



Marine
Management
Organisation

Fisher to Fisher Engagement (MMO1389a)



...ambitious for our seas and coasts



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Marine Management Organisation
Lancaster House
Hampshire Court
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE4 7YH

Tel: 0300 123 1032
Email: info@marinemanagement.org.uk
Website: www.gov.uk/mmo

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Executive Summary

The MMO is committed to delivering its [Strategic Plan](#) whilst supporting Defra's 25-Year Environment Plan and the Fisheries Act 2020, including delivery of regulatory the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS). The MMO's Strategic Plan and the JFS are clear that collaboration, partnerships and joint stewardship involving the fisheries sectors are essential components of achieving the UK's and England's fisheries objectives. Currently, the inshore fishing sector is the least organised and least represented in fisheries management and the MMO has recognised the need to support inshore fisheries through enabling fisher to fisher engagement to facilitate better organisation and representation within the fisheries management system.

This study was commissioned by the MMO to identify next steps and actions that would overcome barriers to fisher-to-fisher engagement, to increase participatory capacity in the inshore sector, and to move towards improved representation of the inshore sector in fisheries management. Building on a literature review, analysis, interviews and weaving in findings from supplementary studies, this study provides an increased understand of current engagement landscape at local and national levels and provides an analysis of the capacities of and challenges facing existing organisations involved in developing the capacity of fishing sectors to organise and engage.

The review includes government structures including the Regional Fisheries Groups (RFGs), Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs), non-departmental public bodies, national fishing industry representatives, Fish Producer Organisations, local fishing organisations, and sector-led initiatives such as Community Interest Companies (CICs). The study also delves into the informal mechanisms used to facilitate the organisation of fishers, such as community cohesion, spatial agreements, and social media. Case studies from parallel UK industries and four international fishing organisations were drawn upon to provide examples of collaborative working between government and industry to reach shared goals. The role of each organisation in fisher representation and participation was highlighted along with the methods taken to facilitate engagement. The study then looked at the financial options needed to create and maintain each organisation along with impact made towards their goals (and beyond), acknowledging how each organisation has developed over time. The benefits and relationships built from these organisations at regional and national scales was also explored to understand the wider impacts these groups have on the fishing industry as a whole.

Recognising that there are multiple barriers to fisher to fisher engagement and participation in fisheries management, building on interviews and previous studies, the study comments on factors that influence participation at local, regional, national and international scales. Key factors identified include financial disincentives, a lack of trust, not understanding the process of fisheries management, not seeing knowledge given being used, not knowing what participation results in, power imbalances, overwhelming communication, dominant characters and individual motivations, impacts on earnings and competition and secrecy.

Drawing the information together, the study recommends nine actions that could be implemented or supported by the MMO to improve engagement between fishers and to build capacity in relation to engagement and participation. Actions include:

- i) “How-to” guides for forming and maintaining fisheries associations, or for establishing a fisheries CIC (well progressed through the work of Lyme Bay CIC).
- ii) Implementing tools to enable anonymous input (noting the need for caution).
- iii) Fostering constructive participation through upskilling to build participation capacity and confidence.
- iv) Using specialist facilitators and novel approaches at Regional Fisheries Group meetings.
- v) Creating and supporting inshore fisheries spokespersons.
- vi) Introducing payments for inshore fisheries representatives.
- vii) Targeted organisation support, including financial support.
- viii) Enabling blended finance structures to increase financial stability of fishermen’s associations, CICs, and similar organisations.
- ix) Developing an engagement and participation roadmap that orients multiple stakeholders towards a shared vision of better engagement and participation.

Key findings and recommendations from the study are:

- Strengthening civil society organisations and building social capital are essential if inshore fishers are to be fairly represented in England’s fisheries management system.
- Enabling inshore fisheries to organise and for fishers to have confidence that their interests are fairly represented, which will require upskilling, funding, and a coherent multi-stakeholder programme that provides the foundation from which greater equality of representation can be achieved.
- The inshore fleet requires investment to enable professionalisation through skills development, including of the skills needed to engage, organise, and participate in fisheries management.
- The MMO should provide and support opportunities for fishers to develop the skills to engage, organise and participate.
- The MMO using its convening power, should consolidate existing efforts to increase fisher-to-fisher engagement and participation in fisheries management, while being sensitive not to override existing efforts.
- The MMO and Defra have the capacity to enable significant progress by clarifying and communicating what engagement and participation can lead to.
- The MMO should invest in a co-designed engagement and participation roadmap

1. Introduction

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO), as a delivery body and regulator for England's seas, has a strategic vision ([MMO2030 Strategic Plan](#)) that sets how the MMO will support the implementation of Defra's 25-Year Environment Plan and the Fisheries Act 2020. The vision is clear about the importance of collaboration and working relationships to achieve the MMO's goals. Goal 4 identifies co-management as a means of transforming regulation, and Goal 6 identifies active participation by the fishing sector as a means of enabling sustainable fisheries. The Fisheries Management Plans, as specified components of that framework to deliver sustainable fisheries, are required to be developed in collaboration with the fishing sector and other stakeholders. This transition to a fisheries management system with greater stakeholder participation and collaboration represents a shift in approach and is highlighted as important for producing appropriate management outcomes which have support from industry and in ensuring greater compliance. To support these goals and delivery of fisheries management objectives the MMO has recognised the need to increase engagement by fishers¹ with fisheries management.

As part of a wider effort to understand and increase fisheries engagement, the MMO commissioned Howell Marine Consulting (HMC) to conduct a literature review and to work with stakeholders including government, regulators, academics and industry, to provide recommendations on how the MMO can best support and strengthen commercial fishing community networking and engagement in England. This report is a deliverable for project MMO1389, which provides:

1. an increased understanding of the current fisher-to-fisher engagement at local and national levels, expectations and appetite for increased engagement;
2. an analysis of existing organisations and activities that are developing fishing sector capacity to organise and engage;
3. a literature review of sectoral organisation approaches including UK and international experiences, and learnings from comparable sectors;
4. recommendations for activities or interventions that individually and collectively could be supported by MMO to strengthen networking, participation, and engagement by fishers to benefit fisheries management.

The report is based on the literature and findings from the interviews with representatives from the catching sector, national Federations and organisations working to ensure a sustainable fishing industry, regulators, and academics researching engagement and participation in UK fisheries.

¹ This report uses the collective term "fishers" rather than "fishermen" given its greater versatility. The authors note that the term is contentious and in the UK and North America with some females who fish having expressed a preference for the term "fisherman" to describe themselves (see Branch & Kleiber, 2015 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/faf.12130>). Until there is clarity about which term to use, this report has favoured the gender-neutral term "fishers" reflecting the FAO's Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (2015) that calls for the equal participation of women and men in organisation and decision-making.

2. The role of civil society

There are many definitions of civil society, but all focus on self-organisation around common interests. It is largely through civil society organisations (CSOs) that fishers, particularly non-sector/under 10m vessel operators, engage with government. The UK government sets out that civil society “*includes any individual or organisation that works to create social value, independent of government. This definition is intentionally broad and flexible, capturing traditional charities, social enterprises (the social sector), active individuals, community groups, social investors and private businesses (DCMS & DDCM, 2018).*”

CSOs can encompass everything from sports clubs and community associations through to trade unions and professional representative bodies. All represent the interests and values of their members based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. An individual’s ability to be an active citizen within the framework of a CSO also depends on rights, responsibility and power.

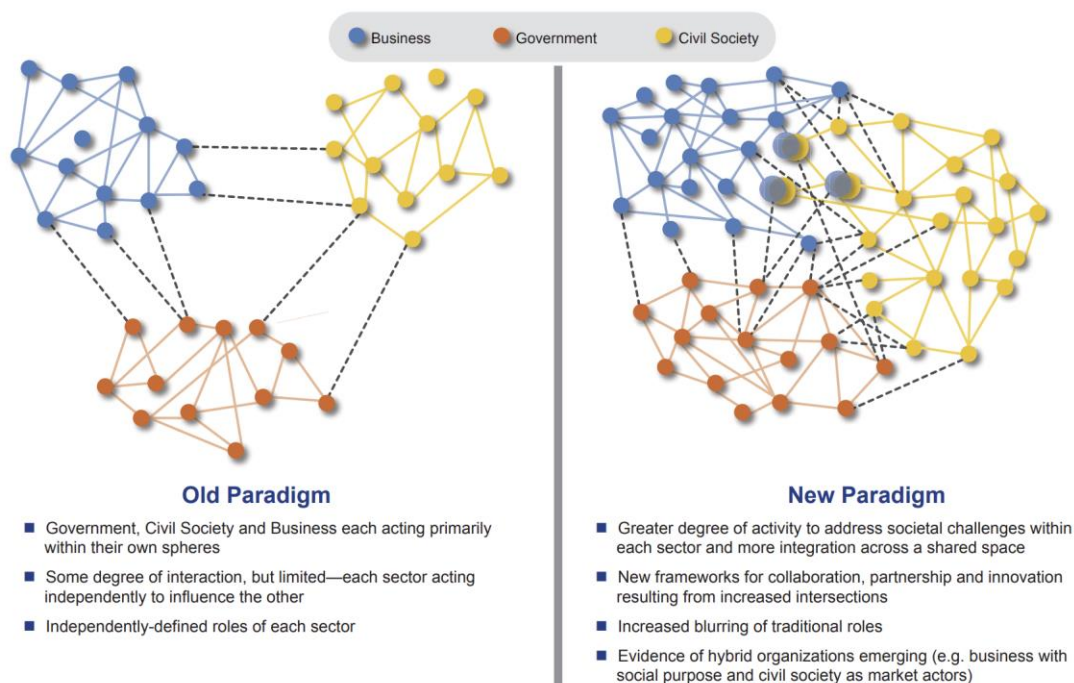
The common characteristics of a CSO are that they:

- are a legitimate expression of people exercising their fundamental human rights;
- express interests and values;
- are independent and autonomous; and
- involve and facilitate voluntary as well as collective action (O’Connor and Ketola, 2018).

The concept of civil society is not a new concept, having emerged in Europe in the eighteenth-century, where it was seen as a bridge between the state and the market where citizens, and the organisations they belong to, were able to build social capital and to influence public affairs. Over time the role of civil society has become increasingly important and has a renewed focus on the essential contribution of civil society to a resilient global system alongside government and business (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Paradigm shift in the role of civil society. Source World Economic Forum (2013)

Source: World Economic Forum/ KPMG



Whilst there has been a blurring of traditional roles of government, civil society and business, each have their own set of drivers which impact and influence their interactions (Table 1) and should be considered when designing participatory processes. Important to note is the voluntary nature of civil society and the need for commitment from participants; this is particularly relevant to the fishing industry, and especially non-sector/under 10 vessels, where morale is currently low, stakeholder fatigue high, and time and capacity to commit limited.

Table 1. Drivers which differentiate government, civil society and business. Adapted from O'Connor and Ketola, 2018.

	Government	Civil Society	Business
Guiding principle	Hierarchy	Voluntariness	Competition
Prerequisite for participation	Legal authorisation	Commitment	Purchasing power
Principal decision rule	Authoritative adjudication	Debate	Supply and demand
Positive externalities	Security, justice	Social capital, public discourse	Material prosperity/Financial capital

In its 2018 Civil Society Strategy, the UK government sets out that “*social value flows from thriving communities. These are communities with strong financial, physical and natural resources, and strong connections between people. This includes public funding, private investment, buildings, and other spaces for a community to use. It also includes trust and goodwill, and the organisations and*

partnerships that bring people together.” Throughout this document these are common themes explored through academic literature, and through direct engagement with members of the fishing industry, fisheries managers, and academics.

3. Social capital

Social capital, or social value, is a central concept which is both driven by, and underpins, civil society and all other human interactions. It relates to the relationships and functioning of society at different levels. Goodwin (2003) refers to the value of trust, relationships, social networks, mutual understanding, and community structures, when describing the characteristics of a society or community. This definition has been expanded over time to include other factors describing society, such as relationships, norms, values, and networks in which they operate (Mauerhofer, 2013).

Social capital is thought to become more valuable the more it is used, providing participants continue to engage, and trust and reciprocity is maintained. Over repeated interactions, where participants prove their trustworthiness to each other, trust will continue to grow. Brondizio et al. (2009) set out that building social capital for a specific purpose creates mutual understanding and can be used to accomplish entirely different joint activities at much lower start-up costs.

Bakker et al. (2019) investigated how fishers use social capital to influence marine spatial planning (MSP). Through literature reviews, field observations, and target interviews within the local fishing communities they evaluated how these communities use ‘bonding’, ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ as forms of social capital. ‘Bonding’ describes interlinked values, norms, and practices within a community, ‘bridging’ refers to collaborations across different communities, and ‘linking’ represents the process of building connected social capacity at various levels of governance. The study found that although local fishing communities have strong bonding, the linking potential remains low, thereby reducing their impact on MSP, a finding that was replicated in the recent MMO fisher community network analysis study (MMO1341).

In principle, social capital can be created with relatively low investment costs (e.g., through community and stakeholder engagement activities), but requires a systematic approach to connect people (Jacobs et al., 2023). In understanding the existing social capital in the context of decision-making, and investing in its creation, regulatory bodies can create long-term relationships with local communities and industry, which, in return, support compliance with intended regulations and thereby can reduce enforcement costs (Grafton et al., 2005), as demonstrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Relationships between policy actions and resources in social capital in the context of fisheries governance (Grafton et al., 2005).



Building social capital is one of the main interventions that the MMO can invest in to improve fishers' capacity to take part in collaborative fisheries management. As set out in Figure 2, and by Bakker et al. (2019), by supporting fisheries groups with both resources and appropriate policy actions, the MMO can help them to strengthen internal bonding and inter-community bridging which will support fishers' ability to build trust and long-term relationships with regulators. Actions to support social capital building are set out in section 11.

4. UK fisheries context and relevant organisations

4.1 Contextual background

This section sets the scene for this study by introducing the wider context, including what fisheries "means" to the UK economy, the structure and operating profile of the fleet, and an exploration of the organised structures that are relevant to the engagement and representation landscapes. This section was derived from a review of literature supplemented by interviews with representatives of the organised structures described in the following sub-sections.

The level of detail included about the organisational structures described varies significantly. Supporting documentation exists about the structure and operation of the Regional Fisheries Groups (RFGs), for example, while in contrast, no indication

was found that there exists a comprehensive list of fishing associations. In general, information about organisations that represent the inshore fleet is scarce.

Collated information was brought together to provide an overview of existing organised structures that are actors in the participation landscape. While possibly not comprehensive, this information base can help to understand the participation landscape, including of the currently under-represented sectors of the fishing industry. A working draft of the engagement-participation stakeholder map can be found in Annex 1 and see also Annex 2 for an indicative map of actors and institutions relevant to a local fishery.

Fishing has been a livelihood in the British Isles for millennia and is a recognised part of English heritage “*contributing to the structure, character and vibrancy of coastal communities* (Historic England, 2020)”. Fishing has evolved from an unstructured, open access livelihood to an increasingly managed but partially organised collection of commercial enterprises that operate within an increasingly congested marine space. In straight economic terms, the contribution of fish and shellfish caught by UK vessels was GBP 1,003 million in 2022 generated by 619,000 tonnes of landings, an increase of 11% from 2021 (Seafish, 2023). The majority of UK fisheries landings stems from fisheries in the North East Atlantic, with about 15% being caught in EU waters. More than 25% of EU catches in the North East Atlantic were from UK waters. The UK fleet is dispersed and diverse, with 5,617 vessels recorded in 2022, the second largest fleet in Europe after Spain (measured in gross tonnage). Seafish analyses fleet activity in detail and reported 4,076 active fishing vessels in 2022 of which about 1,300 are low activity vessels earning less than £10,000 per year (Seafish, 2023).

About 50% of the active UK fleet is registered in England, about 2,000 vessels, where roughly four in every five boats is less than 10 metres in length. While more than 75% of the total fleet is under 10m in length, the large-scale boats land about 90% of the UK catch by value. Seafish categorises the UK fleet based on a combination of vessel power, gear type, target species, and region, and records the performance of 30 fleet categories. In terms of stocks targeted, the UK fleet targets more than 100. Of relevance to this study, this makes for a diverse fleet that is dispersed between large and small ports and harbours dotted around England’s long coastline. The diversity of the fleet is recognised by UK government, which in 2019 was seeking advice on how to better classify UK fisheries (Guille et al., 2021).

One of the challenges for UK fisheries management is defining how to progress towards sustainability across environmental, social, and economic outcomes, as an independent nation. For three decades, UK fisheries adhered to the Common Fisheries Policy’s fundamental principle: to restore and maintain fish stocks above biomass levels that can produce their MSY. The UK was making progress against this principle, with the number of overexploited stocks reducing over time. By 2020, about 37% of the 104 stocks fished by the UK were being sustainably exploited, about 30% of stocks remained overexploited and the status of about 30% was uncertain due to the lack of stock assessment data (Guille et al., 2021).

One of the primary criticisms of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and of the UK fisheries management system under the CFP was the strongly top-down, centralised approach to fisheries management. Fishing sectors were, broadly speaking, managed with little participation by those being managed. In recognition of the role of the fishing industry in achieving sustainability outcomes, there has been a move globally as well as in the UK to increase participation and to move along what can be termed the management spectrum, ranging from purely top-down, hierarchical arrangements, through more participatory, co-designed approaches to fisheries management, to entirely community managed arrangements.

UK fisheries are now managed under the umbrella of the Fisheries Act 2020, which is driving significant policy and delivery change through, for example, an overarching set of objectives, the Joint Fisheries Statement, and the rollout of Fisheries Management Plans. This movement towards participation is reflected in the Joint Fisheries Statement (2022), which states that *“our future vision is that industry should play a greater role in management fisheries”* across developing technical measures, contributing to science, and co-designing policy. This legislative framework provides space for the MMO to deliver its strategic goals and objectives that relate to collaborative management. The following subsections explore organisations or structures with active roles in organisation and participation in fisheries management, with a view to identifying existing structures that could act as scaffolding to support greater engagement and participation of the non-sector and under-10m fleets.

4.2 Regional Fisheries Groups

Regional Fisheries Groups (RFGs) are a joint Defra-MMO initiative and were established following a 2020 Defra-MMO hosted workshop with the inshore fleet that discussed RFGs as mechanisms to aid collaboration and partnership working. The intention behind the RFGs was to meet the Joint Fisheries Statement aim of participatory decision making. RFGs are explicitly designed to *“enable industry to share their views, opinions, ideas and experiences with [policy makers, regulators, and scientists] to assist with the management England’s waters”* [Regional Fisheries Groups National Delivery Plan (unpublished)]. MMO documentation indicates that five RFGs were established in 2022 covering ICES region 4b, 4c, 7a, 7d, 7efg with identified steering groups to help self-regulate meetings and to increase and retain membership attendance from the localities within each region. The Delivery Plan (v.07.2, 2022) states that:

“The Regional Fisheries Groups (RFGs) are here to give industry an active role in informing regional fisheries decision making and to build a collaborative and trusting working relationship between policy makers, regulators, scientists, and the fishing sector at regional and local levels. “Our vision is to facilitate and enable the inshore fishing industry to become part of the decision-making process for fisheries management recognising their shared vested interest in developing and moving towards a world-class sustainable fisheries management system that supports local communities.”

Specific priority outcomes include, but are not limited to, having representatives from industry established in attendance by end-2024, having cross-supply chain industry steering group members by end-2024, supporting industry to be leading projects that produce opportunities or tackle fisheries challenges. The RFGs are supported by a clear delivery plan, including outcome evaluation plan, and RFG-specific handling plans to manage relationships. RFGs are also supported by communications plan, including a dedicated email box, developments website, and an online GIS with detail of completed projects. RFGs operate on an annual cycle with three meetings per year, and also complete intersessional work (including port visits) to increase outreach and dialogue. The observation relative to this study is that the RFGs, if delivering as intended would contribute significant progress towards building a collaborative and trusted working relationship between stakeholders.

The RFGs are financed out of the MMO budget, delivered by the MMO and Defra RFG team, and each is chaired by the Principal Marine Officer of the region. The RFGs are contributed to by other MMO Fisheries Management Team liaisons, representing thematic interests relevant to the future of UK fisheries, including but not limited to evidence, communication, legal, and marine conservation. The RFGs are regularly contributed to by other governmental organisations and statutory bodies, including Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) and Cefas. RFGs have an approximate year cycle with 3 meetings per year per region. Participation at meetings is understood to be voluntary, though the Delivery Plan specifies that *“organisational stakeholders are key to the success of RFGs and should therefore attend meetings where appropriate”*. Seafish and the MCA are also flagged as key stakeholders who participation is encouraged.

Interviews with individuals in the catching sector at local levels indicate that the RFGs are broadly speaking on people’s radar. While opinions are mixed, positive opinions were recorded about the opportunity to hear directly from the MMO about what is happening in fisheries management. The RFGs, if successful, represent a clear opportunity to act as a bridge between managers and operators, and as a means of streamlining communications. If successful, the RFGs also establish clear intent in terms of industry representation, with the RFG delivery plan setting out that each RFG will include representation of the inshore fleet within each RFG’s footprint to be in place in 2024. And in addition, that each RFG will include an industry cross-supply chain steering group to be in place by end 2024, which will have representatives from each major port in a region, processors, auction/markets, and merchants to steer large projects. To support delivery, RFGs are also supported by a charter table, that provides terms of reference and sets out the expected conduct of members, and a grievance process. The anticipated FY22-23 budget estimated in 2022 was 33,000 GBP, which set in context of the intended outcomes suggests good value for money. A long-term (e.g. decadal) financial commitment to the RFGs would signal intent and provide a sufficient period over which to evaluate progress.

4.3 Inshore Fisheries and Conservations Authorities

The IFCAs are included as a key structure for future engagement and participation due to the vital tasks the authorities undertake to support sustainable inshore

fisheries and coastal areas. The IFCA's have a regulatory role for inshore fisheries out to 6nm under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. There are 10 IFCA's in England created in 2011 with shared powers and duties to achieve viable and sustainable inshore fisheries. IFCA committees comprise 'general members' appointed by the MMO for their experience relative to inshore fisheries management (UK government, 2023a), and local authority appointed members, appointed by the constituent authorities that fund the IFCA's. IFCA committees also include a member from Natural England, the MMO, and the Environment Agency as well as commercial and recreational fishers. This structure is inherently the most participatory of the various bodies delivering fisheries policy and management. The IFCA's act as a conduit for information between regulators and the fishing interests through the boards and through the activities of IFCA officers. The IFCA's are represented nationally by the Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities, which is governed by a board of directors and a members' forum.

IFCA's are funded by local authorities with funding in part provided from a Defra Area Based Grant of about £3 million per year. Opinions about the effectiveness of IFCA's vary by region and between people, with both positive and negative comments recorded during interviews for this study and preceding studies for both Defra and MMO. Where IFCA's have been effective, the outcomes have been significant. A positive example cited was the Southern IFCA and the Poole Harbour clam and cockle fisheries where SIFCA and local fishing association efforts over a decade were instrumental in increasing compliance with fisheries regulations and leading to sustainability certification for clam fishery, which is of high social, ecological, and economic values. Broadly speaking, this relationship is positively perceived by key stakeholders and engagement and participation is perceived as good.

Again speaking broadly, IFCA's, along with the MMO coastal offices, understand well the local fisheries network in their regions, and have good reach to get communications into fishing sectors operating in local and regional waters. During interviews for MMO1341 and preceding studies, discussions with MMO coastal office Marine Enforcement Officers point to equally vital intelligence being held at the level of frontline staff, emphasising the importance of coordination across organisations. IFCA's are identified in the RFG delivery plan, with IFCA representation at RFGs due to have been established by end-2023, however interviews suggest that the role of IFCA's relative to RFGs is not yet clear.

4.4 National federations and organisations

The **National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations** (NFFO), was established in 1977 during negotiations for the CFP, stimulated by the need for the fishing industry in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel isles to speak with a single voice in European level debates (with Scotland having its own representation). The NFFO is comprised of 10 committees, including an executive committee and 5 regional committees. The Federation's objectives include, among others, to act as a representative body on behalf of the members and to give the views of the Federation to international, national, regional, or other authorities through appropriate channels.

The NFFO membership includes fish producer organisations, port associations, and vessel owners who are not member of either an organisation or association. The NFFO is well connected to fish producer organisations and the Association of Fish Producer Organisations. Membership is diverse, though the NFFO recognises that a significant number of under-10m vessel owners are not represented by the NFFO. The current executive committee, as of end 2023, is committed to increasing NFFO membership among the under-10m sector, recognising the need for increased participation by the inshore fleet in fisheries management and is seeking to work through regional committees to achieve this. The NFFO note that their capacity is stretched given the range of factors that the NFFO is being required to engage in.

Local member views are collected through regional committees and fed back to the NFFO. The Federation works through consensus and so works with members to reach agreement on issues of debate, and so can speak with weight on matters of fisheries management. The NFFO operates in accordance with a defined governance structure and is respected by public authorities as a voice in the fisheries management system. The NFFO is funded through subscriptions, levies and calls by the Federation. Capacity is an issue when set against the breadth of issues where the NFFO has a remit to engage. NFFO engagement in the Fisheries Management Plan programme has increased the range of issues substantially.

Relative to increasing engagement, the NFFO would be an important actor with an established network into the fisheries ecosystem, though the reach into the non-sector and under-10m sector through existing members is limited. The Federation does have good communications and the executive committee are regularly engaged in regional and national meetings and events. Interviews with the NFFO for this study suggest that the MMO and NFFO are aligned in principle relative to the need to increase participation capacity. NFFO endorsement of any proposed activities to strengthen participation would provide a boost in terms of recognition from the fishing industry.

Other relevant national federations and organisations for this study include the UK Association of Fish Producer Organisations (UKAFPO), which is covered in the FPO subsection, below, the **New Under Ten Fishermen's Association** (NUTFA), and the Fishmongers' Company. NUTFA is a not-for-profit national organisation dedicated to supporting the under 10m fleet. Information about NUTFA is scarce and was gleaned from the [Association's website](#). NUTFA declined to be interviewed for this study, but recent publications responding to current challenges, such as pollack catching restrictions indicated activity in December 2023.

It is not clear how representative NUTFA was of the inshore fleet. Interviews with individual fishers in harbours along the south coast for a recent MMO study on fishing community networks (MMO1341), interviews for the control and enforcement study (MMO, 2020), and interviews for this study did not identify NUTFA members. Knowledgeable interviewees who were aware of NUTFA (n=2) were not sure why NUTFA had gained limited traction among under 10m skippers commenting on the positive intent but the difficulties of securing benefits of membership.

The Fishmongers' Company is one of the ancient Livery Companies of the City of London, which plays a role in upholding the standards of trading of fish and shellfish, and which contributes to the UK fishing sector through philanthropy and grants, as well as through events that bring members of the fishing industry together. The Fishmongers' Company has an established convening role relative to ensuring profitable and sustainable fisheries and thriving coastal communities. The associated Charitable Trust supports projects and engages across the UK fisheries sector, spanning industry, government, academia, non-governmental organisations, and third-sector organisations.

Based at Fishmongers' Hall under the auspices of the Fishmongers' Company is the **Shellfish Association of Great Britain (SAGB)**, which originated in the Oyster Merchants' and Planters' Association in 1903 and renamed the Shellfish Association of Great Britain in 1969. The Association's membership comprises individuals and companies spanning the value chain associated with shellfish fisheries, and IFCAs, Seafish, academics and interested scientists. SAGB aims to assist and promote the sustainable development of the shellfish industry, which contributes about 50% of the total value of seafood landed into the UK by UK-flagged vessels, and which also comprises cultivated shellfish operations contributing an additional 30,000 tonnes of production. SAGB represents the views of members in discussions with government and regulators. It is not clear how representative SAGB is of the many inshore under 10m vessels targeting shellfish and localised interviews in Hampshire, Dorset, Kent, and Essex suggest that many such vessels are not represented by SAGB.

4.5 Fish producer organisations

Fish Producer Organisations (FPOs) are officially recognised bodies set up by fishery producers that manage their members' fishing quota, represent their members' interests at government and policy levels, and that seek to improve market conditions for landed catch. FPOs contribute to devolved management with FPOs taking management control of their members' shares of national total allowable catch. FPOs are permitted to determine how quota is allocated among members, with some pooling quota and setting monthly limits, and others allocating individual quota, and some using a blended approach (Appleby et al, 2018).

FPOs arose from the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) in response to the recognition that participation by the fishing industry is essential to achieve the primary goal of the CFP as revised in 2002 to ensure sustainable fisheries and guarantee incomes and stable jobs for fishers. The 2014 reform of the CFP, implemented while the UK remained an EU Member State, comprehensively reformed the Common Market Organisation component of the CFP (the CMO) to provide substantially enhanced powers and benefits for FPOs (EuroParl, 2017). The formation and operation of POs was enabled under Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 on the common organisation of the markets in fishery and aquaculture products (CMO Regulation) and in the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1419/2013 of 17 December 2013. Intervention expenditure by central government to support the common organisation of markets fell away over time and the funding of FPOs has been largely achieved through member dues.

The expectations on FPOs increased in light of the new CMO (COM(2011)0416) to, among other things, “*support the organisation of the sector, empowering POs and their co-management of access rights as well as production and marketing activities, as key elements to implement the CFP*”. While this refers to EU law and policy, the expectations of the FPOs in the UK remain the same under the post-EU exit fisheries management regime underpinned by the Fisheries Act 2020 (UK Government, 2020).

In terms of participation and the role in fisheries management, UK FPOs, are collectively represented by the UK Association of Fish Producers’ Organisation (information on which is not readily available online). It is not clear how many under 10m vessels are included within FPOs, but the number is likely very low relative to the total number of under 10m vessels in England. One calculation in 2018 identified 53 of the 4,299 under 10m vessels at that time were included in PO membership vessel lists (Appleby et al, 2018) and small-scale fishing interests have called for greater transparency of membership, governance and sources of funding of FPOs (Low Impact Fishers of Europe, 2017). An observation relative to quota, which is a complex matter beyond the scope of this study, is that the great majority of UK fishing quota is controlled by the FPOs and, as put by fisheries economist Rognvaldur Hannesson, the care with which divergent interests engage in a cooperative enterprise, such as achieving efficient allocation of resources in production and an equitable distribution of the result “*is likely to be related to the size of the slice of pie one expects to get in return*” (Hannesson, 1988).

Interviews with leading figures in the three POs interviewed for this study identified good cross-PO channels of communication, good communications with NFFO, and regular communications with fisheries regulators and to a lesser extent, Defra. FPOs are actively following and are engaged in Fisheries Management Plans where relevant. From regulatory and policy perspectives expressed by representative interviewees, the benefits of FPOs as a means of streamlining communication, of giving and receiving information is well recognised. An additional notable benefit of FPOs relative to this study is the administrative and participatory capacity of FPOs because of their investments in personnel. Also of relevance to this study, FPOs emerged from the need to include the fisheries sector in management and were formally identified in regulations as key to achieving sustainability objectives. FPOs are also supported by a formalised and established governance system (UK Government, 2020) that provides information for POs or those thinking of establishing a PO, on how to gain recognition, produce annual reports, submit plans and records, and to ensure compliance. The emergence and strengthening of FPOs was a process that occurred over decades, which may be relevant to consideration of the timescale required to enable greater non-sector engagement and participation.

4.6 Seafish

Seafish is a public body that has a stated purpose to support the UK seafood sector to thrive, and which is funded by a levy on the first sale of seafood products in the UK including imported seafood. More than 80 staff work across the UK with offices in

Edinburgh and Grimsby. Seafish has a well-established governance structure and is led by an executive team, governed by a board, and supported by three seafood industry sector panels that provide input and advice to Seafish, including i) domestic and exporters panel; ii) processing and importers panel; and the supply chain and consumers panel. The panel members include a diverse range of associations and companies spanning the UK seafood sector.

Seafish engages across the seafood industry including the range of fleets comprising the catching sector, and the corporate plan (2023-2028) sets out how its non-competitive position enhances the organisation's capacity to work across sectors (Seafish, 2023a). It is unique in being the only UK organisation working across the seafood supply chain at national scale. Seafish has Industry Engagement Managers that offer support, advice, and enable access to Seafish information and services relating to trade and regulation, seafood promotion, safety and training, responsible sourcing of seafood, and insight and research targeted at supporting the seafood industry. Collaboration is important and Seafish takes a partnership approach through industry sector panels, advisory committees, issues groups that provide a forum for communication and engagement, and engagement through on the ground activities.

Among the organisation's stated priorities, which reflect issues that are important to the industry as reported by industry to Seafish, is improving fisheries management, where Seafish has a stated convening and facilitating capability to support achievement of sustainable fisheries. The active engagement of coastal communities is explicitly identified as being a requirement of sustainable fisheries management, and existing Seafish Advisory Groups continue to facilitate and deliver co-management initiatives. Seafish is also a delivery partner in the FMP programme, facilitating the development and implementation of the shellfish FMPs, with the Future of our Inshore Fisheries collaborative project (described in the following section) and nested Advisory Groups (across shellfish and finfish) active participants in the FMP development process. The Advisory Groups include, among others, a broad range of catching sector representatives, with under 10m fishers able to join and participate.

An additional Seafish corporate goal to highlight relates to the fisheries management priority. The goal is that the FMPs provide for genuine co-management and Seafish will contribute to delivery by, among others, *“supporting the development and delivery of a world class fisheries management framework by contributing to core strategic projects”* (Seafish, 2023a). Given the remit, goals, and reach of Seafish, there is a strong argument that the organisation should be party to efforts to increase participation and representation of the non-sector and under 10m fleets.

4.7 Sector-led initiatives

4.7.1 Community Interest Companies

A community Interest Company (CIC) is a limited company with special additional features to promote social enterprise for the benefit of a community. CICs were introduced by the UK Government in 2005 under the Companies Act 2004 that

includes statutory provisions to ensure that CICs work for the benefit of the community. While not charities, CICs meet many of the requirements of charitable status, and are more lightly regulated than charities. CICs also differ from charities by being liable to pay corporation tax. About 10,000 CICs were registered between 2004 and 2014 tackling a range of social and environmental issues but are not common in the fishing sector.

The formation and registration of CICs is documented and well established, including the availability of step-by-step guides (UK Government 2023b), but interviews suggest that for those in the fishing sector wishing to set up CICs, additional support would be beneficial. CICs, by being limited companies include liability and reporting requirements, to publish an article of association, and involve multiple initial and ongoing administrative steps. The two CICs interviewed for this study, the [Lyme Bay Fisherman's CIC](#) and the [Plymouth Fishing and Seafood Association](#), are notably both run by dedicated individuals with a different skillset to fishers. Both seek to serve local fishing communities, with the Lyme Bay Fisherman's CIC (LBFCIC) initiated by fifty small-scale fishers from across Lyme Bay.

CIC's report positive benefits for their members, which span different catching sectors but are bound by geography, including acting as a focal point for communications to be fed through to management, getting involved with managers regarding current issues and enabling engagement with the FMP process. The CICs provide examples of bridges and facilitation between fishers and management and aim to increase the representation of their members in fisheries management. CICs require significant work and concerns about capacity versus the sheer scale of issues that concern members, and the longevity of funding were primary concerns for CIC leaders. The importance of strong individuals is evident speaking with CIC representatives, who acknowledge that there are conflicts between individual members, but that dialogue can work, and who put responsibilities on members in exchange for membership, such as timely responses to consultation. Business resilience and capacity strengthening, and the medium-term possibility of networked CICs feeding into RFGs for example, would depend on security of investment through sustainable financing.

4.7.2 Future of our Inshore Fisheries

The Future of our Inshore Fisheries project (FOIF) is an industry-led project housed within Seafish and supported by Defra and MMO, that has a long-term aim to transform how inshore fisheries are managed. The project arose from the Future of Our Inshore Fisheries conference in 2019 and has brought together active fishers, policy makers and regulators to focus on five core work topics that include co-management, collaborative science, credible fisheries management, rights and access, and effective compliance. A system of groups has been established to distribute FOIF work across shellfish and finfish fisheries and is actively involved in the FMP programme. Under FOIF sit a series of groups, including the Finfish Industry Advisory Group (FIAG), the Shellfish Industry Advisory Group (SIAG), the Crab and Lobster management Group (CMG), and the Whelk Management Group (WMG), and Priority Issue Groups that house subgroups with specialist focus including FMPs. The priority issue groups are in theory linked with the RFGs (Seafish, 2023c) and jointly the groups provide forums from the transmission of

information to and from members to the wider fishing community, and to Seafish, Defra, MMO and the IFCAs. The groups have open membership policies and encourage participation by active fishers, fishermen's associations, producer organisations, processors, researchers, and regulators. Seafish provide secretariat support for the groups and support the development of work programmes and some of the work on specific actions arising through work programmes. Minutes from the most recent minutes of advisory and management groups' meetings (from 2022) highlight the foreseen role for these groups in facilitating effective industry engagement in the FMP development process. The attendee list at a recent groups' meetings indicates a broad range of participants suggesting a broad linked network that could benefit communications about future engagement and capacity building activities.

4.7.3 Fishing into the Future

Fishing into the Future (FITF) is an independent UK charity led by people who work in the fishing industry that seeks to ensure that those fishing have a clear role in fisheries management and in determining the future of fishing. The charity is relatively new, being launched as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation in 2015 off the back of an industry-focused workshop in 2013 with support from the Prince's Charities International Sustainability Unit, Seafish, and the Gulf of Maine Research Institute. FITF has been gaining traction within the fisheries management system, providing convening capacity to build participation capacity in the fishing sector through training, and is developing a central point for learning, resources, and information for commercial fishers. FITF also supports third parties to reach out to fishing sector representatives, helping to communicate projects and information requests. Following a knowledge exchange visit to east coast USA where the US Fisheries Councils realised that those within the councils didn't have the skills and knowledge relative to stakeholder management and chairing, leading to frustrations that often spilled out in meetings. Taking this learning, FITF has been working to increase the capacity of fishers to participate constructively in workshops, and to encourage participation in workshops by the local fisheries network to increase credibility of such events within the fishing industry. This building of knowledge and confidence in fishers to be able to engage in fisheries management and science is being well received and is recognised by MMO that has participated in recent FITF-convened events to generate connections between fisheries stakeholders. Capacity is an issue, with FITF run by one person supported by trustees. As with the CICs and fishermen's organisations, the significance of that individual is evident, requiring someone with the necessary skills to bridge stakeholder segments, and to navigate the local and national politics that characterise commercial fisheries. As with CICs, the resilience of FITF is dependent on funding and in terms of operations, on one person.

5. Local-scale Fishermen's Organisations

Organisations with a role in collective fisheries management occur through formal and informal organisation (Hannesson, 1988). This section focusses on the fishing associations, cooperatives and organisations that have formed at local level and that are not FPOs. Associations and councils are terminologies used to describe a group

of fishers or fishing industry stakeholders that voluntarily come together to represent a common objective, sharing common interests. The associations are often somewhat organised generally with variable formalities in each case and often the supervision by elected body members (Hannesson, 1988). The goals of the associations vary depending on the fisheries and regions in question but usually include a broad range of activities that benefit the community at large (The Fishmongers' Company, 2023). Examples of association origins include the need to coordinate and respond to changing fisheries management regulations, stock pressures, spatial squeeze from other offshore developers and shared sector management divergences.

Fisher organisations are internationally recognised as benefiting governments and fisheries management for reasons of efficiency and equity (Hannesson, 1988). Relative to the UK there is little in the way of literature providing insight into the formation and effectiveness of UK fishermen's associations and councils, hence this section relies on interviews and targeted searches for information about examples of UK associations. One associated challenge is identifying how many fishers' or fishermen's organisations there are, though it is understood that between the MMO and IFCAs, there is a reasonable understanding of the range and spread of local fishermen's organisations, though it is not clear if that understanding has been collated and analysed.

The following sub-sections provide positive examples of organisation by parts of the UK fishing industry to develop collective capacity. Prior to describing these examples, the international experience of fishing organisations relative to marine management were touched on briefly. Experiences in industrialised countries covering Asia, Europe, North America, and Oceania point to different reasons for and ways of organising to defend group interests, ranging from tenure and access rights, supporting harvesting rights systems (as with FPOs in the UK), gaining access to and influencing decision making through consultation and lobbying, and regulating markets through legal and illegal means (Hannesson, 1988). The overarching driver for organisation across these international examples is the need for collective management, whether stimulated by government, in collaboration with government, or in response to external factors that threaten social equity and, or efficiency. Key observations relative to this study are that organisation and the benefits of organisation are context dependent and reflect the broader economic framework, that there are trade-offs between equity and efficiency, and that a legal framework to support organisation is beneficial but requires strong, thought-through policy that balances economic interest, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

5.1 Poole District Fishermen's Association

What is it and what is its role in representation and participation?

The [Poole and District Fishermen's Association](#) has a long-standing history as an organisation for fishers dating back to the 1900s. The association based in Poole, Dorset is composed of approximately 80 registered vessels and over 90 members including potters, netters, clam dredgers, worm draggers, anglers, shellfish farmers

and others. It acts as an agent for Poole Harbour Commissioners being responsible for the management of the Fish Landing Area, the Slipway, and the Boat Haven.

How is it financed?

The association exists to support its members from a commercial standpoint and to represent the views of the fishers at a local and national level, including being involved in communications with government and NGOs. The association works on a membership payment funding scheme with a mandatory association subscription when holding a berth in the harbour, other funding contributions come in the way of grants from various bodies for specific purposes.

How has it changed over time and what is the impact now?

In recent years the association has been heavily involved in engagements with the local IFCA (and others) to tackle illegal fishing in the area whereby undersized clams and cockles were being harvested, which was affecting stocks, rejuvenation and ultimately the sustainable management of the fishery (MSC, 2024). As a consequence of good engagement and partnership between fishers, the association, the Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (SIFCA) and others there was progression in the Poole shellfish fisheries management in 2015 where a Harbour Dredge Permit Byelaw was introduced (SIFCA, 2024). Since the introduction of the permit byelaw, illegal activity decreased by 95% and has been maintained at this low level, with infrastructural developments happening to allow the shellfish stocks to flourish (MSC, 2024).

Fishers within the Poole District Association were heavily involved in raising awareness and measures to combat the illegal activity as well as adapting their fishing gears to enable juvenile shellfish to remain on the seabed (MSC, 2024). As a result of the positive engagement and resulting new management, a programme of improvements was rolled out and new multi-stakeholder relationships were formed including with the local Wildlife Trust (MSC, 2024). These new relationships and further fishery management improvements resulted in an MSC certification for the fishery in 2018 under SIFCA management, which enables the sale of the fishery produce using the blue fish-tick label and therefore offers the potential for sales in new markets, whilst increasing revenue from the fishery (Fishing News, 2018).

What is the benefit and relationship within the national fisheries context?

Following on from gaining MSC status, new grants have been open for application from the fishing association and one successful MSC grant application has paid for training for 70 of the harbour's fishers to identify protected species, contributing to national conservation and sustainable management efforts (BBC News, Sept 2023). The association is also part of the [Shellfish Association for Great Britain](#) (SAGB) which is also a long-standing 1900s industry trade body that represents and provides a national engagement forum for various shellfish associations including cockles, clams, crabs, and lobsters. SAGB is often used as a platform for gathering stakeholders to discuss national legislation and alterations to management or to address national issues within the wider shellfish fishery. SAGB also run an annual membership fee funding scheme with a membership composed of shellfish farmers, fishers, associations, processors, commercial traders, and retail companies including restaurants, IFCA's, Seafish, academics and consultants.

5.2 Whitby Commercial Fishermen's Association/ Northeast Fishing Collective²

What is it and what is its role in representation and participation?

Whitby's Commercial Fishermen's Association was formed rapidly in response to the mass mortality event in 2021 and is currently therefore not a registered association and is rather an informal association. It is a relatively new 'association' which grew throughout 2021 and 2022 due to the shellfish (mainly crab and lobster) mortality event on the East Coast (All About Shipping, March 2022). The mortalities of which are still impacting the livelihoods of many local fishers. After the first reports of dead crab and lobster washing up on the coast in 2021, the Yorkshire coast fishers rallied together to try and find the cause of the event, to prevent further mortality (Fishing News, 2023b). Around 60 people are currently involved in the association which aims to support and represent members from a commercial standpoint, distributing news and collectively communicating information to regulators on all fishing matters. The communications within and from the association started between fishers but later branched out to include regulators.

How is it financed?

Due to the association being newly formed it currently has no continual support funding i.e., memberships or other. Given the continued mortality impacts on members of the association and their livelihood, some welfare support was sought in 2022. This was initially in the form of crowdfunding for supplies but gained momentum and brought further welfare support from seafarers and fishmongers (Fisheries Charitable Trust) who also helped to fund research on the cause of the mortality event (All About Shipping, March 2022).

How has it changed over time and what is the impact now?

It is reported that the fishing community didn't feel the best available evidence was being sourced or analysed by regulators to determine the causal effects of the mortality which is the main reason for the fishers gathering (All About Shipping, March 2022). Initial conclusions of algal bloom mortality causation from regulators were not well received so the association 'spread word' north along the coast via a network of fishers to gain further momentum, voicing and organising meetings with regulators to help combat the problem. This regional engagement led to the creation of a regional fishermen's association: 'The North East Fishing Collective' who (inclusive of the Whitby Fishermen's Association members) were the recipients of the Fishmonger's Company research support funds. The research conducted with the support funds involved collaboration with scientists from the University of York, Hull University and Newcastle University (Fishing News, 2022a) and commenced with the notion that results would be shared with government and regulators in an effort to aid stock sustainability and environmental protection (The Scarborough News, 2022). When receiving the research results government responded by setting up a group of external experts to assess the evidence (Fishing News, 2022b).

² Evidence informed by interview in November 2023, except where stated.

What is the benefit and relationship within the national fisheries context?

The local and regional collectives communicate nationally with the SAGB, NFFO and with Producer Organisations (POs) which is encouraging, but there are feelings that mechanisms to engage more and regularly, both locally and regionally are lacking for fishers especially since many communications feel 'one-sided' and 'fed top-down' (*interview notes*). The benefits of the local association and regional collective that formed due to the mortality event have been positively impacting with regards to evidence gathering and understanding the concern. However, there is the feeling that funding, resources, effort, and engagement do not occur equally across where there are shellfish fisheries in the UK. The feeling of a lack of communication and resource input into the Yorkshire fishing community echoes the negative opinions expressed by the fishing community due to the perceived mishandling of the mass mortality event by the relevant authorities. Negative fisher-regulator relationships within this region were more strongly expressed than other geographies.

5.3 Holderness Fishing Industry Group (HFIG)³

What is it and what is its role in representation and participation?

The Holderness Fishing Industry Group (HFIG) was a fishermen's organisation which represented crab and lobster vessels from the surrounding Bridlington area (HFIG, 2011) until closing in 2022. The Holderness region had substantial crab and lobster fisheries when comparing with other European fisheries with growing catch records until 2015 due to increased fishing effort and efficiency and outwards expansion to fishing grounds further offshore. The industry group was founded in 2011 because of conflicts with other marine users, particularly offshore wind farm developers as two offshore farms were being constructed 8km off the coastline in the nearby fishing grounds (HFIG, 2011). Before 2011, there was a small fishing association for the 'Grid and Flamborough'. The majority of local fishers in the Holderness area assembled during the early planning phases, despite pre-construction Environmental Impact Assessment (EIAs) predicting only minor impacts to the crab and lobster populations, to express concerns that construction could have harmful effects on the crab and lobster stocks therefore affecting livelihoods (Orsted, 2023). HFIG aimed to protect and promote the local crab and lobster fishery, advocate for members and to facilitate co-operation and coexistence with the offshore wind sector (Orsted, 2023). The industry group resulted in good relations with offshore developers and Producer Organisations (POs) which operated due to the personal relationships and engagement between people. OWF developers also praised having HFIG engagement loops and the representative voice of a group of fishers to improve co-existence (Orsted, 2023).

How is it financed?

HFIG were provided with some funding support from the offshore wind farm developers and others, but only once the association and research plan were established and carried out i.e., the fishers received a reimbursement of the money spent. The offshore wind developers did employ an in-house fisheries representative, who was the bridge between the developers, regulators, and the

³ Evidence informed by interview in November 2023, except where stated.

fishing industry. Once the initial start-up funding was sourced by HFIG, the members developed and implemented a research study focused on the concerns of the fishing grounds and the impacts of offshore wind development which was a 'first of its kind'. For this, there was a collaboration between the University of Hull, fishers and offshore wind developers. The research was carried out on a dedicated research survey vessel the *R.V. Huntress*, which was owned and operated by HFIG and supported by funding from offshore developers. The vessel was crewed by a mix of industry-employed professional scientists and experienced fishers showcasing a mixed level of engagement and collaboration (Orsted, 2023).

Following this further funding came from offshore wind developers and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, (distributed by the Holderness Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG)) after the construction of a research centre termed the 'Yorkshire Marine Research Centre. The research centre aimed to carry out inquiries suggested by members of HFIG and other fishers to "better understand the marine habitats and interaction between offshore wind on the fishing industry" (Orsted, 2023).

How has it changed over time and what is the impact now?

At present HFIG is disbanded and no longer in action. This is attributed to a series of events and causes within the last five years. Firstly, the data collected during the research carried out demonstrated that fishing could continue to thrive alongside the wind farm (Orsted, 2023) which may have led to a decrease in input from the offshore developer community. The lack of capacity and resources, with an especially high number of consultations, a lot of time allocated to funding applications in a challenging funding landscape and numerous engagement events, is highly regarded as another reason for its termination. The lack of funding resources and reserves also led to vessel maintenance and upkeep being belated, resulting in the breakdown of the research vessel which halted information output and therefore access to further funding support. There was also a feeling of a lack of association structure for example no regular communication events or annual meetings and a strong dependency on the chair of HFIG for the personal relations and both intra and inter-industry regulator communications, who left the association just before it curtailed and no 'instructed' person to follow the path.

What is the benefit and relationship within the national fisheries context?

HFIG currently remains disbanded with some local efforts to try and rebuild something in its nature from a research facility, and community engagement centre to a core fisheries-oriented research association. Local stakeholders including academics are currently involved in efforts to rebuild what was a very successful association and collaborative organisation and funding and resource seems to be a considerable issue. Additionally, due to the previous closure, some of the original HFIG members have lost interest in current engagements, despite the will still being there. At its height, HFIG represented 42 boats and the current participation from fishers in efforts to build a new association is identified at 10-12 members with another six possibly interested.

5.4 Orkney Fisheries Association

What is it and what is its role in representation and participation?

[Orkney Fisheries Association](#) (OFA) is a trade body which represents Orkney's fishing fleet. Orkney's commercial fishing fleet consists mainly of locally owned inshore creel boats. The association works collaboratively with scientists and other fishing organisations, representing approximately 50 vessel owners (~40% of the total island fleet) and two shellfish processors (OFA, 2013) on both local and national decisions, responding to reports and consultations, applying for external funding grant opportunities, and promoting sustainable fishing practices.

The association was formed in 1971 by Alan Coghill who had worked for Orkney Islands Council as an Economic Development Officer. The association was formed to strengthen the voice of the industry within Orkney. Later the association also became a Producer Organisation, although these became separate organisations around 2010.

How is it financed?

The association works on a membership payment scheme with subscription fees based on the size of the vessel registering. In previous years money has been received from Government bodies to conduct research, which involved employing scientists.

How has it changed over time and what is the impact now?

On a local and economic basis, OFA members contribute to the Orkney Fishermen's Society (OFS), which was created by local fishers to process and market local products representing another example of fisher-fisher engagement. OFS was first founded as a cooperative in 1953 due to fishers being unhappy with prices offered in neighbouring towns, the society grew quite rapidly to first trailing crab fishing in 1960 and commencing processing in 1965. The original society which employed over 100 people in 2016 recently collapsed due to a series of issues which ended in financial instability but was bought out by Orkney crab which kept over half of the original employees in position (Insider, Oct 2023).

Between 2010-2016, a pilot Marine Plan commenced for the Pentland Firth area allowing for wider stakeholder engagement and therefore opening up the opportunity for fishers to influence the decision-making process. OFA amongst other fisheries associations and organisations, participated and responded to proposed developments and the Marine Plan due to concerns over spatial and seabed use and competition (Bakker et al., 2019). In drafting the Marine Plan, stakeholder involvement and feedback were regarded by the Orkney Islands Council as paramount to the plan's success (Orkney Islands Council, 2021). The OIRMP plan processes are still ongoing with the draft plan for consultation currently in the signing phase (Orkney Islands Council, 2023) and OFA are still a key stakeholder in the consultation. The paper by Bakker et al., 2019 explores the possibilities and challenges within marine plans for fishing communities, with specific regard to Orkney Islands Regional Marine Plan (OIRMP). The paper mentions the importance of community resilience concerning bonding social capital and its use in exercising

the influence of community objectives, especially within the fishing community, linking with OFA and the impacts on the OIRMP pilot.

What is the benefit and relationship within the national fisheries context?

In addition to the association's input into the regional pilot plan (OIRMP), OFA is affiliated with a number of wider regional and nationally focused organisations, including being a founding member of the [Communities Inshore Fisheries Alliance](#) (CIFA). CIFA is a community-based policy and action organisation which originally formed through the grassroots movement of several inshore fishing associations which came together to collectively address the needs of the Scottish Inshore Fleet. Regionally, OFA is working with the [Orkney Regional Fisheries Group](#) (ORIFG) which covers waters out to 12nm. The Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups (RIFG) are non-statutory bodies in Scotland that provide a forum where commercial fishers can input and voice concerns about wider planning initiatives and in which the RIFG can try and offer practical support. Nationally, OFA is also affiliated with the [Scottish Fishermen's Federation](#) (SFF) which was established in 1973 and represents fishers from all of which represent Scotland's commercial fisheries. This wider nationally focused federation is made up of individual vessel owners, agents, and association representatives, who represent from regional and specific gear standpoints, representing over 400 vessels in total.

In addition to the Orkney Fisheries Association, in 2009 local fishers from Orkney set up a not-for-profit local company to research shellfish stocks and advise on appropriate management measures: Orkney Sustainable Fisheries Ltd (OSF), alongside which the local authority appointed a full-time shellfish sustainability officer which aided communication to regulators. Orkney's Fishing Association (OFA), Society (OFS), the Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF) and Sustainable Fisheries Ltd (OSF) all feed into the OIRMP (Scottish Government, 2016). Interviews have indicated that associations are usually developed around a common cause and that for Orkney the engagement is ongoing but is generally being held together by key people that are valued for representing.

6. Informal organisation of UK fisheries

Alongside formal fisher-to-fisher organisational structures sits a more informal set of self-organisational mechanisms which drive behaviours in the formal context as well as deliver on-the-ground non-statutory management. This section sets out three types of informal organisation which influence the fisheries management landscape, which are:

1. Community
2. Non-statutory spatial agreements
3. Social Media

6.1 Community

Fishing is central to many small coastal communities throughout the UK and seen by residents as defining what makes their communities distinct or unique. Clay and Olson (2008) set out four commonalities that define a fishing community: i) a common residence on land, and place of work at sea; ii) strong cultural beliefs about the importance of fishing to the community even when fishing revenues are only a small fraction of gross revenues; iii) women's strong involvement in the resource enterprise and iv) crew members as co-venturers and kinship as an important hiring criterion.

Community cohesion, the forces that hold individuals and communities together through the maintenance of social relationships, is important in the development and maintenance of key social processes that support effective resource governance, such as collective action, coordination, and learning (Korda et al., 2023). It is both the result of social capital but also, via a positive feedback loop, helps to build social capital, through the bonding, bridging, and linking processes set out in Bakker et al 2019. In a fisheries context, social cohesion plays an important role in enabling fishers to reach agreement on how they make use of a common fishery. Community cohesion can, where there is existing institutional capacity, also support learning and enable fishers to navigate and respond to larger-scale institutional or environmental change (Alexander et al., 2018).

Alexander et al. (2018) modelled drivers for the formation and maintenance of community cohesion in small scale fisheries via social relationship networks, and ground-truthed their theories in Jamaica. Their results showed that prolonged geographic proximity, for example fishers sharing a landing site where they spend long periods of time repairing gear and socialising, plays a significant role in structuring interactions.

Social capital can also be exclusionary and community cohesion can, for example, be built around local geographical rivalry (Reed and Courtney, 2011) which, whilst bringing benefits at a local community scale, can cause fragmentation between fishers operating from different ports/landing sites. Reed and Courtney set out that whilst there may be local rivalries, fishers will often demonstrate a tight solidarity with one another beyond their own geography. Alexander et al., (2018) note that there can be an "us vs. them" mentality between landing sites posing a significant barrier to collective action. The MMO Lyme Bay sole fishery evaluation report⁴ clearly shows this fragmentation, where the main conflict which initiated the new management measures was between fishers based in the Bay versus those based outside.

Amongst fishers, even when there is geographic proximity, there is a further set of complex interconnected communities, where gear type contributes to social ties at multiple scales. Alexander et al., 2018 set out that fishers will seek and share information with others who have similar resource needs and experiences, and this is reflected in the make-up of many formal fisherman's association organisations in

⁴ [ICF & Howell Marine Consulting \(2024\) Process evaluation of the development of Lyme Bay fisheries management measures: Final report.](#)

the UK which focus on target species (and therefore gear types). Additionally, the authors suggest that fishers using multiple gear types may form social ties with a broader range of fishers using different gear types and that they may therefore be key to developing greater connectivity across different types of fishers and thus improving community cohesion.

Cooperation amongst fishers can be a risky strategy, if individuals decide to use the information they receive from others for their own gain without reciprocating. In these instance, social cohesion breaks down and trust is lost, weakening a community's ability to be fully represented in participatory processes. Reed and Courtney raise the concept of 'competitive solidarity' where groups of fishers are competing against each other for resource and yet at the same time support each other, particularly at sea, in the interests of safety.

Strong leadership is another key indicator of community cohesion, whereby key leaders within communities drive the establishment and maintenance of social ties among small-scale fishers. Conversely, strong community leaders can dominate decision making and in turn disproportionately benefit.

The decline of the UK fishing industry has been well documented over the years, and small-scale fisheries and the communities that support them are arguably most at risk of further decline. Brookfield et al. (2005) discuss that once strong links between fishing communities and local fishing fleets are breaking down and set out that in North Shields only 10% of the total catch landed at the port could be attributed to the local fleet. Abernethy et al. (2010) reported back in 2010, in the context of high fuel prices, that most skippers (94%) they interviewed in Newlyn expressed uncertainty about the future of the fishing industry within their community and said that it "*looked bleak*". Most recently Korda et al. (2023) state that England's small-scale fisheries, where community cohesion is most important, face an "*existential threat to their survival*". An important factor accelerating decline is the multiple barriers for younger generations to enter the industry, which include the rise of second home ownership driving up costs of living in coastal communities and preventing younger people from living in fishing communities (Investment Monitor, Oct 2021), regulatory and financial constraints, and improved social and spatial mobility among fishing families (White, 2015). The breakdown of local fishing communities will logically lead to further fragmentation of the non-sector fleet and their ability and motivation to self-organise.

6.2 Non-statutory spatial agreements

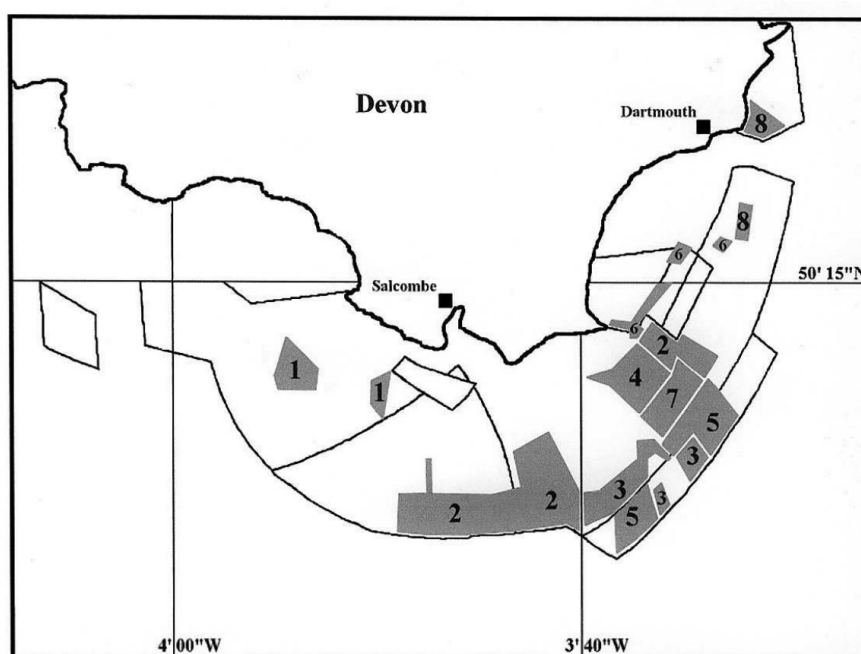
Long before fisheries management became formalised in the UK, fishers have been making 'gentlemen's agreements' which primarily focus on spatial delineation of traditional fishing grounds. These agreements are usually between static gear fishers who fish well defined territories close to their home port. Many of these fishers have family ties to fishing that date back to the middle ages and many are related to each other (Kaiser, 2014). For example, in Swanage, Dorset, the Lander family have

potted Peverill Ledges for over 200 years and other fishers in the area acknowledge and respect their territory⁵.

Other examples of cooperation between fishers to avoid spatial conflict include the regular dialogue between French and English fishers where they share positions of fixed gear in the Western Approaches of the English Channel. They have developed a long-standing system of marking blocks of the sea for use by static and towed bottom fishing gear which are rotated on a six-weekly basis.

In Devon the Inshore Potting Agreement (IPA) was set up in the 1970s to reduce conflict between mobile and static gear fishers within the IPA area set aside for potters, each fisher leaves their pots in place for the whole year, effectively setting up their own territories which expand and contract seasonally (Figure 3). In effect these fishers have established a right to the ground, although there is no legal ownership. It is an entirely voluntary agreement and, whilst it worked well for much of the 25 years that it has been in operation, there have been increasing incursions by mobile gear fishers into areas delineated for static gear. Similar agreements and relationships have been identified between inshore trawlers and scallop dredgers. There are recorded instances of private agreements between potters and scallop dredgers, which make it possible for the latter to use their gear between the strings of pots sitting on the seabed (Hart & Johnson 2002 and Kaiser, 2014).

Figure 3. The IPA area with territories occupied by eight potters (Kaiser 2014).



6.3 Social media

With the advent of social media, fishers have developed new ways of organising themselves spatially and temporally to avoid potential conflicts. One example of this

⁵ Jeff Lander, personal comms.

is within the Lyme Bay sole fishery. Between 2015 and 2022 the quota for Dover sole in Area 7.e was almost doubled as a result of successful sole recovery measures. Over time, fishers, especially those based in Lyme Bay, reported that this had led to an increase of vessels in the area, greater fishing activity and more competition for space. Competition was largely split between those whose home port was within Lyme Bay and those from 'outside' the area, but also between gear types - fixed net versus mobile gear (largely demersal otter trawls, but also beam trawls and dredges). In 2022 87% of netters stated they had experienced gear conflict (MMO, 2023). Whilst the MMO took innovative approaches to help address concerns, trawlers and netters located within the Bay worked together to avoid spatial conflict and gear loss. This was achieved through using radio, a WhatsApp group run by a local fisherman, and clear gear marking. Anecdotal evidence is that this has proved successful to a point, but the WhatsApp group mainly consists of fishers with Lyme Bay home ports and therefore cannot address the broader spatial conflict and has not served as a tool to represent all stakeholders. There is further evidence⁶ that the WhatsApp group has been used to threaten and bully individuals within the group.

Social media is also a powerful communication tool where stakeholders are able to self-organise, for example via Facebook groups and – to a lesser extent Twitter - as well as interact directly with regulators, and stakeholders outside of their direct sphere of influence. Facebook is a free alternative to setting up and maintaining a website for fisherman's associations and can allow almost real-time communication. It allows members to discuss issues without having to meet up and for association leadership to put out important information such as consultation opportunities, meetings etc. However, as with all social media, there is a risk of bullying and harassment which could have the opposite effect of breaking down community cohesion.

7. Supporting engagement activities

Beyond the more formal and informal channels of organisation and engagement set out above, there are other activities taking place on a day-to-day basis which provide additional opportunities for engagement and building trust.

Defra, MMO and IFCA's conduct formal and informal public consultations to gather the views of relevant stakeholders on a range of topics. IFCA's (Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officers) are regularly present at quaysides speaking with fishers, checking landings and measuring gear for compliance and aim to have a large presence at ports across IFCA districts. They use this as an opportunity to speak with fishers about relevant meetings (e.g. FMP meetings), fisheries updates and ongoing consultations, and feed-back information and insights gained from fishers to wider IFCA officers.

The MMO also have enforcement officers that are both vessel-based, conducting at-sea inspections, and shore-based and interact with fishers in the same way as

⁶ Anonymous interviewee for the MMO Lyme Bay Dover Sole Fishery evaluation project.

IFCOs. Scientific observer programs help collect data on commercially important fish stocks and, as part of the crew, indirectly involve them in data collection that contributes to the advice on future fishing opportunities. Conducting research projects provides another means of engaging and collaborating with fishers; for example, a recent study by Enever et al. (2022) on scallop potting with lights, funded by Defra and Natural England, was carried out by a partnership of fishers and scientists.

Workshops, both online and in-person, have provided an opportunity to bring together a wide range of stakeholders. Fishing into the Future, for example, launched a series of workshops that is bringing together fishers, industry representatives, academics, Defra, MMO and Cefas to “learn from each other’s expertise and work together effectively ahead of the implementation of Fisheries Management Plans” (Fishing News, 2023a). Fisher forums provide a more informal space for fishers to discuss their concerns, management decisions, and share information.

Education and outreach initiatives, such as the Angling Trust’s ‘We Fish as One’ campaign, which aims to “harness the power of fishing as a community building activity,” provides opportunities for the wider community to engage with the fishing industry.

8. Case studies from parallel UK industries

Fishing is unique in that stakeholders are competing for a common resource. This makes collaborative approaches to management especially challenging and is therefore generally lacking in parallels.

However, farming can provide some useful examples to draw on, in that the farming industry is highly heterogenous, including single sector (e.g. dairy or arable) and mixed farming models. Farmers are often geographically isolated, time-poor, work unsocial hours and have a strong sense of place. Additionally, much of their assets are locked up in equipment, fuel prices are influential, and profit margins can be low (depending on sector).

In the UK farmers have formed cooperatives since the mid 19th century. These are primarily established to secure higher market prices, but also to share risk, cut costs, increase resilience, and gain more control over their supply chain. They also provide social capital that is important for farmers when adapting to change. However, research for Defra found that only half of farmers were co-op members, but as many as 80% collaborated informally. Farmers gave many reasons for not joining cooperative which included mismatched expectations, and mistrust of other potential members (Macmillan & Cusworth 2019).

With an increasing need for farmers to deliver environmental outcomes, cooperation and shared learning is becoming paramount. Defra recognised the need for an alternative to cooperative societies and set up the [Defra Facilitation Fund](#) in 2015. The fund is part of Countryside Stewardship (CS) and is managed by the Rural

Payments Agency (RPA). Since its inception the Fund has set up 224 groups with 5,982 members of farmers and land managers, developing their knowledge and skills to improve nature restoration in their local areas. It supports individuals who act as facilitators to bring together groups of farmers, foresters and other land managers to improve environmental outcomes in their local area. The Funding will cover:

- the costs of facilitation and collaboration among the farming community involved
- the training of group members to better deliver CS priorities set out in the CS Statements of priorities and targeting priorities map
- the extension of the group and/or securing funds from other sources if the members of the group want that to happen.

Clear rates of pay are set out for facilitators (Table 2) and funding agreements run for a three-year period. There are strict criteria and expected outcomes.

Table 2. Facilitator rates of pay for the Defra Facilitation Fund 2024. Source [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

Facilitator activity	Rate per hour
1. Facilitation and administrative aspects of the job (basic rate)	£24
2. Facilitators providing environmental expertise (supplementary rate)	£44
3. Facilitators running an event and providing expertise on the day	Basic rate + supplementary rate = £68
4. Administrative staff	£13.42

The decline of fishing communities has been discussed earlier, and a slightly precautionary case study is that of the social movements to fight the demise of the UK mining industry. This example directly opposes the current government's ambitions to actively enable fisher to fisher engagement, in that a government policy was the rallying point for community action but, nevertheless, there are interesting lessons to learn about the motivations and consequences of a community fighting for their livelihoods.

By the early twentieth century trade unions were being set up within coalmining communities which provided welfare, social and cultural benefits. From the end of the nineteenth century, unions called repeated strikes to tackle poor working conditions and to demand higher wages. As the industry declined, especially during the inter-war depression, many miners left their communities to seek alternative livelihoods, with those remaining becoming increasingly militant. Social cohesion of colliery communities, which was already strong, increased.

In the 1980s the Conservative government set out to systematically close the UK mining industry. Devastating general strikes, driven by the trade unions, initially united miners around a common cause, with slogans such as ‘close a pit, kill a community’ (Faculty of History, Oxford University, 2023). But as the strikes stretched on, they divided families and communities. Today community cohesion in traditional Welsh valley mining areas remains splintered along the line of past union activism, the separate villages in which people live, and along generational lines, with antagonism between the elderly and the young (Bennett et al., 2000). This dysfunction makes united community action difficult, and even when projects are initially successful, they can become complicated by local rivalries and competition for resources. Thus, government interventions to help regenerate communities struggled to gain traction and are only now starting to fully recover (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2017).

9. International case studies

Four international case studies of organisation among fishing interests are set out in the following subsections. The case studies provide an indication of the scale of organisational efforts that have been embarked upon at scale, and which have resulted in positive engagement and participation outcomes.

9.1 Tuna fishing associations, Philippines

What is it and what is its role in representation and participation?

Being the world’s third-largest producer, the handline tuna fisheries of the Philippines, support the livelihoods of many small-scale fisheries (vessels range between 3-20m in length, with most 6-10m and consist of 1-8 crew per vessel) (FisheryProgress.org, 2024 and WWF, 2024). The rising global demand for yellowfin tuna amongst other tuna species together with intensive fishing threatened some of the Philippine tuna stocks in recent years (WWF, 2024). In an effort to combat this, the Partnership Program Towards Sustainable Tuna (PPTST) with the WWF has been working since 2011 to organise fishers, help Local Government Units (LGUs) to engage and work with fishers and to improve the overall traceability of landed tuna. The overall aim of the program was MSC certification and therefore sales on a more profitable market to help combat overfishing (WWF 2014). The program operated in villages within two regions within the Philippines; Bicol (112 villages) and Occidental Mindoro (28 villages) and included approximately 5,000 fishers (similar to the UK small-scale fishery) (WWF, 2024).

A full program report is available for the full duration of the program which details efforts in community organisation and proceedings since the program finished in 2015, but for the purpose of this report, some of the key steps which enabled community engagement has been summarised below (all with reference to the [WWF tuna FIP Philippines project Report 2011-2015](#)).

One of the first steps of the PPTST was to empower these tuna fishing communities for better communication, collaboration, and representation within the sector. To begin this process group discussions with stakeholders in each region were organised to help understand the interests and perceived needs across the two areas so that organisational structure could be determined, and activities prioritised. The formation of the fishing organisations was described as involving a series of dialogues, consultations, and meetings to motivate fishers' interest and appreciation in forming an organisation. Trust building between fishers was also a large part of enabling organisation which was facilitated by social marketing approaches to help gain participation at the grassroots level. The community outreach activities were repeated until the majority of tuna fishers joined the organisation. Once the majority of fishers were organised, the issues identified and communicated within each village (during formal and informal discussions) were used to create a community organising framework which identified different stages that were essential for the active participation and formation of the associations.

These included the following phases:

- Preparatory
- Integration
- Mobilisation
- Monitoring
- Evaluation

Following this framework and enabling organisation within the fishing communities, led to the enhancement of the understanding within the fishing community of the need to manage their resources, which ultimately headed the development of fishing associations within each village in the two regions. To date 21 Municipal Tuna Fishing Associations (MTFAs) have been organised, all with clear policies and are legally registered. Close collaborations between government bodies were considered instrumental in the success of the fishing associations.

These municipal associations have then been organised into Federated Tuna Fishing Associations for each site which enables representation at a regional level. The regional tuna federations have also influenced the drafting of site-specific Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) which feed into and are consistent with the National Tuna Management Plan (NTMP). Additionally, through these associations, fishers have the mandate to participate in the management process at Municipal Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Management Councils (FARMC) and Integrated FARMC2 level.

FARMCs emphasised the empowerment of the fishing community and allowed for meaningful participation in the management of the fishery and access to technical and financial assistance from various governance institutions. Representation to the FARMCs was stated as very important in influencing the decision-making process in terms of budget and planning for the fisheries program as well as engaging with the local authorities. The fishers engaging in such processes were able to move their agenda forward by ensuring that budget allocations were secured for their activities. The FARMC system was originally developed to institutionalise the major role of fishers and other resource users in planning and formulating policies and

programmes for the management, conservation, protection, and sustainable development of fisheries.

In 2011 when the PPTST first began very few municipalities had FARMCs and after 6 years there were FARMCs in 99% of the Philippines' 924 coastal municipalities and cities, along with 150 bordering inland water bodies (Lighthouse Foundation, 2011). The FARMCs were set up in a similar way to the MTFAs with the building of self-organisation but also the enlarging of the database, adaptations to climate change and implementing fisheries laws.

How is it financed?

The initial Phase 1 PPTST funding came from private companies and banking groups with sources of funding allocated through various grants to cover project-specific work. The Phase 2 funding also came from private companies as well as seafood companies from the UK including New England Seafood International, Waitrose, Sainsbury's and Marks and Spencer, and banking groups.

Once the FARMCs had been initiated the Bureau of Fishing and Agricultural Resources (BFAR) were able to implement an incentive system to provide cash rewards for use in activities. This cash award was later doubled, and other larger one-off cash awards were allocated for further industry-enhancing projects such as supporting law enforcement (Lighthouse Foundation, 2011).

How has it changed over time and what is the impact now?

The Sustainable Tuna Partnership (STP) is continuing to build on the PPTST achievements by working to give fishers louder voices in local governments and improve business skills. This includes the development of an investment scheme to help the financial stability of the fishing industry and to help networks between fishers and members of the local supply chain (WWF, 2024).

There were also smaller more research-focused projects during the PPTST that helped the fishery become more sustainable. These included BESTTuna, which helped to empower fishers to take control of their data. This was achieved by setting up systems to enable 'administration untrained' fishers to keep track of their activities and to provide information for potential certification organisations that wanted to know that the tuna is sustainably caught (Wageningen University, 2022). Similar data app projects have been carried out in Indonesia for tuna Wageningen University (2024).

In October 2021 the Philippines Tuna Handline Partnership (PTHP) received MSC certification (Marine Stewardship Council, 2021).

What are the benefits and relationships within the national fisheries context?

On a national basis, the Alliance of Philippine Fishing Federations, Inc. (APFFI) was created. The APFFI is a non-government organisation that includes a variety of associations from the fishing industry (6 regional associations, 8 cities, 20 municipal associations). It aims to contribute to the national building of fishing knowledge, act as a centre for fishing information, coordinate association members and serve as a lobby group on key issues raised by members (Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic

Resources National Fisheries Research and Development Institute Republic of the Philippines and Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, 2012).

Socksargen Federation of Fishing and Allied Industries, Inc. (SFFAI) is also a national and global representative organisation but from a value chain viewpoint. It includes 7 associations and over 120 companies involved in fishing, canning, fish processing, aquaculture production and processing and other allied industries (Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources National Fisheries Research and Development Institute Republic of the Philippines and Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, 2012). The funding for the SFFAI is mostly from membership and annual conferences as with SAGB in the UK.

9.2 Maine Coast Fishermen's Association (MCFA)

What is it and what is its role in representation and participation?

The [Maine Coast Fishermen's Association](#) (MCFA), originally known as the Midcoast Fishermen's Association is an industry-led representative fishing organisation that advocates for policies and regulations. The association was established in 2006 by a group of fishers seeking a way to provide a voice for the fishing members when at sea and process any documentation required for engaging in decision-making processes (Mascoma Bank, 2023). Maine is the largest lobster producing state and is home to over 7,280 lobster fishery licence holders which are part of the fishing-dependent communities along the coastline (Ebel et al., 2018). In 2021, Maine's lobster fishery supported nearly 18,000 jobs (Island Institute, 2022).

There are three levels of government involved in the co-management of lobster in Maine which are at a local level through councils, at the state level which is through the Department of Maine Resources (DMR), and a federal level by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) (Acheson 2013).

How is it financed?

The association is dependent on donations and business partnerships from the public and private sector as well as banks and annual membership fees (Mascoma Bank, 2023). Some research funding has also been given from the state for targeted fishery and sustainability research projects (Maine Government, Department of Marine Resources, 2023).

How has it changed over time and what is the impact now?

During the Covid-19 pandemic the MCFA built a Fishermen Feeding Mariners Program to provide direct financial relief to fishers through foodbanks and seafood meals (Mascoma Bank, 2023). This was achieved by buying catch at a fair price and donating it to local networks which provided a stable market for the fishers of Maine when restaurants and global markets closed or were restricted. Since the association's establishment, the MCFA has also developed and overseen a community sector known as the Maine Coast Community Sector. The community sector is made up of 41 groundfish fishers who are involved in the management of

the New England groundfish industry. Additionally, the MCFA working with The Nature Conservancy and Island Institute have identified securing permits and quota allocations for community access. They have also helped to develop an electronic monitoring program with a focus on accountability and affordability within the fishery.

In 2016 the Maine lobster fishery was given MSC certification due to its sustainability measures (Candid Guidestar, 2023). As of this year, the DMR have received grants to support research into alternatives to traditional lobster trap and buoy fishing gear as well as evaluating the acoustic geolocation systems that locate gear on the bottom without the benefit of surface buoys. Both of these projects are working with the MCFA in an attempt to reduce the risk of fishing gear impacts on the North Atlantic Right Whale population. A second phase of funding has also been awarded which will establish a Maine Innovative Gear Library (MIGL) to increase access to a diverse range of gear types and engage with fishers in research that looks at novel technologies of retrieving lobster traps without the use of vertical lines (Maine Government, Department of Marine Resources, 2023).

9.3 Mexican Fishing Cooperatives, Baja California

What is it and what is its role in representation and participation?

Cooperatives are often referred to as a group of fishers who communicate and coordinate their fishing activity to meet their goals which can include marketing products (Environmental Defence Fund, 2015). The Mexican Fishing Cooperatives demonstrate a long-standing history of community representation in the Baja California region. The first cooperatives were established by the Mexican government in the late 1930s, from fishing camp communities in remotely isolated areas which were originally dominated by foreign fishing and canning companies targeting lobster and abalone. The cooperatives formed in response to the threat of the fishery closure due to an El Niño event that brought warmer waters disrupting local upwelling and causing a decline of the kelp that sustains the abalone (much like the Whitby Fishing Association). The cooperatives remain in the same original isolated locations, whereby some have now developed into small villages with paved highways and have year-round residents and schools, local government offices and businesses whilst others are mainly seasonally occupied.

Collectively the cooperatives have around 1,200 members along with non-member employees and apprentices, most of whom work as harvesters and in processing operations. Members of the cooperatives have similar educational and work histories and have often learned their skills from other cooperative members and families some of which were involved in creating viable cooperatives. One of the characteristic features of the Mexican fishing Cooperatives is that they have an unusually high degree of investment in production and rather than individual fishers owning the boats and gears the cooperatives do so instead. The cooperative officers and members also decide on seasonal and daily schedules for fishing and fishing related work assignments and are fully networked within the coastal communities (McCay et al., 2014).

How is it financed?

The cooperatives are funded through membership fees which are often used to promote financial incentives to gain other members. This is done through cumulative membership and retirement benefits for members which serve as an incentive to comply with fishing cooperative rules (McCay et al., 2014). It has been documented that cooperatives also invest profits into community projects to increase awareness of the importance of fishing resources for income and the benefits for the community as a whole (Environmental Defence Fund, 2015).

How has it changed over time and what is the impact now?

The cooperatives belong to Baja California Regional Federation of Fishing Cooperative Societies (FEDECOOP) which serves to coordinate the cooperatives and provides marketing services and technical expertise for management (McCay et al., 2014). Between the 1990s and 2000s thirteen cooperatives through FEDECOOP were awarded the Territorial Use Rights for Fishing (TURF) which were designated in areas that were divided for management purposes and based on a 20-year species concession (Cunningham, 2013). When granted concessions the cooperatives were incentivised to steward the resource and maintain a sustainable fishery (Environmental Defence Fund, 2015). The TURFs are actively managed by the FEDECOOP, National Commission on Aquaculture and Fisheries (CONAPESCA) and the National Fisheries Science Institute (INAPESCA) (Cunningham, 2013).

What are the benefits and relationships within the national fisheries context?

The cooperatives function to translate local and regional concerns to advance the interests of the sector at a national level (Lozano et al., 2023) and to work together on collective issues and advances to the fishing industry. To improve financial benefits for the industry the lobster fishers, through the cooperatives, worked towards organising themselves and attaining sustainable fishing practises and were awarded an MSC certification in 2004 (McCay et al., 2014). This was the first MSC certification for small-scale fisheries in Latin America. Mexico has since started to create political opportunities for the small-scale fishing fleets and cooperative members in an effort to expand the multi-level co-management (Finkbeiner & Basurto, 2015)

9.4 Life Platform, EU

What is it and what is its role in representation and participation?

The [Low Impact Fishermen of Europe](#) (LIFE) platform is a representative organisation of grassroots fishers across Europe. LIFE was set up and run by small-scale fishers to fish sustainably, with low impact and contribute to coastal communities. The platform represents 33 organisations which include 10,000 small scale fishers across 15 EU member states.

How is it financed?

The platform is financed and supported by a wide range of partners and donors, which includes a variety of non-profit foundations, environmental law charities and the European Commission.

How has it changed over time and what is the impact now?

LIFE formed between 2009-2012 (when it was formally launched) in the lead up to the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) in which small-scale fisher representatives participated in the 'Green Paper' consultation process. Within two European Artisanal Fishermen Congress' LIFE established a strategic vision and defined its mission. In 2015 LIFE started developing a stronger voice for small-scale fishers across Europe and also started to support national organisations which represented small-scale fishers. Between 2016-2018 grants were secured which enabled the branching of the organisation to the Mediterranean and the Baltic and North Sea, which saw 5 LIFE member organisations elected to the executive Committee of the Baltic Sea Advisory Council.

In 2018, in response to the UK's Exit from the EU, LIFE closed its UK operations (NUTFA and the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation) and registered as a Not-for-Profit Association in Belgium. Between 2019 - 2022, LIFE's long campaign to ban fishing with electric pulse trawls was passed and a new five-year strategic plan and Theory of Change was developed which included uniting fishers and achieving healthy seas and vibrant communities. The 2025 vision is "to become a cohesive, well governed and financially stable European umbrella organisation, made up of national and local level organisations dedicated to small-scale low impact fish (SSF) production, including SSF fish producer organizations".

What is the benefit and relationship within the national/European fisheries context?

Amongst others, the LIFE platform aims to ensure high social impacts in that small-scale fishers have access to resources and fishing grounds, members engage to formulate local, national, and European fisheries policies, young people are motivated to be part of the small-scale fishing industry and are low impact, and that women are recognised within the small-scale sector.

The LIFE platform is also supporting, advising, and coordinating small-scale fishing organisations and enabling effective cooperation with public and private sector stakeholders across six Baltic member states in the Baltic and North Sea (BANS) project. BANS has assisted in the elaboration of Action Plans for Seabass and Western Baltic cod stocks and organised workshops to get small-scale fishers acquainted with the decision-making process.

In line with the LIFE objectives, there is also a project which is mainstreaming small-scale low low-impact fisheries in the Mediterranean: giving voice to the small-scale fisheries sector with the support of the MAVA Foundation. This Mediterranean project aims to bring small-scale fishers to the core of the decision-making process with a focus on two areas: the Alboran Sea and the Strait of Sicily.

10. Factors influencing engagement and participation at multiple scales

Over the course of this study and drawing on the MMO network study (MMO1341 and see Annex 2), fishers and fishing sector representatives interviewed raised in conversation factors that had a bearing on their perception of engagement and participation. These factors have been gathered and are discussed in this section to give insight into barriers to and opportunities for improved engagement and participation. The factors have been categorised into local, regional-national, and international scales, and are then brought together into a working draft infographic of the factors and introduces a concept of a cost-benefit calculation that influences whether to engage and participate with other fishers and fisheries management, or not.

10.1 Local-level

Noting that there is great diversity in English fisheries and therefore variability between individuals and locations, the local level factors discussed here represent observations from fisheries along the East, Southeast, South, and Southwest coastline of English. Each fishery known has a unique set of personalities and relationships among stakeholders and has a distinct set of pressures to respond to that will influence perceptions about the costs and benefits of engagement and participation.

At local scales, competition between fishing operations can be an important obstacle or barrier to fisher-to-fisher collaboration, with individual interests taking priority over collective organisation. Informal discussions with vessel owners point to some local relationships and competition between long-standing fishing operations having an influence on whether people choose to attend a fishing event or not. Some associations report competitive relationships with nearby associations that can lead to less productive meetings as historical grievances take precedent over cooperation in the present. Power dynamics were also identified, with anonymous interviewees recounting occasions where the voices of individual vessel owners were suppressed through intimidation from further up the value chain.

Individual personalities, key characters and their motivations were also identified as factors influencing the dynamic between fishers and the willingness to attend and participate in meetings. Some fishers were confident about speaking in public, while others were not, leading to less confident fishers' opinions going unrecorded. Fishers may want to speak openly and honestly but are unable to do so if their views contradict those of more outspoken characters. This intimidation can be a crucial barrier preventing fisheries managers from gaining a truly representative view of stakeholder opinions through public forums. Moreover, should engagement events be regularly overtaken by one or two individuals, other fishers may choose not to participate due to these negative past consultation experiences.

Another factor influencing the success of fisher engagement is a lack of monetary incentive or compensation for lost at-sea hours. Whilst increasing efforts are being made to hold engagement events at times fishers can attend, time at sea fishing will

always be prioritised over attending these events unless fishers are being compensated for loss of earnings or are semi-retired from fishing.

Many fishers are not aware of how evidence is used in decision making and can become disillusioned if their input is not reflected in resulting management measures. This in turn can lead to disengagement from future participatory processes. Fishers unable to attend engagement events may be unaware of how they can participate in future events and consultations, which can lead to a recurring cycle of non-attendance and disproportionate input from the fishing community. There are, at times, multiple simultaneous consultations ongoing that ask for fisheries stakeholder input. These consultations often have short time-frames for participation and can leave stakeholders feeling overwhelmed with the intense levels of communication.

10.2 Regional and National Scales

At regional scales, such as within and between IFCA districts, there can be territorial views around fisheries and fishery areas, which can create conflict when fishers from other areas, either within the same district or further afield, enter. This can create wider tensions among fishers, especially in relation to quota. At engagement events in particular, fishers may not want to disclose their fishing locations for fear that they will lose out on good fishing areas, and thus a sense of secrecy and competition underpins certain fisheries.

At regional scales, fishers often feel that management is rigid and unchangeable. This outlook often varies with geographical scales of concern, as, at national scales, fisheries management varies between regions (e.g. between IFCA districts) with the same fisheries often having different access requirements, permit conditions and gear restrictions depending on the presence of marine protected areas, availability of fisheries data and status of the fishery as reported in stock assessments. Tensions can therefore arise between fishers targeting the same fisheries in different locations, as they may think management is comparatively more restrictive in their area, as can be observed between ICES areas in the English channel. Competition between nomadic fleets and localised inshore fleets was also often cited as a barrier to engagement, with nomadic fleets entering local waters with powerful vessels and larger amounts of fishing gear, causing conflict with small-scale inshore vessels. This conflict has, though, acted as a galvanising force for local interests, which organise to represent local interests in meetings with fisheries regulators.

There are also reported regional differences between the level of organisation and representation that have a bearing on the starting position from which to enable greater engagement and participation. The level of organisation on the East coast is reported to be substantially different from the Southwest coast, for example, with implications for attendance and engagement with the respective RFGs. Relative to this study, which recommends the RFGs as a vehicle for increasing future participation by inshore fisheries, these regional differences require investigation to determine how appropriate specific fisher-to-fisher activities would be in each location. Regions with limited fisheries representation (i.e. regions without

fishermen's associations or regional fisheries groups) are, themselves, barriers to engagement and economic and social growth within an area. Being part of a FA or RFG presents opportunities to improve communication and build relationships between fishers, whilst simultaneously accessing opportunities (such as government funding and additional quota) not available to individual fishers. However, some RFGs are more organised and active than others, which presents a potential avenue to facilitate and improve engagement between fishers, both in the wider context and in relation to FMPs. In particular, supporting already established RFGs, clarifying how they are connected to fisheries management and explaining what participation in RFGs can achieve would likely consolidate different interests, foster a sense of inclusion, increase participation and improve the trust between fishers' and fisheries management processes. Creating a standardised network of RFGs would then foster collaboration at national scales.

10.3 International Scales

At an international level there is a strained relationship between UK and foreign fishers compounded by Britain's EU exit (Brexit). Many fishers voted in favour of Brexit because the pro-leave campaign offered promises of 'taking back control of our waters'. UK fishers have long been concerned about the imbalance in quota shares between the UK and the EU which remained largely unchanged following Brexit, with foreign vessels still holding 43% of the catch landed value from UK waters (Stewart et al. 2022). The result has been damaged relationships between UK and EU fishers but also decreased trust between fishers and the UK government (including fisheries managers).

10.4 Collating factors that influence engagement and participation

The factors discussed above can be conceptualised as a set of factors which can be combined to influence a cost-benefit calculation made by individuals or organisations about whether to engage or not. When the combined weight of the cost factors outweighs the benefits, individuals or organisations will be unlikely to engage. The relevance to this study is considering the set of factors in the whole, to think through at different geographical scales, the nature of the calculation, and which factors to target to shift the balance towards individuals and organisations perceiving greater benefit than cost.

Figure 4 should be viewed as a conceptual diagram that seeks to convey both the range and diversity of factors that influence individual decision making. This emphasises the complexity of the task of influencing individuals to be motivated to engage and participate, particularly where there is a long-standing lack of trust. For this reason, a key recommendation of this study is to view the F2F activities as a set rather than individual activities that can collectively encourage engagement and participation. The second key recommendation is that, in parallel with F2F activities, the MMO works on a roadmap that clarifies what engagement and participation mean in practice for fishers, and that clarifies how F2F activities will support fishers,

specifically the under-represented fishers, to engage to participate in decision-making structures.

Figure 4. An image of factors identified by fishers as influencing perceptions of engagement and participation. The decision by individuals and organisations to engage is influenced by weighing the perceived costs and benefits of engagement, which are influenced by one or many factors.⁷



The implications for this study are that: i) there are a range of factors that will influence choices to engage, and that engagement and participation capacity building should consider the range of factors; ii) that the complexity of the range of factors suggests the emphasis should be on enabling and seek to consider addressing negative factors which to consider how to shift the calculation towards perceiving greater benefits by addressing one or more of the factors. The next section is based on the sum of information gathered and consists of a longlist of potential activities that address the multiple factors which influence engagement and participation and which the MMO could support, individually or with external partners.

⁷ See also Annex 3, section 3.7

11 Recommendations for facilitating fisher-to-fisher engagement

11.1 “How-to” guides

Overview

Setting up any kind of fisheries organisation can be challenging for fishers, who often don't know, or lack confidence in, how to access funding, establish governance structures and how to interact with the fisheries management system. Building on work being conducted by the Lyme Bay CIC, step-by-step guides for fishers and fisher representatives could be developed. A guide can reach more people and be more useful to some fishing communities as they can learn at home with no loss of earnings from in-person training. The guides could also supplement FMP (or similar management meetings) partner events. Guides could cover how to:

- establish a fisheries community interest company
- establish an inshore fisheries representative body
- effectively engage in fisheries management
- access funding to support governance capacity building

Preconditions and considerations for success

The guide must be accessible to all fishers, sharing information in an easily and quickly digestible manner. Visual materials including infographics, videos or animations will improve accessibility although increase costs.

Resourcing implications and potential partners

Guide creators could build on existing efforts, making use of emerging resources, for example, the Lyme Bay CIC guide. One guide template could be created by an independent contractor (e.g. CIC) which is then made FMP-specific by FMP partners and updated by IFCAs/MMO area officers/SeaFish/MCS with all the relevant funding opportunities and events. Alternatively, an independent contractor could take complete ownership. Guide creators would need to work closely with FMP partners to gather relevant/up-to-date evidence and communicate this effectively.

Financing

In its simplest form a how-to guide would be relatively cheap to produce and could, with adequate capacity, be produced in-house by the MMO or SeaFish to keep development and communication costs down. The MMO could potentially work with FMP partners to share costs, but this might prove challenging with multiple FMP partners all needing to agree on costs, style and content. As set out above, visual materials would make the guides more accessible but would significantly increase the budget.

Relevant tools and technologies

If conducted in house, the MMO and SeaFish have their own writers and designers with relevant tools and technologies available. External providers would also have their own systems in place. Social media tools would be a useful tool to publicise materials once produced.

Overall ease of implementation/predicted acceptability

The creation and distribution of a guide would have to be communicated effectively for it to be used properly. A guide would likely be accepted if it were a simple, clear accumulation of relevant and helpful information in an engaging way. The guide creator/owner would have to communicate and engage well with MMO/IFCAs to ensure it is communicated well to fishers and there is no duplication of works.

11.2 Tools to enable anonymous input

Overview

There are multiple examples of competition, rivalries and intimidation with some fishers feeling unable to provide their opinions at in-person and virtual meetings. Enabling fishers to provide anonymous, real-time input via technologies such as Slido, Miro (or other online whiteboards), is something that could be implemented quickly and easily to provide a more equitable process and more representative outcomes.

Preconditions and considerations for success

Some fishers might not have smartphones, so the MMO might need to provide tablets/phones for these people. While anonymity provides the potential for a more equitable process for those inhibited from participating in the traditional way, it could have the unintended consequence of preventing longer-term understanding of other fishers' perspectives via dialogue. There is also the potential for abuse of anonymous systems, and if investigated further, it may be that anonymity is limited to the public forum, with the regulator having confidential sight of who provides input. Open discussion, therefore, should still be encouraged, while also providing tools for anonymous input. One of the challenges of anonymous input is verifying or validating contributions and thought will need to be put into how to enable robust anonymous input.

Resourcing implications and potential partners

This would require minimal additional resource and could easily be implemented by the MMO and within RFGs etc.

Financing

There are many free versions of online interactive tools, some of which might require relatively low-cost subscriptions to unlock key features. Other costs could include design and specification costs, technology licensing, supporting skills in the MMO and training costs for participants.

Relevant tools and technologies:

There are many online interactive tools including, but not limited to: Miro, Slido, Mentimeter, Canny, and Survey Monkey.

Overall ease of implementation/predicted acceptability

This is a relatively 'quick win' option with predicted high acceptability for both fishers and the MMO. Some more vocal fishers may feel disempowered which could potentially change dynamics (for better or worse) within meetings.

11.3 Participation training/up-skilling participation

Overview

A major barrier to participation is a lack of confidence in taking part in meetings and how management processes work. Supporting or providing training to inshore fishers with a focus on enabling constructive participation in fisheries management through increased understanding of what participation and consultation involves, what expectations are, how to get involved would help address this. Participation training can help to overcome participation and trust concerns and would encourage active participation in engagement and collaboration from all stakeholders involved. It would also help in building relationships and support greater understanding of the regulatory and management system further enabling future participation and engagement. There is potential to develop, in parallel, a participation MOU or similar that requires accountability of those participating in, for example, RFGs.

Preconditions and considerations for success

It is important to identify incentives and ensure the purpose of participation training is understood and that it is uniform across all regions with coordinated communications. Ways of delivering training should also be considered to ensure that it is done in a collaborative way which promotes attendance and participation and caters to industry working schedules and locations, as well as education/technology proficiency level. The training itself could be run by external and therefore 'neutral' organisations such as Fishing into the Future (FITF) who are already well placed and networked within the industry community and deliver other engagement activities, which may enhance participation and links with the facilitator model.

Resourcing implications and potential partners

A Defra and MMO staff member would be required to oversee and create a training programme as well as working with external training organisations to deliver the training events. The government and regulatory staff members would also need to attend and oversee the training events as well as for relationship building and follow-up communications. Strong potential partners would be FITF and Seafish who already deliver successful training programmes for fishers.

Financing

A training programme could be managed by one specialist staff member within MMO (as with the blended finance model) to oversee the programme's development and delivery actions. The training events and development would need government funding on a medium to long term basis to ensure longevity in training success and continuity of participation uptake as well as connected participant funding through

the blended finance model. Funding would also need to be available from government for in-person meetings (i.e. venue hire and resources and for facilitators to hold the events).

Relevant tools and technologies

There are many resources which would help to deliver training. Fishing into the Future's Fisheries Research Education Programme (F-REP) is a strong starting point. Tools such as Miro and Canva are useful for infographics and for both in-person and remote participation tools such as Slido allow anonymous and interactive participation. There are online training platforms and web conferencing platforms including Blackboard, Moodle, MS Teams and Zoom. It is important to note that not all industry members have access or knowledge to navigate technological platforms for participation and training. Events would be better received and attended if in person with discussion and open training platform rather than online. However, the tools have been stated for reference.

Overall ease of implementation/predicted acceptability

Training would benefit both MMO and industry in the longer term and would likely be accepted by both, as demonstrated by the success of F-REP in person events for the FMPs. If coupled with a blended finance model, including SSF spokespeople and payments, the use of how to guides, and a facilitator model, the participation training could help to deliver the RFG roadmap and result in further acceptability and engagement across the system.

11.4 Specialised facilitation and novel approaches

Overview

Fisheries meetings tend to be formal and run to a set formula which can allow dominant voices to disrupt proceedings. A general facilitator is a neutral party with no vested interest in fishing and fisheries management and who has the skills and presence to facilitate the participation of multiple stakeholders in fisheries management meetings, ensuring all voices are heard. This intervention proposes that a specialist facilitator company designs, and initially runs, an equitable and innovative process for RFG meetings to minimise disruption, improve engagement and to enhance attendance through demonstration of constructive meetings for inshore fishers or their representatives. If not already in place, Terms of Reference and Rules of Engagement should be established to moderate behaviour.

Preconditions and considerations for success

When appointing facilitators there are several important considerations. Whilst the facilitator needs to be neutral, some knowledge of fisheries is important, and they will likely be more respected if they have worked with fishers before. There is a need to comply with employment laws, but younger people may be met with some prejudice over what they know about fisheries. Facilitators would need to be briefed on relationships between fishing communities/families/organisations and other stakeholders to enable them to pre-empt potential conflict. Setting out what behaviour is acceptable and what the consequences are for breaking those rules,

through formal agreements, would also be necessary. It is important to note that some fishers may choose not to engage with facilitators out of principle.

Resourcing implications and potential partners

The MMO would need to develop, alongside the selected facilitators, a vision and process to deliver facilitated RFG meetings. Good processes can take considerable time to design and develop. The intention would be for MMO staff to eventually take over facilitation once the process was well established, which would require training as well as time to attend meetings. A specialist delivery partner would need to be identified, but AIFCA could also be a potential partner.

Financing

Facilitation design and implementation costs would need to be factored in. This could be part financed by AIFCA but neutrality would need to be considered. Administrative support from the MMO would also need to be covered.

Relevant tools and technologies

Similar tools and technologies necessary for anonymous participation could be used including Miro, Slido, Mentimeter, Canny, and Survey Monkey.

Overall ease of implementation/predicted acceptability

Implementation would be relatively straightforward, but having a neutral party to facilitate participation and engagement may be more accepted by fishers than current managers if fishers trust that the party is truly neutral.

11.5 Inshore fisheries spokesperson

Overview

An inshore spokesperson would be tasked with coordinating communications between fishers and fisheries managers. This concept has been raised by several research programmes and a suitable title for this role would need to be agreed. Ideally candidates would be one-step removed from regulators, but with good access to them, for example through RFGs. The role could potentially operate through an implementing partner, but the candidate would need to be an excellent communicator with good knowledge of the system to be able to represent SSF effectively. There are large regional variations so a standard terms of reference would support coherence between regions.

Preconditions and considerations for success

To better understand where spokespersons are needed, it would help to map out the fisheries network, building on the resources of coastal offices and IFCA's. A detailed regional study would assist the development of a bespoke delivery model per region to reflect variation. The role requires a clear remit, and potential to deliver observable benefits for those represented. It could take up to two years to identify the right people, onboard them and for the roles to be fully functional.

Resourcing implications and potential partners

Initially there will be significant MMO resources required to network, communicate and establish the roles and for identification of suitable people. Time would also be required to draft terms of reference and terms of engagement. Welfare support and training would be required for the representatives.

Financing

Financing would be required for the pre-inception detailed delivery model per region, covering discussions with coastal offices, IFCAs, and local associations. Budget for training and to pay representatives, at least initially, will be required. For the latter there is potential for sliding payments over time linked to raising a levy from those represented. It is estimated that a direct wage, assuming good skills, would be circa £40,000 per annum. Administrative support would also require funding; supporting structures and welfare, administrative support - centralised within the implementing partner - is estimated at £25,000 per annum.

Relevant tools and technologies

Tools for communication between representatives and fishers could potentially include dedicated websites, WhatsApp and/or SMS, the latter of which would be more familiar to non-users of social media.

Overall ease of implementation/predicted acceptability

The primary challenge is predicted to be the degree of existing coordination and networking among SSF in the relevant zone. For the role to work, the person needs to be able to offer and demonstrate benefits for SSF, which links to the participation roadmap.

11.6 Representation payments for small-scale fisheries associations

Overview

Loss of potential earnings is a commonly cited barrier to participation at meetings that happen during fishing hours. One potential solution would be to set up a similar fund to the Defra Facilitator's Fund which supports individuals who act as facilitators to bring together groups of farmers, foresters and other land managers to improve environmental outcomes in their local area. It would provide direct payment via per diems to a nominated representative of Fisheries Associations and other formal organisations to attend RFGs and FMP meetings.

Preconditions and considerations for success

The MMO would need to have a clear view on rules of engagement, eligibility criteria, benefits, and buy-in from Defra. The equitable distribution of payments could prove challenging and may create division amongst organisations and individuals. Whilst this approach is not currently favoured by Defra/MMO for fisheries, there is a precedent for farming and could be considered. Thinking is required on how to prevent attendance only to receive representation payments as well as about representativeness and effectiveness – for example by linking payment to a participation term of reference.

Resourcing implications and potential partners

An administrator would be required to manage payments, which could fit within the MMO funding team or administered by Seafish. Initial Defra and MMO resource would be needed to research, design and launch the scheme.

Financing

This option would require a separate fund to be set up and managed, a secure source of finance to make the payments and funding for administrative costs, including monitoring/enforcement.

Relevant tools and technologies

There could be a dedicated website and potential for an App to be developed which allows simple administration and claims process.

Overall ease of implementation/predicted acceptability

This would be high for fishers and resolve many of the reported barriers to attendance but is currently low for the MMO.

11.7 Targeted organisational support financing

Overview

Existing organisations with a role in engagement and participation, such as associations and CICs, are financially vulnerable. Retirement, burn-out and lack of sustainable funding leads to reduced capacity in those organisations or the end of those organisations. While multiple positive examples of organisations exist, those interviewed report financial and administrative concerns. Targeted funding, for example to enable recruitment of administrative personnel, or personnel with the skills required to strengthen associations, which are distinct skills from those required by vessel owners, or to provide security of future funding could strengthen the capacity and effectiveness of such organisations.

Preconditions and considerations for success

FASS has a clear set of guidelines for what it is able to fund, and funding roles long-term is largely out of scope. Alternative funds may need to be established which enable longer-term stability for organisations; one possibility is establishment of a blended finance fund, which is set out below. Clear terms of reference will be required if funding is provided to ensure funding is spent appropriately, and there are important considerations around how funds are equitably distributed.

Resourcing implications and potential partners

MMO resources would be needed to co-develop the fund scope and associated terms of reference. There will also be a need for administration and support, which could likely fit within the existing MMO funding team, as well as for outreach and communication of the fund. Potential partners to develop and/or administer the funding could include AIFCA and Seafish.

Financing

Financing would be required for the design of the fund as well as long-term secure funding for distribution. Management costs would also need to be factored in, but this could be absorbed within existing MMO structures.

Relevant tools and technologies

There could be a dedicated website and potential for an App to be developed which allows simple administration and claims process.

Overall ease of implementation/predicted acceptability

Defra and MMO are highly competent in developing and administering fisheries funding so this should be relatively straightforward to implement. Fishers would find this highly acceptable and if the issue of being able to deliver longer-term funding for staff and organisations, rather than project-based funding, can be overcome should be acceptable to Defra and MMO.

11.8 Blended finance participation fund

Overview

Blended public-private sector funds can unlock private sector funding with security provided by seed-money from UK government. Blended finance models are becoming increasingly popular within government and can provide longer-term sustainable financing. Potential private sector partners are supermarkets, chain restaurants etc. that are benefiting from improved, collaborative, fisheries management. The fund could pay for nominated fishers to attend meetings etc. where no associations exist, but alternatively could provide funding for FAs, CICs etc to pay for representatives. If successful, and over time, the fund could also be used to fund, for example, fisheries infrastructure and adaptations required to address climate change.

Preconditions and considerations for success

This option would require a long lead-in time to fully research the concept, design the fund and attract investors, probably over a period of two to three years. There are important links to many other options which require access to equitable funding, including the 'how to' guides, and funding of individuals and organisations. It may be beneficial to review how current funding is being used to support improved governance.

Resourcing implications and potential partners

Blended finance models would require a specialist fund builder and, once up and running, a fund administrator. Administration could be delivered via the MMO funding team.

Financing

Once established, the fund could be managed by one additional specialist staff member within MMO. The blended finance model would require government funding to provide assurance to private sector investors, but once established and successful, it could potentially reduce the need for other funding programmes such

as FASS and FLAG. Such a fund would require seed money, design and fund management costs and outreach and communication.

Relevant tools and technologies

Not really relevant for blended finance models, but use of Apps for administration and applications could be considered in the future.

Overall ease of implementation/predicted acceptability

Blended finance models are initially complex to design and implement but once established should be no more complicated than other fisheries funds. Acceptability for fishers would be high, as a source of reliable, long-term financing for participation. It is probably perceived as a high risk option for government.

11.9 Roadmap for regional fisheries groups

Overview

Regional Fisheries Groups are an important focal point for improved fisher-to-fisher engagement and contributions to fisheries management. Following options validation, as set out in section 12, it was agreed that development of a roadmap for consolidating and further developing the RFGs would be the final output for this project. More details for this option are set out in section 14.1.

12. Options Validation

All of the options set out above have budget and capacity implications for the MMO, Defra and delivery partners. A series of follow-up discussions were held to gauge acceptability and validate these options to inform the final phase of this project.

13. Timeline for implementation

The options set out cover a range of timescales which are set out below and outlined in Figure 5.

How to guides:

Relatively short-term gain (6 months) but would need to be ongoing for FMPs and allow for edits and networks to be addressed i.e., contacts in IFCA's and MMO with regular updates and revisions necessary.

Organisational Support Funding:

Set-up is relatively quick as it has been done previously (6 months - 1 year) but it would need a long-term roll out for longer-term results.

Facilitator Model:

6 months - 1 year to onboard and train a general facilitator (assuming it is someone with good knowledge of fisheries management already).

Regional Fisheries Group Roadmap and Facilitator:

It would take 6 months to 1 year to build a complete roadmap and will differ depending on the region in question. There is potential for a quick design phase, but working with stakeholders will take more time thereafter. The ToR would be relatively quick to set up (1 year). However, the facilitator implementation would be a longer term ongoing process following the set-up (5+ years).

Tools for anonymous input:

Set-up is relatively quick (6 months) but transition time is needed (1-2 years). May need ongoing process for training to use tools or alternative methods if everyone does not have the means or access to use these tools.

Small scale fisheries payments and spokesperson:

2 years to set up properly. Design and set up approximately 6 months, recruitment and training (6 months) and implementation and networking (1 year). Would then embed and hopefully input into fisheries management over, for example, 2 year review cycles.

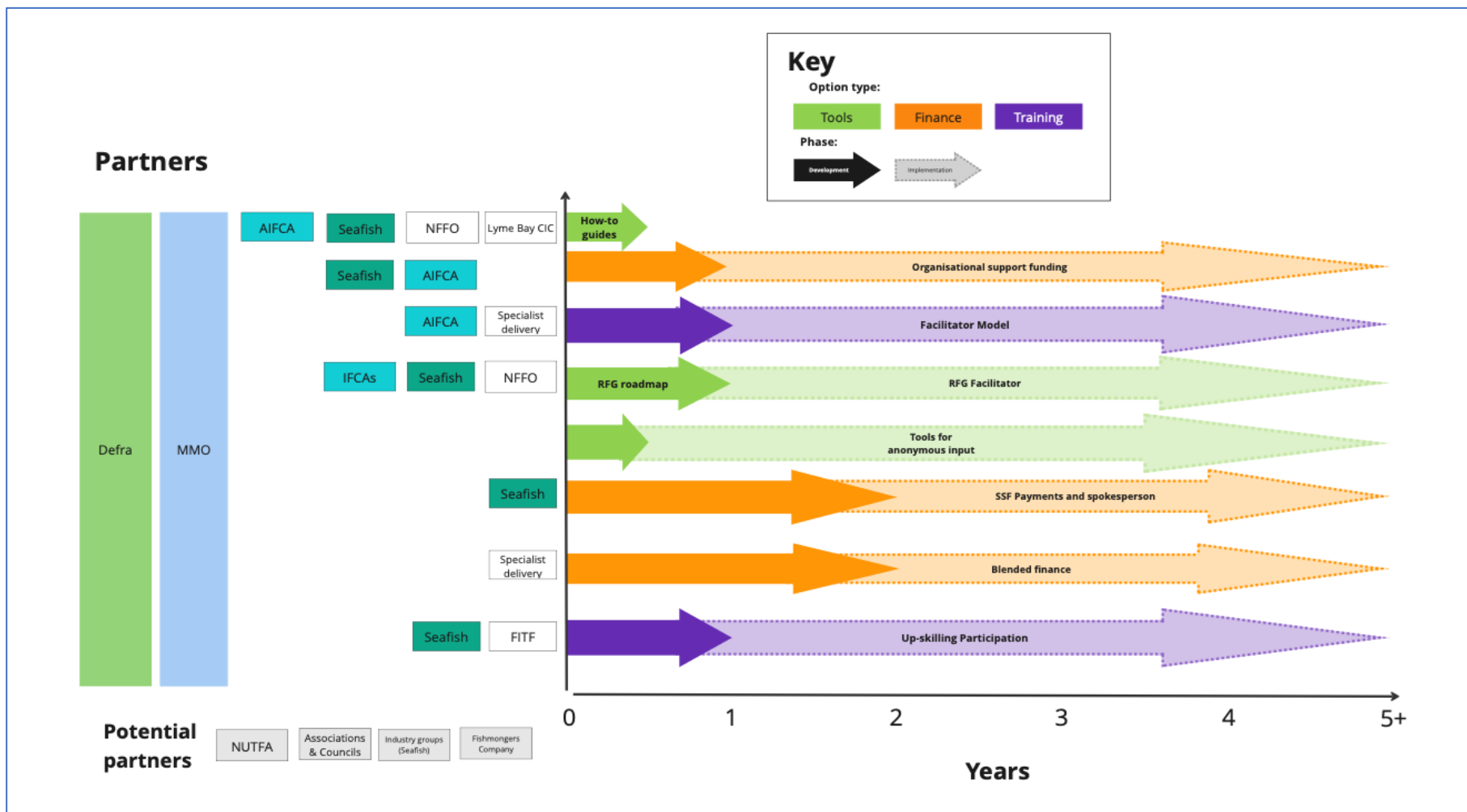
Blended Finance:

Up to 2 years to develop a blended finance model before implementation begins.

Upskilling Participation:

Set up would take one year. In the medium to long-term it would require ongoing training to enable understanding and build trust and attendance at multiple events resulting in participation in all areas of fisheries engagement not just FMP or technology monitoring cycles, for example.

Figure 5. Graph showing a suite of options to facilitate fisher to fisher engagement with associated partners (Y axis) and timescales (years) (X axis). Solid arrows represent development phases and semi-transparent arrows represent implementation phases.



14. Key findings and recommendations

Strengthening civil society organisations and building social capital are essential if inshore fishers are to be fairly represented in England's fisheries management system. There is a long history of fishermen's associations and councils in England, and more recently of CICs, but these organisations are underfunded and in some cases in decline. Geographical variability is pronounced and there are examples, such as parts of the east coast of England, where inshore fisheries are fragmented and unrepresented.

Enabling inshore fisheries to organise and to have confidence that their interests are fairly represented will require upskilling, funding, and a coherent multi-stakeholder programme that provides the foundation from which greater equality of representation can be achieved. Those interviewed for this study consistently pointed to disadvantages for the inshore fleet in terms of engagement and participation within the current fisheries management system. Reversing that situation will take time and will require coordination among the numerous actors engaged in this space.

The inshore fleet requires investment to enable professionalisation through skills development, including of the skills needed to engage, organise, and participate in fisheries management. An argument can be made that the drive to increase participation of organised fisheries interests within England's fisheries management system is dependent on the increased professionalisation of fisheries. Professionalisation implies the development of skills, identities, norms, and values, and tends to homogenise a workforce over time (Nolan and Molla, 2023). In response to the increasing management and regulation of fisheries, the English sector fleet has organised and has developed the necessary skills to engage and participate in fisheries management. The non-sector fleet, however, is not collectively organised, with local interests either represented by local organisations that have limited capacity to engage in a hierarchical fisheries management system or are unrepresented. Professionalisation clearly makes management easier, as representation of a homogenous workforce is more straightforward. The inshore, non-sector fleet, is not homogenous, however, with a hugely diverse fleet of small vessels dotted around England's coastline working near local ports and harbours, often operated by one or two hands. Of the fishing sectors, the inshore fleet is the least organised, the least observed and informed, and the least involved in fisheries management.

The MMO should provide and support opportunities for fishers to develop the skills to engage, organise and participate. This study, supplemented by previous studies including interviews of 200+ individual fishers for the evaluation of fisheries control and enforcement (MMO, 2020), confirmed that most inshore fishers want to participate in fisheries management, but do not know how. It is important to flag that there are also fishers who do not want to engage and participate, where legitimate concerns about local politics, power dynamics and past experiences prevent individuals engaging with fellow fishers and with regulators. These individuals may never engage and interviewees recognise that there are limits to what the MMO can achieve. However, the MMO should provide opportunities to engage, organise and

participate. Over time, as progress is achieved, it is reasonable to suggest that success will generate greater engagement and participation. To this end, based on the research conducted for this study, a series of actions and activities have been recommended, which are set out in section 11 of this report.

The MMO using its convening power, should consolidate existing efforts to increase fisher-to-fisher engagement and participation in fisheries management, while being sensitive not to override existing efforts. Recognising that multiple actors are already engaged in this space, including NFFO, Seafish and NGOs including FITF, among others, a further recommendation is that current efforts are fragmented and the MMO is in a unique position to coordinate and harness these efforts, if supported by a coherent programme that provides a shared vision across actors, for example, of inshore fisheries being equally well represented in fisheries management.

The MMO and Defra have the capacity to enable significant progress by clarifying and communicating what engagement and participation can lead to. The Joint Fisheries Statement states that “...*fisheries policy authorities are committed to further developing and strengthening [participatory decision making] arrangements for moving toward co-management of our fisheries and promoting inclusivity and involvement in our management approach across all parts of society*” (article 3.4.2, pp27). At present, based on interviews for this and previous studies, including with non-sector vessel owners, it is not clear how organised and represented inshore fisheries can participate in co-management of English fisheries. Policymakers and fisheries regulators need to clarify what the inshore fisheries sector will gain by engaging and participating. Implementing engagement capacity building activities is half of the story; those who have the capacity to engage need to also see where those efforts will lead. The incentives to expend effort engaging, to build relationships and to overcome trust issues need to be identified and made clear. Stakeholders need clarity around why and how engagement and representation will lead to meaningful participation in fisheries management.

To that end, it is strongly recommended that **the MMO invest in a co-designed engagement and participation roadmap** that provides:

1. clarity of purpose across stakeholders and orients multiple actors towards to vision of better engagement and participation for the inshore sector;
2. clarity about a route to achieving the vision of better engagement and participation
3. a means of countering the growing frustration with piece-meal consultation.

A positive finding from this study and from previous ICF/HMC studies is that the MMO is increasingly recognised as getting out and talking with people portside, which broadly speaking is welcomed. Interviews suggest that the MMO’s social capital is growing, but that needs to be converted into a clear participation roadmap which enables fishers to transition from defensive, reactive engagement towards positive and proactive participation.

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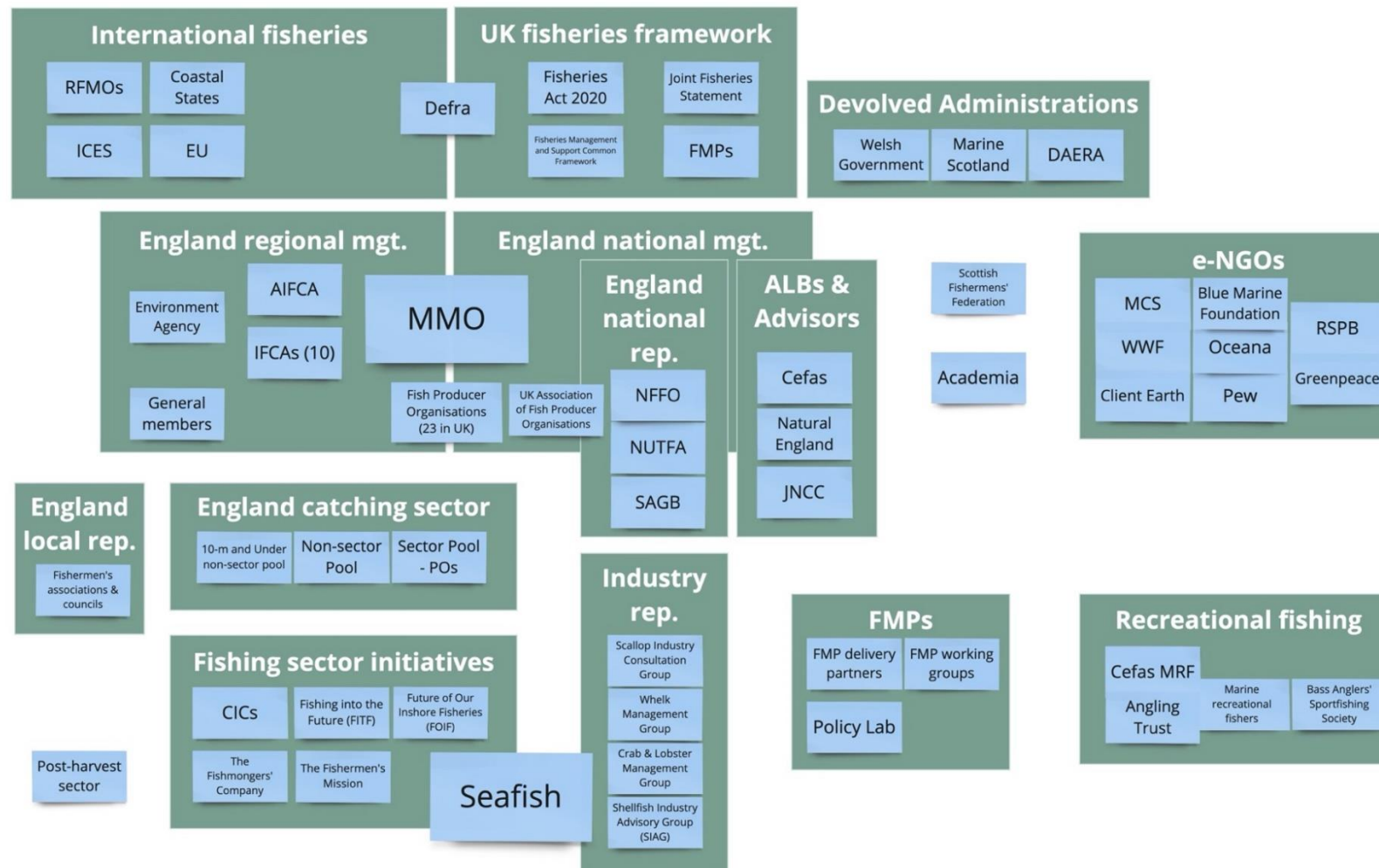
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Annex 1: Working draft of the English fisheries engagement landscape map

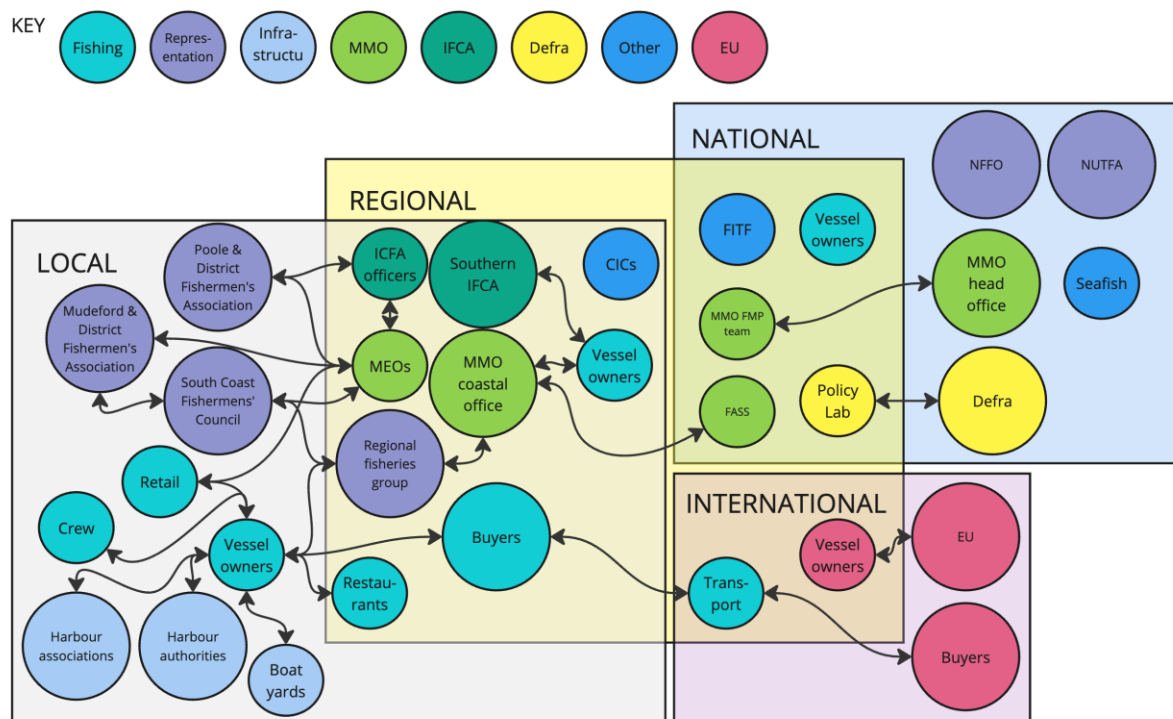
Figure 6. Working draft of the English fisheries engagement landscape map



Annex 2: Example map of local network

The below network map is from MMO1341 (MMO, ongoing) Supporting Participatory Processes and is included here to provide insight into the range of connections at local level (in this instance covering the Poole Bay-Christchurch region) that are relevant to engagement, communication, and participation. Note the role of the RFG that spans local-regional levels, and which provides a conduit to national level also.

Figure 7. Network map showing local, regional and national participants across a range of sectors



Annex 3: Interview Guide Scripts

A3.1 Interview Guide Individual Fishers

Thank you for taking the time for this call. We have a tight schedule to keep to one hour so are you OK if I direct the call and follow a set structure? [Assuming yes] I'll introduce us, and the study, and then get into the questions.

A round robin of introductions – who, title, role in the project, why on call

Introduction to the study

The MMO has committed to working in a collaborative and participatory manner with the commercial fishing industry. This is driven both by legislation, including the Fisheries Act 2020, but also through its own strategic vision which emphasises the importance of working in this manner and developing and maintaining productive working relationships with commercial fishers. The MMO understands that this is a sector that comprises numerous, diverse, and dispersed subsectors so understanding how the industry collaborates within itself and if current representative arrangements are sustainable and effective as well as looking at barriers and enablers facing the fleet is key. To support this, the MMO has commissioned Howell Marine Consulting to deliver a study that develops the MMO's understanding of how those directly involved in commercial fishing operations engage with each other and organise themselves to be able to participate effectively. This will help the MMO understand what it can do to support the commercial fishing sector strengthen its capacity to engage in a meaningful and impactful manner and secure sustainable and effective representation of English fishers in the fisheries management process. This interview is one of between 20-30 that will inform the understanding of the level of engagement and organisation between those directly involved in commercial fishing. We are interviewing people from the fisheries sector, relevant academics and those involved in developing management.

The interview will take about 1 hour. Your participation in the interview is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw your participation and data at any time without giving a reason and without it affecting you. If this interview is via the internet and you consent, this interview will be recorded for HMC's records only and will be deleted 6 months after the end of the project. When reporting the findings, all responses will be anonymised.

Can I confirm that we have your consent to continue?

Do you have any questions for me now before we move into the questions?

- 1) Are you a member of a fishing association, council, or national body?
- 2) How long have you been fishing?
- 3) How would you describe the current state of organisation among fishermen in your area?

- 4) The MMO is seeking to co-design fisheries management measures - do you feel that your interests are well represented in that process?
- 5) What benefits do you feel would result from stronger organisation and representation?
- 6) How could the MMO support stronger organisation and representation?

Wrap up

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you.

A3.2 Interview Guide Industry

Thank you for taking the time for this call. We have a tight schedule to keep to one hour so are you OK if I direct the call and follow a set structure? [Assuming yes] I'll introduce us, and the study, and then get into the questions.

A round robin of introductions – who, title, role in the project, why on call

Introduction to the study

The MMO has committed to working in a collaborative and participatory manner with the commercial fishing industry. This is driven both by legislation, including the Fisheries Act 2020, but also through its own strategic vision which emphasises the importance of working in this manner and developing and maintaining productive working relationships with commercial fishers. The MMO understands that this is a sector that comprises numerous, diverse, and dispersed subsectors so understanding how the industry collaborates within itself and if current representative arrangements are sustainable and effective as well as looking at barriers and enablers facing the fleet is key. To support this, the MMO has commissioned Howell Marine Consulting to deliver a study that develops the MMO's understanding of how those directly involved in commercial fishing operations engage with each other and organise themselves to be able to participate effectively. This will help the MMO understand what it can do to support the commercial fishing sector strengthen its capacity to engage in a meaningful and impactful manner and secure sustainable and effective representation of English fishers in the fisheries management process. This interview is one of between 20-30 that will inform the understanding of the level of engagement and organisation between those directly involved in commercial fishing. We are interviewing people from the fisheries sector, relevant academics and those involved in developing management.

The interview will take about 1 hour. Your participation in the interview is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw your participation and data at any time without giving a reason and without it affecting you. If this interview is via the internet and you consent, this interview will be recorded for HMC's records only and will be deleted 6 months after the end of the project. When reporting the findings, all responses will be anonymised.

Can I confirm that we have your consent to continue?

Do you have any questions for me now before we move into the questions?

- 1) Could you describe your role in the fishing industry [i.e., what sector - *inshore/offshore, geographic base, and stocks targeted*]
- 2) How long have you been active in the sector?
- 3) How are you engaged with developing fisheries management now?

- 4) From what you have observed, what is the current level of engagement between those actively engaged in fisheries? Has this changed since you started working as a [insert role] and if so, how?
- 5) Do you perceive your sector as being well-represented now? Who represents you? Does this differ across different parts of the industry? [*tweak questions for governmental, organisation & academic interviewees*]
- 6) Who do you engage with within the industry and with that frequency? And outside of the industry and with what frequency?
- 7) Do you want to engage more, do you want a more active role in fisheries management? If not, why not?
- 8) What would your vision of positive engagement and participation look like?
- 9) Who would you trust to represent your views? Do any local or national organisations have sufficient understanding of your fishing operation to represent your interests? Is representation important to you? Are there reasons why it is counter-productive?
- 10) Are there any barriers to participation? Are there things that enable participation, that help people to participate?
- 11) How do you think the MMO could best strengthen the capacity of fisheries interests to engage in fisheries management? Are there specific activities, tools, or initiatives that the MMO should consider supporting?

Wrap up

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you.

A3.3 Interview Guide Non-Fisher

Thank you for taking the time for this call. We have a tight schedule to keep to one hour so are you OK if I direct the call and follow a set structure? [Assuming yes] I'll introduce us, and the study, and then get into the questions.

A round robin of introductions – who, title, role in the project, why on call

Introduction to the study

The MMO has committed to working in a collaborative and participatory manner with the commercial fishing industry. This is driven both by legislation, including the Fisheries Act 2020, but also through its own strategic vision which emphasises the importance of working in this manner and developing and maintaining productive working relationships with commercial fishers. The MMO understands that this is a sector that comprises numerous, diverse, and dispersed subsectors so understanding how the industry collaborates within itself and if current representative arrangements are sustainable and effective as well as looking at barriers and enablers facing the fleet is key. To support this, the MMO has commissioned Howell Marine Consulting to deliver a study that develops the MMO's understanding of how those directly involved in commercial fishing operations engage with each other and organise themselves to be able to participate effectively. This will help the MMO understand what it can do to support the commercial fishing sector strengthen its capacity to engage in a meaningful and impactful manner and secure sustainable and effective representation of English fishers in the fisheries management process. This interview is one of between 20-30 that will inform the understanding of the level of engagement and organisation between those directly involved in commercial fishing. We are interviewing people from the fisheries sector, relevant academics and those involved in developing management.

The interview will take about 1 hour. Your participation in the interview is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw your participation and data at any time without giving a reason and without it affecting you. If this interview is via the internet and you consent, this interview will be recorded for HMC's records only and will be deleted 6 months after the end of the project. When reporting the findings, all responses will be anonymised.

Can I confirm that we have your consent to continue?

Do you have any questions for me now before we move into the questions?

- 1) Could you describe your involvement in the English fisheries sector and your interest in fisheries management?
- 2) From what you have observed, what is the current level of engagement between those actively engaged in fisheries? How has this changed over time, and if so, why?
- 3) Do you perceive that English fisheries are well-represented now? Who are the leading representative organisations? How representative are they? How does this differ across different parts of the industry?

- 4) Do you think that the less represented sectors want to engage more, do fishermen want more active roles in fisheries management? If not, why not?
- 5) What do you think is realistic to expect of engagement within the fishing industry, within and across sectors? Is it clear how participation could fit within the existing fisheries management system?
- 6) What would your vision of positive engagement and participation look like?
- 7) What are the key barriers to participation? What would enable participation, to help people to participate?
- 8) How do you think the MMO could best strengthen the capacity of fisheries interests to engage in fisheries management? Are there specific activities, tools, or initiatives that the MMO should consider supporting?

Wrap up

Is there anything else you would like to add?
Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you.

Annex 4: Initial findings from interviews

A4.1 Interview summary

A total of 22 semi-structured interviews were conducted specifically for this project and included government, regulatory, industry, and academic fisheries stakeholders. For the purpose of this report and anonymously referencing interview quotes the interviewees have been categorised into three groups and the interview numbers are quantified below (Table 3).

Table 3. Interview categorisation table which includes stakeholder groups, organisations represented and numbers of interviews per stakeholder group conducted.

Stakeholder Group	Organisations representing	Number of interviews conducted
Government	Defra, MMO, AIFCA	3
Fishing Industry	Inclusive of: eNGOs, Producer Organisations, Processors, Representative Associations and Organisations, Commercial Companies, Individual fishers and CIC's	13
Academia	University academics	6

Note: No identifiable description has been given for interviewees, so all comments remain anonymous.

The interview coding used throughout is referenced as follows, with the number corresponding to the individual interviewee from the stakeholder group. No identifiable description has been given for interviewees, so all comments remain anonymous.

- G followed by an interviewee number (e.g., G1) = interviewees from a government organisation (policy and regulation).
- A followed by an interviewee number (e.g., A1) = interviewees from an academic institute or academic background.
- I followed by an interviewee number (e.g., I1) = interviewees from industry or an industry-related body.

Information relating to the interviewee's regional location and gender can be found below (Table 4). When more than one gender has been specified it refers to multiple individuals representing the interview, however, all comments have been collated and are referenced as organisation-specific rather than by individual.

Table 4. Interviewee regional distribution and gender information.

Interviewee	Region representing	Gender (M/F)
G1	<i>National</i>	M
G2	<i>National</i>	M
G3	<i>National</i>	M
I1	<i>National</i>	M & F
I2	<i>National</i>	M

Interviewee	Region representing	Gender (M/F)
I3	Northwest	M
I4	Southwest	M
I5	South	F
I6	Eastern	M
I7	South	M
I8	Southwest	F
I9	Northeast	M & F
I10	Northeast	M
I11	Northeast	F
I12	<i>National</i>	M
I13	<i>National</i>	F
A1	<i>National</i>	F
A2	Northeast	M
A3	North and South	M
A4	<i>National</i>	M
A5	Northeast	M
A6	<i>Global</i>	M

Note: National represents UK-wide with a main focus on England and communications with devolved administrations. When more than one gender has been specified it refers to multiple individuals representing the interview, however, all comments have been collated and are referenced as organisation-specific rather than by individual within the report.

A4.2 Current level of engagement

There are mixed views about the current level of engagement among those actively engaged in fisheries (A3, I8, I10, I11, G1), with one academic stakeholder suggesting that government may believe that engagement has improved but industry does not (A4). However, some stakeholders did state that they felt at least more effort was being put into engagement now than when compared to 20-25 years ago (A3, I2, I10, I11, G1) and that the engagement within the UK highly resembles that of other countries such as Australia and the US (A4).

“Feel like things have degenerated over the last couple of decades. When first in fisheries it was better and now feel that successive disappointment has led to less engagement.” (I8)

“There is definitely more effort being put into engagement. Some fishers are engaging more, but some still not. Some just want to go to sea, be with families, don’t want to speak out” (I11)

One industry and academic stakeholder reported that EU Exit was the reason for the increased pace of consultation and rate of engagement (A3, I2), and that there was a variety of engagement within the fishing industry across different scales (G2, A5). However, despite the increased engagement, there was still a lot of disagreement within the fishing community and between the fishing community and regulators (A3, I5) and the increased engagement is causing industry fatigue (G1, I1, I2, A3). One

industry stakeholder stated that representative organisations have recently increased but despite this, they were still overworked, concerning engagement, with a particular mention of the Tier 2 FMPs (A3).

“On the whole engagement has increased and a lot of consultation is happening but there may be over-consulting and causing fatigue”. (G1)

“Fishers are fatigued and trying to get engagement in FMPs”. (I4)

The ‘breaking of trust’ post-EU Exit was also attributed to the engagement disparities due to various reasons, including high staff turnovers within government and regulator departments which led to the loss of long-term working relationships with certain central people in contactable positions across industry and within government (A6, I7). It was also felt that trust had been broken post-EU Exit due to ‘unfulfilled Brexit promises’ and also a lack of transparency from government and regulators on the change in management process and decision making, feeling that what industry says doesn’t make a difference and are dissatisfied with the feedback loop (A2, I1, I4, I10).

“Brexit has made a huge impact as there is a feeling that government has failed on every promise.” (A6)

Across industry groups, the outputs of engagement feedback are expressed as lacking and many feel that the timelines between engagement and decision-making are too long as they are focused on the current issues and do not want to engage to wait years to hear something back (I2, I9, I13). These successive disappointments are leading to less engagement (I8).

“Hard to get to know new people with the turnover and continuity would be better.” (I7)

“There is conflict between all policy leads involved and a need for more transparency and for policy bodies to talk to each other.” (I1)

“It feels like there is more effort on the part of government to get people involved, but they need to keep the momentum up. Fishers say what is the point of engaging, it doesn’t lead to anything.” (I13)

“Comments of ‘what is the point’ is partly because of timescales i.e., resolved in a year but this takes too long, and people are focused on the now and paying bills etc.” (I2)

One stakeholder described a “feeling that there is a dividing and conquering strategy for certain fisheries and holding different fisheries up against one another.” (I1)

There was specific mention of the AIFCAs within stakeholder interviews which had mixed views, including good engagement, networks, and connections with industry (A1, I7) along with an increase and commencement of informal collective fishers communicating with IFCAs and wider regulators (I10, G1). However, some communication issues were also expressed concerning a the local IFCA and wider

regulator teams with a feeling like nothing is considered when communicating (I10, I11).

“Second-hand information is always communicated. There are not a lot of mechanisms in place to engage and feel unsupported by Environment Agency, IFCA and MMO” (I10)

“Decided IFCA not fit for purpose, and nothing has changed and there is no talk of change. So, with regards to how much on the ground impact they are having, not sure.” (I11)

The Regional Fisheries Group (RFG) formation was also mentioned but the engagement impact was uncertain as there was not much to compare to regionally and they are still a new organisation (I11). One government stakeholder did report however that RFG meetings are gaining good feedback and MMO and Cefas engagement and process explanations have increased (G1).

Despite the reported instances of fragmented disconnect between the fishing industry and regulators, several industry members stated that they felt there were still good inter-fisheries communications (I5, I6, I7, I12) including on a local individual fishing level through informal channels (I5, I12), between fishing organisations (I7), between Producer Organisations (PO's) (I6) and between POs and government (I6, G3).

“From radio-radio chat to quayside gossip fishers have always talked a lot with each other”. (I12)

“We do connect with other fishing organisations, but normally locally”. (I7)

“POs are in a good position with engagement and have national quarterly meetings in which POs, government and Cefas talk through issues. Most are members of NFFO and from the sector side, it is good”. (G3)

A4.3 Sector representation

Stakeholder feedback identified differences in representation across the different fishing sectors, whereby larger companies and those that are organised are understood to be better placed to attend events and have representatives (G1, G2, I12, A2), unlike active fishers who have difficulty in attending meetings (G1). Representation is however documented as improving in some sectors (I3, G1), and one industry member felt that the sector was being well represented at international negotiations with the EU (I12).

“Big companies don't have struggle attending and they own their boats but don't go fishing themselves so can attend”. (G1)

“Representation is getting better”. (I3)

Among those involved in government and academia, the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations (NFFO) was considered positive for representation (G1, A2), with some specific species sectors (SIAG: Shellfish Industry Advisory Group) feeling well represented (I1) and Community Industry Companies (CIC's) working well to represent a network of smaller inshore fishers (I4, I5). However, one stakeholder reported that there needs to be more people speaking for the fishing industry (A5).

"Representation differs for different sectors. I think the NFFO are doing a good job and they are making an effort to represent the inshore fleet." (G1)

A relatively common viewpoint however was that representation is challenging for the non-sector (I2) and that there is currently inadequate representation for the <10m (A3, A4, G1, G2), with New Under Ten's Fishing Association (NUTFA) finding it difficult to continue (A2 and NUTFA email correspondence). One academic referred to the small-scale sector as locally organised (A6).

"Small-scale fleet is left behind to some extent. For a lot of them, they are fishing quite hard to make a living and don't have time to spend at meetings. Not as well funded as other sectors so less representation." (A3)

"Non-sector is challenging. It is challenging due to most fishers wanting to work alone at sea and don't align with others and don't want to, so getting them involved in meetings and consultations is difficult." (I2)

"POs can represent small-scale fishers (despite non-quota) but struggle to do so, finding that some don't want to be engaged with and won't attend meetings if they can fish." (G1)

A4.4 Frequency of engagement within the fishing industry and with regulators

Generally, there was a positive reflection on the engagement within and outside of industry. In particular, three industry members noted good engagement with the MMO via various means including local offices (I11), daily engagement (I8) and RFGs (I2). Also, NFFO (I2, I10, I11) and POs (I2, I6, I10, I11) were regarded as a good point of contact for wider engagement as well as council, developers, boat yards and restaurants (I4).

"Engage with the fleet, other fleets such as mobile sector, IFCA, MMO, local council, Defra, usually engage with at least one of these daily and NGOs and public through social media. Harbour masters also. Busy varied engagement landscape. Does limit the capacity to input into management. Constant dynamic, reprioritisation." (I8)

"Got good relationship with the local office of MMO, if we need anything will go there, member of a national organisation, but not necessarily that active vocally, although we met the other day and we had a chat about the industry, so can engage with them, if need be, also have relatively regular contact with the NFFO." (I11)

One industry stakeholder referred to the FMPs as being a good source of engagement for both industry and regulators, however, felt that the series of consultations from FMPs to others all came at the same time which limited the ability of industry stakeholders to respond effectively and collaboratively to all concerns (I12).

“Was majorly overwhelmed in summer with REM, FMPs, and fly-shooting consultation and all came in one block and similar deadlines so didn’t get to respond to all they would have liked to. These weren’t as collaborative as normal/ if consultations were spread out as could only respond to key areas and concerns focused on these rather than analysing other consultations.” (I12)

A4.5 Capacity and desire for increased engagement

There is shared support for increased engagement and collaboration within the majority of the fishing sectors and organisations, however, the UK fishing sector and therefore engagement activities should not be seen as one sector, because it is much more complex than that (A6).

“Fishers do like to talk and have ideas about how to improve things.” (A3)

“There are three kinds of fishers. Those who want transformational change, those who are willing to adapt and engage if they have the time, and those who just want to go and fish.” (A2)

“Feeling that all the focus is on inshore fisheries and that the government are pitting one fishery against another.” (I1)

Points were raised about the need for better and more effective engagement through transparency in decision-making and results, for industry to want and to engage more (I4, I8). There was also a mention of a need for improved engagement through collaborative data collection and engagement with the academic community (I12).

“Think the regular engagement needs to be more focused. Want to actively engage with government and appropriate management measures and do what is necessary to set those up but they have almost come to industry a bit too early with not enough science.” (I4)

As well as a need for better representation and engagement across the different sectors (G2), but also notably for the small-scale fishing fleet (A3, G3). The lack of engagement in the small-scale fleet is attributed to a lack of trust and resources leading to a less prominent role than with larger industries (A3). There is also a need for a suitably financed model to enable representation and engagement (A6). One academic did note an increase in engagement and support from the small-scale fleet, however, with regards to the nearshore trawling bylaws (A4).

“Needs to be better representation but the current trend is the meeting set up and then that is that they are represented and the forum for representation therefore doesn’t exist.” (G2)

“Small-scale fleet has a lack of trust, low resourcing, low funding. Typical things of big businesses having a more prominent role in public life. But given the opportunity fishers love to talk and have a good idea of how to deal with things and would like more involvement with regulators.” (A3)

Two stakeholders expressed the need and want for more engagement and results from the local IFCA (A6, I10).

“Feels the IFCA is failing in terms of conservation.” (I10)

“Even though inshore don’t always feel like their voice is heard at the IFCA level the structure is good for engaging the inshore fleet.” (A6)

A4.6 Expectations of engagement

There are mixed views about the expectations of engagement with a feeling that a lot of fishers want to be engaged with and to inform decisions (G1, G3), but that the system is not set up to encourage engagement i.e., long consultations are not realistic and long reports and online forms need to be simplified (G1, A6). One industry stakeholder also raised that the time given to respond to outreach was also too short (I6).

“There is almost too much engagement and outreach and not enough time to respond to everything.” (I6)

The Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) were regarded by government and academic stakeholders as an opportunity for increased positive engagement (G1, G3, A3). Feedback and observation from exercises during FMP development such as role play were that it was positively perceived as people were able to understand the different viewpoints of stakeholders and understand that compromise in some situations may be necessary (G3). One stakeholder mentioned that it would be good to see this type of engagement supported more (G3).

“If FMPs are done well, they could be a good mechanism for engagement.” (G1)

“Hard to know what is realistic but FMPs are a massive opportunity for engagement.” (A3)

“Consensus is a myth. Need strategic decisions to be made that balance various viewpoints with an even spread of winners/losers.” (A4)

However, it was stated that engagement efforts have somewhat ‘slowed down’ with FMPs which has led to industry stakeholders feeling confused about what is coming next (G1, G3). Two academics also raised concerns over the lack of representation of small-scale fishers in FMPs (A2) and the difference between people attending engagement events and those whose input is documented (A3). A comment from one industry stakeholder related to this as it was believed that it is very difficult to get a ‘full picture’ in terms of viewpoints from all industry members (I6).

“Things have slowed down (re FMPS) and it leaves people thinking what is the next step? We need to see co-delivery in addition to co-management.” (G1)

“Feedback loop is not there. Many people feel they have engaged for years but nothing has happened.” (G3)

“Need to remember it’s not just about who is in the room but who speaks the loudest.” (A3)

One industry stakeholder felt that more funding for FMPs and engagement was needed as it was difficult to keep organisations running due to a lack of funding and the time it takes to represent and get people in the room together (I9). Financial compensation for participation was also extended by one government stakeholder to help encourage and enable participation at engagement events (G1). Independent organisation facilitators and bringing together associations to aid communication were also viewed as positive for engagement (I13). With the MMO and some IFCAAs being regarded as positive with recent efforts for engagement (A2, G2).

“The new FMPs could be like the US system, but the US is well funded.” (I9)

“Need to bring together the associations. Someone who can transcend squabbles. With good channels of communication.” (I13)

“MMO appears to be partaking in genuine engagement these days and some IFCAAs are very good at engagement e.g. Scilly.” (A2)

“The MMO have been going out and talking to more people in person, which is good, but participation without government structure is problematic.” (G2)

A4.7 Barriers to participation

The lack of time and funding for industry members to participate in engagement were considered two of the main barriers to participation (I2, I4, I5, I11, I13, A1, A3, A4), with a feeling that more flexibility is needed to engage with fishers around their schedules and areas (I4, I10, I11, A3). Trust was also regarded as a fundamental part of participation (G2, A1, A3, A6, I8).

“Overcoming apathy as an awful lot is happening and everyone is exhausted. FMPs, medicals, prosecution approach, and IFCA regulations, are all exhausting and therefore other new regulations are overwhelming. The timescales set to get these things done are also difficult and things are happening in a rush leaving no time for feedback or to give updates. This is difficult. Reaching the people who don’t want to be contacted is also a challenge.” (I2)

“Time and money are key barriers. Industry members are very hardworking and need meetings to happen in places they are comfortable working in. We all know that the best place to speak with fishers is at the port and Seafish and Defra speak to fishers and have toured fishing ports around the UK to develop surveys, but there is a lack of trust with government members which also needs to be rebuilt.” (A3)

“Time is always important if planning a meeting. Try and be in the mind of the fisher.” (I10)

“Barrier is the trust which has been breached many times over the years and this is both ways. Fleet and regulators. Communication is a big barrier and tailoring them to the correct audience and literacy barriers, especially within smaller fleets who prefer human consultation and can’t participate digitally. Trust is first and foremost. As for solutions, trust is difficult as this is bridge-building. Need to recognise when promises have been made and what’s happening and take tangible actions. Using plain English and having things dyslexia-proofed and recognising the audience, if fixed, would encourage participation.” (I8)

The lack of continuity and confidence in communications was also regarded as a barrier (A2, A5, A6), especially knowing how to respond to consultations (I1, I8). Internal issues between industry members was also seen as a barrier as they will become defensive and try to ‘out-compete’ one another (A5). However, when liaison officers and representative communicators have trust and a ‘relevant’ background it can have a positive impact on participation and communication for all (A5).

“Different parts of government don’t talk to each other and that uses up the ‘will’ from the fishing industry to build trust and it destroys the trust and makes things worse. Continuity is key.” (A6)

“Articulation, education, and confidence with management paperwork. Regarding small-scale fleets, they aren’t that confident with words and when they attend meetings with IFCA’s and sense a lack of sympathy and confidence it lessens engagement. It is all about capacity development.” (A2)

“Often hate each other on a day-to-day basis and are competitors and if someone steps up to representation they will often be shut down.” (A5)

A4.8 Visions of positive engagement and participation

Communication

Across stakeholders, communication was regarded as important for positive engagement and participation, with a feeling that the communication chain has broken down over the last few years and direct points of contact are unknown (G1, G2, I1, I6, I8, I10, I11, I12, A1). The communication between processors, producers and other industry stakeholders was also mentioned as part of the positive communication and value chain (I3, I6, A5).

“Need to improve the communications on getting back to stakeholders.” (G1)

“Primary communication has disappeared.” (I8)

“The more the catching sector talks to the processors the better the job for everyone.” (I3)

“Making contacts available for different things. It’s complex and so much is going on.” (I11)

“MMO personnel not known and who industry should contact in MMO is unknown. Direct MMO personnel used to exist but not now. When communications do happen there is also a complicated scenario and it takes too long.” (I1)

Education and feedback loops

Another factor viewed as influencing participation and engagement across all stakeholder groups was education and the need to provide a feedback loop within the decision-making process which leads to transparency (A1, A4, A5, G2, I1, I6, I10, I11, I12).

“Need to demonstrate the difference engagement makes to management outcomes and that will create engagement initiatives.” (A1)

“People should also be aware of the process and understand what the end is.” (A4)

“Share concerns regarding responses and not seeing much feedback and the effects.” (I6)

“Need more feedback and to build the loop of feeding back why and what happens. Make it as black and white as possible to show the comments and feedback the reasons for decisions.” (I10)

Linking with the need for a feedback loop within the management system one industry member raised that shorter-term decision-making processes would likely make the end goal of management processes clearer for industry members which would encourage more engagement (I4).

“Decision-making process needs changing for short-term turn arounds. End goal at the end of the engagement is clear and is short term and not 2-3 years down the line.” (I4)

Port visits and engagement scheduling

Tailoring fisheries management towards industries working schedules and different levels of administration experience contributes towards positive engagement (A1, G2, I5, I6, I7, I10, I11, I12).

“Need to tailor fisheries management to be more receptive of people’s needs locally and if engaging more, then it is easier to work with and engage further.” (A1)

“Being creative and getting into the minds of the fishers and getting them to fill in forms on boats whilst at sea i.e., that they can fill in on their phone or on the way home would be useful. Emails just don’t cut it.” (I10)

“Big difference between being on the ground and someone in an office ticking boxes and not knowing how things work.” (I11)

“Defra and MMO have made efforts to come and meet people face to face which is valuable. Formal consultations need to be structured better as does the response.” (I12)

Strengthening associations

Having an industry-representative view was considered positive by stakeholders not only for engagement but also for the utilisation of all stakeholder information and communication (G1, I3, I5, I6, I10, I11, I12).

“Strengthening associations and supporting the associations so they can explain how the information is used and when it will be used. Getting a ‘clearer picture’ for everyone.” (I3)

“Getting better representation can help get people’s views to consultations.” (I5)

“Decisions have to be made based on representative view. The area of more informal engagement - the formative informative process of policy development, so pre-consultation is often more influential.” (I6)

“Non-sector owner engagement means more when it comes from representative organisations. Opinions need to get fed back into these organisations, because small pieces of info are likely to get lost. Consensus thinking is more likely to get acted on.” (G1)

Administration Support

Offering general support, and also for administration and the clarification of information was considered positive for engagement and links with communication, representation, and education/ training (G2, I5, I10, I11, I12).

“There needs to be greater support for capacity and capability and there needs to be an open and honest conversation where society also chooses to consider other interests.” (G2)

“Need admin support and this is a thing to change. It is thought that there would be a lot of support to help others but there isn’t.” (I5)

“Keeping on top of rules is difficult. You can easily get caught out as rules are always changing and fast. Hard when earning a living to get more actively involved.” (I7)

“Offering support for someone in the community helps but it also needs financial support to gather the information.” (I10)

Financial facilitation for engagement and incentivisation

Financial facilitation to attend engagement events was indicated as a way to enable industry stakeholders to engage more (I6, I7, I10). This links with one other point raised about the incentivising of industry to self-organise and engage, which could contribute to bringing younger people into the sector (I6, A1).

“The industry being incentivized to organize itself back in the 1980s is a good example of self-organisation and engagement.” (I6)

“Help people out in financial difficulties.” (I7)

“They need to be facilitated financially and go and speak to people themselves.” (I10)

“Is age the limiting engagement factor and previous sea fisheries committees? Or do the younger people just have busier schedules or more restrictive practices?” (A1)

“Youngsters are not coming into the sector as it is too expensive and difficult to set out.” (I7)

Localised and regional engagement

The scale of management and engagement and therefore networks of communication within and between industry and regulators are areas that stakeholders from all groups feel need to be considered when improving participation and engagement practices. Academic and government stakeholders regarded the IFCA model as making the most sense for participation (A1, A5, A6, A4, G1, G2), but also that having regional engagement officers could work (A1, A6, G1, G2, I12).

“Advocate for RFG but need to work more with IFCAs and engage on daily and long-term basis. The RFGs are a good platform to build and send that back up the system and need regional bodies like IFCAs to do so.” (A1)

“If fishers can respond quickly to change it is positive. Local fishers + local government/ regulators + local academics = good triumvirate example of a good information gathering feedback structure. All people involved would have a really good local holding and knowledge and all feedback to each other.” (A5)

“IFCA model makes the most sense for participation. MMO having regional engagement officers could work.” (A6)

“The system doesn’t allow for the minority issues and coming to the inshore fleet their issues are small and local. Scale is a big thing.” (G1)

“We have a top-down system from a national scale and the more local the scale lies with IFCAs and trust is being lost in some of those areas which needs to be improved. Fishers also come to MMO and Defra directly and government can’t change anything or do anything about these issues. There are siloed scales of governance and a need to change this system. NFFO are good here, but local issues are particularly hard to pick up. RFG could help here.” (G1)

“MMO trying to establish regional groups in other areas has definitely helped with capacity-building networks so that it has value beyond just the action of having the meeting on the day.” (I12)

Industry involvement in data collection

The involvement of industry in data collection for decision-making and management decisions was also regarded as important for supporting and strengthening engagement and providing trust and transparency in the process (A3, I4).

“Co-working to collect data would be beneficial to engagement and communication and it is not just collecting data for scientific purposes but also lots of other stuff spins off this collaborative working, such as long-term perspectives on the history of the fishery in question and its future, as well as the trust element as collaborative working allows scientists, regulators and industry to see each other as human beings.” (A3)

“Need more involvement of fishers in data collection.” (I4)

A4.9 Importance and trust in representation

When asked about engagement through representation two industry stakeholders mentioned that people have a lot to share but time constraints are an issue for engagement (I3) and that some people have become defensive, so representation is difficult, and it is important to gain back trust (I1, I3).

“So much to share but time constraints are a real issue.” (I3)

“There’s always a crisis in industry, but fishing is what people want to do so they keep their heads down and carry on.” (I11)

“Need to find something and fix it to get people’s trust. Time-consuming but can last a long time.” (I2)

Some existing organisations were however mentioned as positive for engagement and representation which included the Grimsby Association, Seafox Management Consultants, SAGB (Shellfish Association of Great Britain) and the NFFO (National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations) (I3, I8, I11, I12).

“Very confident in the NFFO, they have good experience, and they encourage us to stand up and say things we believe in.” (I12)

A4.10 MMO in strengthening engagement

Sector-knowledgeable officers

It was generally felt that the MMO has an important role to play in enabling and strengthening engagement within the fishing industry with one of the main factors being the need for informed MMO officers who are involved in the sector long-term and who can interact and build trust with fishers (A2, A3, A6, I1).

“MMO having regional officers could work well. Tag onto existing initiatives and run targeted events.” (A6)

“Need informed MMO officers in order to build trust.” (A3)

“Need more people involved in fisheries long-term who can interact with fishers.” (I1)

“If the MMO could gain trust and persuade fishers that they are not wasting time, and want to support fishers, this would help.” (A2)

Toolkits for education and communication

Alongside this was the need for workshops and toolkits to aid communications.

“Develop a toolkit for training fishing association leads who can communicate with MMO and feedback views from fishers.” (I2)

“FITF workshops with MMO present very well received. Fishers getting a lot out of the events, less formal and less ‘us vs. them.’ Puts faces to names.” (I9)

Improved communication and network with other Arms-Length Bodies

Building relationships with the IFCAs and working together with better regulatory communications was also identified as important for strengthening fisher engagement, enabling transparency and constant reliable communication.

“MMO needs to improve its relationships with IFCAs.” (G1)

“IFCAS are doing a good job of co-management but MMO not so much. Need to better recognise pockets of information.” (A1)

Annex 5: Preconditions for co-management

A substantial literature base identifies and discusses preconditions, or key elements, conditions and principles relevant to fisheries co-management. There are many potential conditions (the influential 1998 study by Pomeroy and colleagues lists more than 25) and the seminal common pool resource management scientist, Elinor Ostrom, consistently highlighted the need to consider each specific setting. A set of eight design principles (or conditions), reviewed in Cox et al (2010) have been shown to be associated with successful common pool resource outcomes in a variety of settings. Participatory governance – which is a foundation for generating individual agency and empowering individuals to contribute to fisheries management through having a clear stake – is a common thread running through the design principles.

The challenge is overcoming the hierarchical approach to fisheries management that has dominated in the UK for the best part of 70 years. The complexities involved in managing common pool resources such as fisheries led Hardin to post his thesis that the only means of preventing the tragedy of the commons was to impose strong hierarchical control (Hardin, 1968). Hardin's narrative, while flawed⁸, was readily accepted and influenced fisheries management, which in Europe including the UK resulted in decades of strict hierarchical governance before the 2002 CFP reform called for increased participatory governance to address the failure to meet conservation objectives.

There is now consensus and a growing evidence base that a blended approach of hierarchical control and participation through co-management are necessary to achieve positive socio-ecological and economic outcomes (Whitehouse, L. & Fowler, M., 2018 and Hilborn et al., 2020). A selection of preconditions that resonate with respect to English fisheries and that are adapted from common pool resource and co-management literatures are listed in the following box. The intention is not to provide a comprehensive review of preconditions, but to highlight the range and nature of elements to be considered in the design phase of a strategy that seeks to enable collaboration or co-management of fished resources.

⁸ Putting aside Hardin's disturbing views on human rights, Hardin's analysis was flawed as he failed to investigate if evidence existed of successfully managed common-pool resource situations, of which there are numerous examples – see Cox et al. 2010. A Review of Design Principles for Community Based Natural Resource Management. *Ecology & Society* 15(4).

Design Elements of a collaborative or co-management strategy

1. Appropriate scale and clearly defined boundaries between legitimate users and nonusers.
2. Access rights to the resource and security of user rights over time – enforcing claims against outsiders
3. Recognition of resource management problems
4. A common understanding of the situation supported by monitors of users and resources who are accountable to users and who can provide a trusted characterisation of resource use and condition
5. Social capital between users and regulators (trust, respect, relationships)
6. Collaborative leadership that is able to convene, to represent, to support, to organise, to inform and to facilitate.
7. Stakeholder participation including legitimate users (not only fishers)
8. Participatory learning that enables stakeholders to understand perceptions, share common concerns and ambitions and to generate ideas to lead to action.
9. Empowered stakeholders supported by capacity building to enable autonomous participation in decision-making and social learning
10. Effective conflict management and resolution mechanisms
11. Effective communication including to legitimate users and nonusers
12. Effective enforcement supported by graduated sanctions against offenders
13. Enabling legislation including the capacity to implement locally derived technical and management measures and
14. A coordinating body with legitimacy and a remit to drive forward the strategy

Adapted from: Pomeroy et al (1998); Cox et al (2010); Gutierrez et al. (2011); Brouwer et al. (2016).

Annex 6: Regional Fisheries Groups Summary

This annex provides a summary of the purpose and aims of and participation in Regional Fisheries Groups (RFGs) compiled using the currently unpublished documents “Regional Fisheries Groups National Delivery Plan (MMO, 2022)” and “Regional Fisheries Groups Handling Plan (MMO 2021)”. The summary has been validated by the RFG team. The purpose of the annex is to evidence the suitability of the RFGs as a vehicle to support engagement and participation of the inshore fleet, as recommended in the main body of the MMO1389 report.

RFG Vision

The RFG overall mission is to “facilitate and enable the inshore fishing industry to become part of the decision-making process for fisheries management, recognising their shared vested interest in developing and moving towards a world-class sustainable fisheries management system that supports local communities.”

The RFGs aim to achieve this vision by providing a space with which (predominantly) inshore fishers can share their views with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas), Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) and other relevant parties in order to build collaborative relationships with policy makers, regulators, scientists and play a more active role in decision-making.

RFG targets and aims

There are currently three RFG targets that state how the RFGs are to be used:

1. To provide a forum for engagement regarding developments relevant to fisheries (including FMPs, MPAs, HPMAs).
2. To deliver sustainable fisheries development projects across the UK, with examples including a review of the small eyed ray population in the South-west, a netting investigation in the South, and a pelagic quota trial in the South-east.
3. To measure the level of trust between the fishing industry and government.

Measures of success towards achieving these targets include looking at how representative the groups are in terms of the fishing sector, measuring the levels of attendance and recurrence at meetings by industry members, and recording the number of meetings held and the number of topics engaged on.

Long-term aims

The long-term aim of each RFG differs based on the unique set of challenges facing each area, however general aims highlighted across the RFGs include:

- To ascertain what the priority issues are for each RFG area;⁹
- To use industry input to develop a flag ship project which tackles priority issues, demonstrates the value of the RFGs for industry and has positive outcomes for industry and for government in line with the Fisheries Act and JFS.
- To improve stakeholder attendance and engagement with industry on topics relevant to them.¹⁰

⁹ A main driver for wanting industry to set meeting agendas but also needs close working with IFCAs.

¹⁰ Stakeholder attendance is reported to be low in areas where fishers have reported less pressing issues (e.g. Northeast 4.b) but is also low in areas where there is greater stakeholder fragmentation and poor relationships (e.g. Southeast 4.c).

- Improve relationships between fishers, IFCAs, NFFO to facilitate productive meetings and tangible outputs.

RFG participation

How are RFGs managed?

RFGs are managed by the MMO/Defra, with each RFG being led by one member of the MMO Regional Fisheries Group Team. MMO RFG leads are responsible for creating and maintaining handling plans for each RFG and are also designated as a link to wider MMO teams (including communications, evidence, planning, licensing, grants and marine conservation) to actively encourage the wider MMO to consider the inshore fishing sector in all relevant plans, licences, legislation updates where they are not already being done so.

Who sits in an RFG?

While the MMO/Defra leads are ultimately responsible for RFGs, wider governmental organisations including Cefas, IFCAs, SeaFish and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) also regularly attend meetings and contribute towards RFG goals and workstreams. The fishing sector regularly attend meetings, including members of the fishing industry and inclusive of recreational fishers.

Communications strategy

The MMO has employed multiple methods of communication in order to a) increase engagement, b) create an open discussion forum, c) facilitate collaborative working and d) facilitate recognition of the RFG brand.

Pathway	Uses
Formal meetings	Providing a space to openly discuss the issues facing fishers in particular regions, and to download information to RFG participants. Includes a “you said, we did” section that addresses how previous actions have been taken on.
Informal meetings	Visits to fishing harbours and ports to gather views from fishing stakeholders on key local challenges and opportunities. Information is used to inform policy and regulation decision making, flagship projects and to inform formal meeting agendas.
Social media	Using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn to promote RFGs and share information regarding RFG projects (e.g. project updates), coastal visits (e.g. upcoming/past coastal visits attended by RFG team), RFG meetings (e.g. locations, times, dates, outcomes).
MMO weekly seafood bulletin	Online bulletin including updates on RFG projects (e.g. small eyed ray project), information on coastal visits and drop-in events, testimonials from industry and RFG meeting information.
RFG newsletters	Online newsletter including updates on RFG projects (e.g. small eyed ray project), information on coastal visits and drop-in events, grants and funding information, “you said, we did” sections focussing on addressing industry feedback, and information on the MMO representatives for that RFG area.
Dedicated RFG website	Overall RFG website as well as individual RFG websites including information such as meeting dates/times/locations, meeting notes/minutes, RFG success stories, collaborative science documents, landings data, and presentations given at RFG meetings.
Dedicated calls and emails to industry	Dedicated calls, texts and emails to industry members including meeting dates/times/locations, sharing of meeting

Pathway	Uses
members from an RFG mailbox	agendas/invites/minutes, requesting of agenda items, sharing post-meeting feedback surveys, sharing of other relevant information such as iVMS guidance, following up with members that make requests (in or out of meetings) to explain outcomes and developments.
Physical media	Includes the use of posters on notice boards, at quays and ports to advertise RFG meetings (time/date/location), share contact information and inform of future port visits. Poster include QR codes linking to RFG websites.
<i>Ad hoc</i> liaison with fisheries groups	When pertinent, RFGs work with fisheries groups, including the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations (NFFO) and with Fish Producer Organisations (POs) where the latter operate in inshore waters.
<i>Ad hoc</i> liaison with governmental fisheries bodies	The MMO also utilise other fisheries managers and public bodies to share RFG information/communications, with the IFCAs passing on meeting information and key RFG information via their industry mailing list, website bulletins and/or emails and SeaFish broadcasting RFG meeting information via SeaFish industry groups (e.g. whelk management group).

Delivering on the needs of the industry

The MMO have adopted multiple mechanisms to build on participation, help RFGs deliver on the needs of the industry, and facilitate industry input/feedback in decision-making, including:

Pathway	How does this deliver on industry needs
RFG mailbox/email communication; RFG website	Creating and sharing an action document from each meeting, including the actions needed to be taken and by whom, to facilitate the production of tangible meeting outputs.
Informal meetings	Through port visits, information is passed on to industry and gathered from industry, to understand local challenges and opportunities, and to provide a pathway for information from industry to feed into RFGs and MMO at a time and place convenient for them, and that enables accessibility for those without access to electronic communications.
RFG mailbox/email communication	Asking for post-meeting feedback to encourage continued engagement on topics covered.
RFG mailbox/email communication	Encouraging fishers to set meeting agendas (with the long-term aim to have industry set the full agenda).
RFG mailbox/email communication; Meetings	Asking for/providing a space for industry to submit agenda items/questions/topics for meetings.
Meetings	Where relevant to the region, delivering consistent presentations across all RFG regions to ensure fair access to information.
Meetings	Including a section to address comments from the previous meeting including connecting industry with other organisations (e.g. MCA) to provide value.
Meetings; RFG Newsletters	Including a "you said, we did" section where MMO set out how they have addressed stakeholder input in tangible ways.

Envisaged changes to participation model

- To establish key representatives for industry, IFCAs, SeaFish and Cefas to facilitate improved communication and quick actions and allow fishers to pass on their points to a specific industry representative if they are unable to attend a meeting.
- To create an “executive steering group” for influential industry and stakeholder representatives. The group will be consulted for major projects within a region.

Facilitating constructive participation

Constructive participation is essential to the functioning of the RFGs. Constructive participation is achieved through management by the chair, supported by a terms of reference or charter shared with RFG members that sets out the intentions for the RFGs¹¹ and that specifies expectations around members being accountable, constructive, efficient, fair, professional and transparent. If a member of the RFG meeting does not adhere to the terms of reference, there will be temporary suspension of the individual and RFGs can apply a grievance procedure to deal with complaints:

- The MMO’s complaints procedure is to be followed should explicit complaints be given in writing (e.g. via the RFG mailbox).
- Complaints regarding meetings, agenda items, project progress or of a similar nature will be addressed on a case-by-case basis and responses will be returned via the Principal Fisheries Manager.
- Complaints regarding conduct of an RFG attendee will be addressed by the RFG team and consideration will be given as to whether the member has breached the RFG charter.
- If a complaint is regarding the conduct of an MMO individual, this will be escalated directly to the G7 Head of Fisheries via the Principal Fisheries Manager, with exception if the complaint is regarding the specified individuals in which case responsibility falls to the next highest grade. This will be handled on a case-by-case basis in line with the MMO Complaint Procedure and MMO HR policy.
- Complaints which are received verbally should be immediately escalated to the Principal Fisheries Manager who will decide with the G7 Head of Fisheries Management the best course of action on a case-by-case basis.
- Correspondence that is received that does not specify that it is a complaint but raises serious concerns about the welfare of attendees (both industry and organisational) will be treated with respect to the severity of the issue raised.

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