



THE FUTURE OF UK FISHERIES

PROTECTING OUR SEAS AS WE EXIT THE EU

WWF is calling on the governments across the UK to set high standards of environmental governance to protect our precious wildlife and wild places upon which our social and economic well-being depends. Europe's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) provides important conservation commitments for managing fish stocks and the impact of fishing on our marine environment. Given how hard the UK fought to establish some of the more progressive elements of the CFP, we hope that governments will work together to seize the opportunity as we exit the EU to establish the UK as a world leader of sustainable fisheries.

The EU is the world's largest single fisheries market. In 2015, the UK exported over £900 million of fish and fish products to the EU – that's almost 70% of total UK exports for the sector. If the UK is to trade effectively with this market, it's vital that UK seafood industry standards meet or improve on those established by the EU. The future of the industry also depends on the effective management of UK fisheries to ensure sustainable seafood for decades to come.

In order to achieve this, the UK government must develop a progressive strategy for managing its exit from the EU that delivers a sustainable and effective management system for fisheries and their impact on the marine environment.

WWF believes that this strategy must include the following:

1. COMPLIANCE WITH EU LEGISLATION UNTIL ALTERNATIVE RULES ARE IN PLACE

The UK remains bound by EU regulations until our exit has been completed. So, while the UK negotiates its exit from the EU and establishes alternative rules, fisheries must continue to operate in accordance with the CFP. A 'free for all' on quotas or other arrangements would be highly damaging and a retrograde step for the UK fishing industry and our marine environment.

2. PROGRESSIVE UK FISHERIES' LEADERSHIP

The UK has often been at the forefront of driving changes in EU fisheries policy, including in the recent CFP reform where they championed key measures that have helped deliver more sustainable management. It should maintain this leadership and introduce at a minimum new legislation that implements the key management commitments of the CFP, including those under EU legislation to combat illegal fisheries, with an ambition to go further. This will provide assurances to buyers and sellers that they are sourcing UK seafood products managed at or beyond high EU standards.

New UK fisheries law should include as a minimum:

- The requirement to set science-based quotas in accordance with the achievement of healthy stock levels.
- A commitment to minimise the impact of fishing on the marine environment.
- A commitment for an effective, time-bound discard ban.
- The achievement of sustainable fleet capacity.
- Effective seafood labelling.

3. CONSISTENCY ACROSS INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL BOUNDARIES

Fish stocks do not respect national borders and require shared management. UK stakeholders will no longer be eligible to participate in the regional Advisory Councils, nor will the UK government be part of the Member State groups negotiating the conditions of regional initiatives. To provide effective management, the UK will need to ensure a consistent approach across international boundaries and, given the devolved nature of UK fisheries, national administrations.

4. EFFECTIVE MONITORING AND ENFORCEMENT

Whatever legislation the UK adopts, it will need effective monitoring and enforcement. The most cost-effective option is Remote Electronic Monitoring, with cameras and sensors installed on UK and neighbouring fleets. This will set a strong standard within European waters and establish the UK as a leader in sustainable fisheries. It will also provide assurances to buyers and sellers that UK seafood is from a demonstrably legal and sustainable source.

5. STRONG SCIENCE-BASED MANAGEMENT

Management principles for UK fisheries should continue to be based on the best available science and coordinated with scientific institutions such as the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES). UK quotas must be consistent with current sustainability commitments and must not undermine the environmental certification of fisheries such as the Marine Stewardship Council programme.

6. FUNDING THE TRANSITION

The UK has been allocated €243.1 million in fisheries funding from 2014-2020 under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). The UK is also a major recipient of EU scientific funding. We expect the EMFF funding to remain available while the UK is a member of the EU. Once the UK leaves, our fisheries will still need financial support to transition to a sustainable fleet that is moving towards discard-free fisheries. This will include funding for improving selective activities (behaviour and gear), monitoring and enforcement, and strong science to underpin management decisions.

7. EXTERNAL DIMENSIONS

Withdrawing from the EU will mean UK-flagged vessels lose the opportunity to fish under all EU fisheries agreements with non-EU countries. The UK will need to negotiate its own agreements. In some cases, UK-flagged vessels may enter into private agreements. But in all fisheries the UK must continue to meet international duties, such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the FAO international agreements, and measures agreed in relevant fisheries bodies.

8. WIDER MANAGEMENT

The UK government must continue its 2020 target of 'Good Environmental Status' for our seas to ensure they are healthy, productive and biodiverse. Sustainable fisheries management that strives to minimise impact on the marine environment will be essential, and the protection currently provided by the Nature Directives for marine species and habitats must be maintained.

WWF is committed to working with marine stakeholders, including government and industry, to ensure that the UK continues to develop effective and sustainable marine management that delivers long-term benefits for society and the environment.

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