Group (WMG), an industry-led group formed of representatives and stakeholders from across the whelk supply chain, supported by Seafish. A WMG Science Sub-Group will identify data needs for whelk fisheries and recommend ways to fulfil these (8).

Why was it selected as a frontrunner?

English whelk fisheries need to be better understood to ensure that effective management measures are in place.

What stakeholder engagement has been carried out, and how has this fed into key proposals for the FMP?

For the purpose of efficiency, activities for the whelk FMP were carried out alongside the crab and lobster FMP. Based in part on discussions at these events, proposals have been formulated for early management interventions, including restricting access to whelk fisheries by means of a permit or entitlement (8).

What are the next steps for the FMP?

Moving forward, the proposed early management interventions will undergo further consideration as a means to reduce fishing effort and mortality of whelk stocks. FISP projects are also underway to address key knowledge gaps within whelk fisheries.

Bass FMP (English and Welsh waters)

Who is leading its development?

This is a joint exercise led by Defra and the Welsh Government, building on stakeholder engagement exercises by Policy Lab (10).

Why was it selected as a frontrunner?

An ambitious FMP is needed to maximise the socio-economic benefits of bass fishing, alongside maintaining the health of bass stocks into the future (11).

What stakeholder engagement has been carried out, and how has this fed into key proposals for the FMP?

From March 2022 to January 2023, a mix of engagement methods were used to reach approximately 1,400 stakeholders who comprised equal numbers of commercial and recreational fishers. This included interviews, pop-up sessions, port visits, social research, collective intelligence debates, co-design workshops, and online surveys. Stakeholders emphasised several key needs including an inclusive stakeholder engagement structure for management, and minimising discards of bass bycatch.

What are the next steps for the FMP?

A plan is in place to establish a Bass Management Group. Potential changes to the FMP were also considered, including increased flexibility and adaptability in the face of changing science, and a review into bass fishery access.

Channel non-quota demersal species FMP (English waters)

Who is leading its development?

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) is leading stakeholder engagement and leading on the drafting of this FMP in the English Channel.

Why was it selected as a frontrunner?

There are widespread concerns among the fishing industry and fisheries scientists about the possible over-exploitation of stocks and a significant lack of data and evidence for non-quota stocks. Some of these species also have complex life histories which compound the challenge of determining sustainable harvesting levels, for example, cuttlefish (12).

What stakeholder engagement has been carried out, and how has this fed into key proposals for the FMP?

Visits and engagement events were held in June 2022 in ports from Kent to Cornwall, followed by more quayside events in March 2023. These events helped determine whether the scope of the FMP was correct, and changes were made based on the feedback raised.

What are the next steps for the FMP?

The establishment of a non-quota species management group is being considered alongside management measures including changes to fly-seining management, selectivity of fishing gears,

fishery closures, more monitoring to improve evidence bases, and a minimum conservation reference size for a range of non-quota species.

Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel mixed flatfish FMP (English waters)

Who is leading its development?

The EU negotiations and policy team within Defra is solely responsible for the development of this FMP.

Why was it selected as a frontrunner?

There is a need to understand the scientific evidence available for each stock, in order to achieve effective harvest management of these fisheries.

What stakeholder engagement has been carried out, and how has this fed into key proposals for the FMP?

Meetings were undertaken with organisations including the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations (NFFO), statutory conservation bodies, eNGOs, finfish advisory groups, and FMP sub-groups. Defra's existing engagement channels were also utilised, including regular calls with its international team (13). Stakeholders provided key feedback in relation to proposed measures such as the application of Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) management to lemon sole, witch, turbot and brill stocks, and drew attention to data gaps.

What are the next steps for the FMP?

International fisheries negotiations led by the Specialised Committee on fisheries will feed into the FMP in its final form. The FMP is also expected to be affected by the Channel non-quota demersal species FMP due to some stock crossovers.



CONCLUSIONS

Following the UK's departure from the EU and the publication of the Joint Fisheries Statement, the forthcoming FMPs are intended to be the principal way by which sustainable management of the UK's fish stocks will be achieved. An extensive amount of stakeholder engagement has been carried out to date – with engagement reports for all the FMPs to be published online in due course – while co-management approaches to developing and implementing the FMPs have been high on the agenda.

Significant challenges already face UK fisheries around sustainable harvesting of stocks, impacts on ecosystems, and economic viability. What is clear from experiences of developing the frontrunner FMPs is that much progress hinges on the sufficient availability of data and evidence to ensure that proposed measures will be effective in meeting the objectives of the FMPs. As such, policymakers could target funding at high-priority data gaps and facilitate collaborations between the industry, academia, government and other partners to collect data on ecosystems, stocks, and fishing activities.

Another need, and one that has already been highlighted by Defra, is for regular and effective communication between the different organisations developing the FMPs as well as between the governmental and public bodies with responsibility for elements of fisheries management in the UK. Ensuring this is in place will facilitate coherence and coordination between the different FMPs, taking into account the specific needs of different fisheries and geographies.

REFERENCES

1. [UK Government, Joint Fisheries Statement, November 2022. Accessed May 2023.](#)
2. [UK Government, Fisheries Act 2020, November 2020. Accessed May 2023.](#)
3. [UK Government, List of Fisheries Management Plans. Accessed May 2023.](#)
4. [UK Government. Fisheries Management Plans. Accessed May 2023.](#)
5. [APPG on Fisheries. The Future of UK Fisheries Management: All Our Panelists' Answers. Accessed May 2023.](#)
6. [Blue Marine Foundation. Perspectives on crustacean potting. Accessed May 2023.](#)
7. [Scottish Government. Crab and lobster fisheries - stock assessments: results 2016 to 2019. Accessed May 2023.](#)
8. [Seafish. Whelk Management Group Minutes - February 2023. Accessed May 2023.](#)
9. [Seafish. Improving how we manage our whelk fisheries. Accessed May 2023.](#)
10. [UK Government. Policy Lab. Accessed May 2023.](#)
11. [The Angling Trust. Bass Fishery Management Plan Process Begins. Accessed May 2023.](#)
12. [UK Government. Guidance, Channel demersal non-quota species Fisheries Management Plan. Accessed May 2023.](#)
13. [Seafish. FMIG Presentation 6. Fisheries Management Plans \(FMPs\). 17 January 2023. Accessed May 2023.](#)
14. [UK Government. Guidance, UK Seafood Fund: Fisheries Industry Science Partnerships scheme. Accessed May 2023.](#)
15. [APPG on Fisheries. Fishing in the Data Age. Accessed May 2023.](#)
16. [MSC. Project UK. Accessed May 2023.](#)
17. [Seafish. Shellfish Industry Advisory Group Minutes - December 2022. Accessed June 2023.](#)
18. [MMO. Channel Demersal Non-Quota Species Fisheries Management Plan: Feedback from February and March 2023 stakeholder engagement. Accessed May 2023.](#)
19. [Seafish. Seafood 2040. Accessed May 2023.](#)
20. [SEAwise. SEAwise homepage. Accessed May 2023.](#)



The All Party Parliamentary Group on Fisheries is supported by The Fishmongers' Company. The Secretariat is provided by Mindfully Wired Communications.