

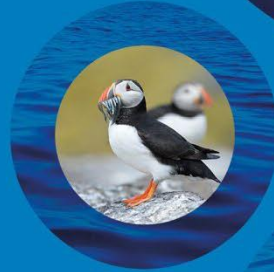
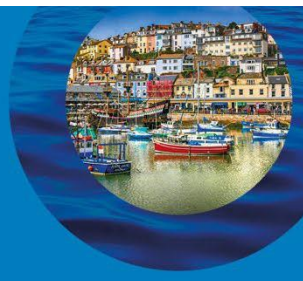


Marine
Management
Organisation

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

Feedback from stakeholder engagement

November - December 2023



...ambitious for our seas and coasts

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Background

The southern North Sea demersal non-quota species fisheries management plan (FMP) covers English waters of International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) divisions 4b and 4c (the ‘southern North Sea’) and includes the following species:

- Gurnards (red, tub, grey)
- John dory
- Red mullet
- Lesser spotted dogfish
- Cuttlefish
- Squid
- Octopus
- Smoothhound*

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) is the delivery partner responsible for preparing the first draft of this FMP, which is due to be published by Defra by the end of 2024¹.

FMPs are developed collaboratively with interested stakeholders. As a critical step in the preparation of this FMP, MMO engaged in the southern North Sea regions with stakeholders with an interest in demersal non-quota species (NQS). This was done in a range of ways including in-person events, quayside conversations and online webinars to give all interested stakeholders an opportunity to contribute. Through this engagement, MMO were able to gather a range of views and feedback on possible management approaches for demersal NQS. It was also an opportunity to identify any additional supporting evidence and future evidence requirements and/or gaps that will help the preparation of this FMP.

This document is a summary of those stakeholder discussions and represent the views of stakeholders and are not MMO opinion. The feedback has been summarised and is not attributable to any individual or organisation. These are the opinions of wider stakeholders which we would like to share for transparency and to encourage further discussion. Please note: The MMO FMP team aim to ensure that

¹ The Joint Fisheries Statement Annex A: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-fisheries-statement-ifs>

*Added into the scope of the FMP after stakeholder feedback

feedback is available to industry promptly post-engagement to ensure there are no unintended errors, omissions or lack of clarity.

Summary of 4c commercial stakeholder engagement

Engagement in ICES area 4c took place on 17 November and then from 5 to 7 December 2023.

Stakeholders from the commercial fishing industry attended a series of drop-in sessions and quayside events that were advertised through direct contact, industry groups and social media posts. The sessions were held in Whitstable, Harwich, West Mersea, Lowestoft, Wells and King's Lynn. A wide range of individuals such as vessel owners and industry group representatives were present. MMO introduced the Southern North Sea demersal NQS FMP and asked them questions on the species that were most important to them and the potential management measures they would like to see within the FMP. Feedback from the online sessions that commercial representatives attended has also been included in this section.

Stakeholders' views have been summarised into the following themes below:

Species

- Red mullet and gurnards are amongst the more important FMP species in the area.
- Stakeholders also reported an increase in the abundance of squid in some areas.

Issues

- Inshore fishermen want more opportunities to be able to diversify and highlighted that there are currently too many limitations in place.
- FMPs need to look what management is currently in place and review what is still needed and what can be improved.
- FMPs must benefit fishermen from the United Kingdom (UK) and trial new ways to manage fisheries now that we have left the European Union (EU).
- FMPs need to address the difference between the under-10m and over-10m fleets when proposing management. Some stakeholders suggested that a "days at sea" trial for the inshore fleet would be beneficial.
- FMPs should engage with transportation organisations to help alleviate some of the issues that the fishing industry have with transporting their catch across the country.
- Stakeholders highlighted that there is a good price and market for local fish currently.
- FMPs should consider the socio-economics of the industry and the importance of FMP species to different sectors.
- FMPs could explore historic wheelhouse logs to gather data on sea temperature changes over a longer period of time.
- Stakeholders raised that the migratory and spawning patterns of fish on the grounds have changed over the past year. Stakeholders want the FMP to explore causes of this and what it means for fishing opportunities in the future.
- The clarity of the water in the area is reported to be increasing. This is a

concern for stakeholders as they highlighted that it could indicate a lack of feed in the water, which could be affecting fish stocks.

- Biodiversity in the area is thought to be decreasing and some stakeholders believe that this is due to more unsustainable fishing practices such as historic pulse fishing and larger offshore trawlers and the increase in Offshore Wind Farms (OWFs).
- MMO need to look at data from EU landings and differentiate between the 6-12nm data from the 12nm and beyond data.

Feedback on Proposed Management Measures

Proposals to restrict future flyseining effort

- Some stakeholders raised concerns around the impact that flyseining is having on smaller inshore vessels and would support measures being introduced to limit their capacity. There is a desire from industry to better understand the impact of flyseining on stocks and what is being caught and discarded.
- Whilst flyseiners do not operate close to the 6-12nm limit in this area, activity is high offshore.
- Some stakeholders want to restrict flyseining in English waters completely.
- Most stakeholders are supportive of a 221kw engine power restriction, although noting this will impact some English vessels. This restriction needs to consider the use of hybrid engines.
- Most stakeholders were in support of a gross tonnage limitation on flyseiners.
- There was both support and opposition to the introduction of a 100mm minimum mesh size.
- Some support for the introduction of remote electronic monitoring (REM) on flyseining vessels, with some fishers seeing this as a priority.
- Suggestion that EU vessels should be required to land catches from UK waters into UK ports to increase local economies.

Minimum Conservation Reference Sizes (MCRS)

- No opposition to MCRS for Lesser-spotted dogfish in the area.
- Some concern around introducing MCRS for species caught in seine fisheries.

Emerging Fisheries

- It is hard to diversify due to set up costs. Suggestion that MMO explore funding options.
- There have been octopus sightings and cuttlefish are now showing.
- Squid numbers are increasing in this area, but individuals are smaller in 4c than elsewhere.
- Squid is increasingly being caught as by-catch in the rod and line fishery for Mackerel.
- Fishermen would like to catch more squid but jigging is not currently viable due to the amount of effort it would require.
- In considering squid jigging, the distribution of species needs to be fed into industry to allow for targeting. There is the need to monitor catches.
- Suggestion that inshore fishermen should be permitted to use smaller mesh sizes at certain times of the year to be able to catch more.
- Flyseining is impacting inshore opportunities to catch squid.
- Cuttlefish are possibly being preyed upon by seals. Suggestion that pots and traps could be adapted for cuttlefish.

Recreational voluntary guidelines and codes of conduct

- General support from fishers for the introduction of voluntary guidelines for recreational anglers.
- Charter boat effort needs to be considered within the FMPs to understand what species they are targeting and removing.

Engagement

- There are too many management measures currently in place or being implemented over the next few years. It is hard to understand them all.
- Online information is hard to read and there is nowhere to see it all in one place.
- Need to ensure the right people are representing fishers in the area.
- The fishing community has a lack of trust in the government which needs to be built back up by showing positive changes in areas such as FMPs.
- Some areas want engagement on the quayside and other want engagement at local venues. Need to establish appropriate venues and locations for engagement. It was noted that Harwich, in particular, needs a suitable venue for engagement in the future.
- MMO teams need to build stronger relationships with industry.

Summary of 4b commercial stakeholder engagement

Engagement in ICES area 4b ran took place on 7 and 8 December 2023.

Stakeholders from the commercial fishing industry were invited to attend a series of drop-in sessions and quayside events through direct contact, social media posts, industry groups and website blogs. We held sessions in Bridlington, Hartlepool and North Shields, and spoke to a range of individuals such as vessel owners and industry group representatives. We introduced the Southern North Sea demersal NQS FMP and asked them questions on the species that were most important to them and the potential management measures they would like to see within the FMP. Feedback from the online sessions that commercial representatives attended has also been included in this section.

We summarised stakeholders' views into the following themes below:

Species

- This area tends to be a mixed fishery.

FMP-specific Issues

- FMP measures need to be adaptable and easy to change if they are not having the desired effect.
- Fishermen want to preserve stocks for future generations.
- Fishermen want to be able to use gill nets but are unable to do so because of the seals.
- There is an appetite to learn what is causing changes in species abundance/distribution. A map of sea temperature changes in the FMP area would be useful.

- Measures should be proportionate in relation to the volume of landings from the Southern North Sea. There needs to be a balance between the precautionary approach and the impact on industry.
- Evidence to support the management measures needs to be available and clear.

Feedback on proposed management Measures

Proposals to restrict future flyseining effort

- Some fishers are reporting that larger vessels are coming inshore.
- 100mm mesh size will impact flyseining vessels within UK Producer Organisations and will reduce their catch of squid, red mullet and gurnards.
- MMO need to ensure that the evidence supporting the measures is included within the FMP.
- Some stakeholders against the use of REM on flyseining vessels.
- Some stakeholders against the proposal of seasonal closures.
- Some concern that the introduction of a permit scheme for flyseiners needs to be considered very carefully due to impact this could have on new entrants to the squid fishery if looking at track records.
- Some support from stakeholders for the gross tonnage limit for fly seiners to apply to all English waters.
- Concern around how the effectiveness of the proposed measures will be evaluated. FMPs need to make it clear how they will be monitored and reviewed if a measure is not working.
- Delivery partners and stakeholders need to understand more about how the measures will impact vessels owners and displacement.

Emerging fisheries

- Support for the proposal to monitor and understand changes to cephalopod stocks in the southern North Sea.
- Squid is a profitable bycatch. Some vessels within the Scottish Producer Organisation target squid seasonally.
- Vessels in the area are landing more squid this year than in previous years.
- Squid jigging is not commercially viable in this area due to water colouration but could be more viable if conditions change. Some trials of squid jigging have already taken place and were not successful.

Summary of recreational stakeholder engagement

On December 14 2023, 2 online webinars were held, during which stakeholders from the recreational sector were invited to share their views and ask questions regarding the proposed management measures. The first session was led by the MMO and included stakeholders from both recreational and commercial sectors, with the second session being hosted by the Angling Trust and aimed solely at recreational sea anglers.

The views of commercial stakeholders who attended the MMO webinar have been included in the sections above.

Recreational stakeholders' views were summarised into the following themes below:

Species

- Lesser-spotted dogfish is particularly important for recreational match fishing due to their relatively large size.
- Smoothhound is very important to recreational sea anglers in the southern North Sea. Mainly targeted off the east coast in ICES area 4b and a key species for match tournaments. Recreational anglers highlight that the size of smoothhound being caught has decreased.
- Dogfish is generally not targeted by recreational sea anglers, although caught in high quantities. Dogfish is mainly used for pot bait, particularly for whelk.

FMP-specific Issues

- There has been an increase in whelk pressure and a steep decline in hermit crabs, with some anglers no longer using hermit crabs for bait due to their scarce numbers. Desire to learn whether the decline in hermit crabs could be due to prey by smoothhound.
- Stakeholders highlighted that dogfish may be being exploited as a consequence of fishers targeting bass and want to see the southern North Sea NQS FMP mitigate this.
- Desire to understand economic importance of match fishing and recreational sea angling more broadly.
- Concern that all species appear to be smaller in size now, and whether this is because they are not given the opportunity live longer due to exploitation.

Feedback on proposed management Measures

MCRS

- Most recreational anglers support the proposal of MCRS for lesser spotted dogfish and flyseine species.

Emerging Fisheries

- Support for the proposal to monitor and understand changes to cephalopod stocks in the southern North Sea.
- Squid is becoming more popular with recreational sea anglers, although this is a seasonal activity generally occurring in winter and spring. There are now charter trips for squid fishing and squid tackle is appearing on the market.
- Cuttlefish have been observed, along with juvenile squid and squid eggs, on charter boats lately. Occasionally dogfish are kept on charter trips.

Recreational voluntary guidelines and codes of conduct

- Recreational stakeholders are in support of this. The Angling Trust already doing work on this so FMP should align and enhance where appropriate.

Other issues raised

There were many other issues raised during the engagement that are currently outside the scope of the FMP. However, they have been passed on to the relevant MMO and Defra teams and are summarised below:

Other issues raised included:

- Issues with the Catch Recording App and the ability to record discards.
- MCA medical certificates and their impact on the industry
- Dredging, particularly in relation to lower landings.
- Quota allocation for the inshore fleet should remain with the inshore vessels.
- Spatial squeeze
- Lack of consultation engagement with fishermen on local marine developments.
- Individuals are sometimes reluctant to engage with RFGs due to others who attend and disrupt discussions.

Many of the topics above are discussed at the Regional Fishery Group meetings. This is the forum to discuss these points with government and scientists and fishers are welcome to attend these meetings in their regions.

Next steps

It is clear from engagement with stakeholders that there are concerns within the commercial and recreational fishing communities that the FMP should aim to address. The MMO will consider, and where appropriate include, stakeholder feedback in the development of the draft southern North Sea demersal non-quota species FMP.

There will be further opportunities for stakeholders to comment on the draft FMP through an online survey that will run from December 2023 to January 2024 and the public consultation which will be launched in 2024, dates to be confirmed.

In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact the FMP team if you have any further feedback.

Useful Information

MMO Contact Details

- Fisheries Management Plan Team: FMP@marinemanagement.org.uk
- Regional Fisheries Group Team:
regionalfisheriesgroups@marinemanagement.org.uk

Gov.uk pages

- MMO Southern North Sea non-quota species FMP
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fisheries-management-plans-marine-management-organisation>
- Defra FMP website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fisheries-management-plans>