



FISHING FOR THE FUTURE

HOW NEW FISHERIES LEGISLATION CAN ESTABLISH THE UK AS A GLOBAL LEADER IN MARINE AND FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

As an island, the UK's history is intertwined with the ocean. Our seas are an important source of jobs across a variety of sectors, from shipping and energy to the onshore and offshore fishing industry. They are also home to an amazing variety of wildlife, including whales, porpoises, sharks and corals.

While we are witnessing positive trends on fish stocks in the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters – with only 47% of assessed stocks being overfished in comparison to 72% ten years ago – the health of our seas is threatened by overuse, a lack of proper protection, pollution and climate change. For example, research into the impact of bottom trawling in the Greater North Sea and the Celtic Seas has found that 86% of the assessed areas are physically disturbed and that consistent fishing pressure occurs in 74% of these areas, levels which are likely to impair the recovery of habitats¹.

As we prepare to leave the EU, the UK and devolved governments have a unique opportunity to develop world-leading, fit-for-purpose policies that protect and enhance this precious resource and build on the good progress that has already been made in some areas. The UK Government has announced that it will start this process with the drafting of new fisheries legislation in this parliament.



THE STATE OF OUR SEAS

Despite some progress in recent years, unsustainable fishing practices and other pressures such as climate change overshadow the future of the UK's marine sectors and in particular its fishing industries.

As the UK develops its domestic fishing policy in preparation for leaving the EU, we have the opportunity to create bespoke legislation that addresses these threats and delivers cleaner, healthier and more productive seas for the benefit of people and nature for generations to come. This would establish the UK's reputation as a world leader in marine and fisheries management and showcase seafood from Britain and Northern Ireland as a highly valued, sought after product globally.

The EU is currently 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.

We believe that new UK legislation can create a future where fisheries are managed in line with the protection and enhancement of our seas and support a sustainable, competitive and profitable seafood sector for the benefit of wider society. WWF is working with Greener UK, a coalition of environmental organisations, to advocate for ambitious, world-leading legislation².

NEW LEGISLATION FOR SUSTAINABLE SEAS SHOULD:

1. Demonstrate global leadership by enshrining international marine commitments, including those in the Sustainable Development Goals and Aichi Targets, into domestic law so that the highest environmental standards are applied to fisheries management within the UK's exclusive economic zone (EEZ).
2. Require all vessels to adhere to all domestic laws while fishing in the UK EEZ and have a strict monitoring, control, and enforcement regime that enables effective implementation of the rules. Likewise, UK vessels should be required to adhere to these obligations while fishing in non-UK waters.
3. As part of the new monitoring regime, require full accountability for all fishing that takes place in domestic waters. Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) with cameras should be fitted on towed gear vessels over 10 metre in length. This is a cost effective solution and would not only help build public confidence that a UK landing obligation and catch limits are being complied with, but would ensure better catch and bycatch data so that more detailed and accurate information can be gathered and used to inform management decisions. WWF research² shows that to install and operate REM on all >10m vessels would cost in the region of £5 million per year (around £3,785 per vessel to review 10% of its fishing activity). REM would also provide far greater coverage than current monitoring methods.
4. In addition to rebuilding and maintaining stocks of all harvested species above levels capable of producing the maximum sustainable yield (MSY), ensure that fisheries management includes assessment, minimisation and, where possible, elimination of adverse impacts on marine ecosystems, including food webs, habitats and non-target species.
5. Embark upon a world-leading fisheries research programme to fill knowledge gaps on stock assessment, species and habitats interactions, and ecosystem responses to fishing and aquaculture, climate change, pollution and coastal development to inform future marine management decisions.

6. Incentivise and promote stewardship of fish stocks and the wider marine environment by using transparent and objective criteria to allocate fishing opportunities and to harness positive incentives so that fishing businesses deliver the greatest environmental and social benefits, including maximising selective practices.
7. Respect clearly defined objectives for individual marine protected areas (MPAs), recognising that they must be managed as part of an ecologically coherent network of sites. Restrict any fishing activities that may undermine the achievement of a site's conservation objectives.
8. Account for climate-related impacts on the distribution and diversity of fish and other marine wildlife by ensuring adaptive mechanisms are built into the system to achieve greater resilience.
9. Co-operate and collaborate constructively both internally amongst the four countries of the UK and externally with the EU and neighbouring countries to support the development and delivery of multi-jurisdictional plans for fish stock management and conservation. Relevant stakeholders from industry, science and civil society must be involved at all stages.
10. Support the UK Government's aims and objectives under the Marine Strategy Regulations to achieve healthy, productive and biodiverse seas.

If new fisheries legislation does not address these issues, there is a real danger that the UK could be left behind by the EU, which will continue to evolve its Common Fisheries Policy and other regulations, leading to different standards and potential barriers to trade.

FUNDING THE TRANSITION

In the transition period before new fisheries legislation comes into force, it is important that UK fisheries continue to receive financial support. The UK has been allocated €243.1 million in fisheries funding from 2014-2020 under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and 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. The UK and devolved governments should work with the fishing industry to use this opportunity to cover 90% of the hardware costs of REM camera technology. 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.

WWF is keen to work with ministers and civil servants, as well as key stakeholders, to develop new fisheries policy for the UK that ensures both the economic wellbeing of fishing communities and the long-term protection of our fish stocks and precious ocean habitats for future generations.

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¹ OSPAR Commission Intermediate Assessment 2017: <https://oap.ospar.org/en/ospar-assessments/intermediate-assessment-2017/key-messages-and-highlights/>

² Greener UK is a group of 13 major environmental organisations with a combined public membership of 7.9 million, united in the belief that leaving the EU is a pivotal moment to restore and enhance the UK's environment. The following organisations are members of the Greener UK fisheries and marine pillar: Client Earth, Greenpeace, Marine Conservation Society, New Economics Foundation, The Pew Trusts, EDF, RSPB, The Wildlife Trusts and WWF.

³ Remote Electronic Monitoring – why camera technology is a cost effective and robust solution to improving UK fisheries management, WWF 2017: https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-10/Remote%20Electronic%20Monitoring%20in%20UK%20Fisheries%20Management_WWF.pdf



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