

REGIONAL FISHERIES GROUPS: Code of Conduct

Introduction and Constitution

Regional Fisheries Groups (RFG) provide a formal method of engagement to help to further develop more collaborative and stronger working relationships between policy makers, scientists, regulators, and the predominantly inshore fishing sector at a regional and local level. RFGs present opportunities for collaborative working on a range of issues, from fisheries management plans and localised collaborative science projects to quota management. The groups are designed to focus on inshore issues relevant to that region, but it is acknowledged that these may naturally at times require consideration of offshore and national activities to ensure that the groups remain mindful and in touch with the bigger picture on a national scale.

The term 'predominantly inshore fishing sector' refers to active commercial and recreational fishers that operate mostly inside 12nm and / or are classed as non-Sector vessels. Buyers, processors, and other inshore industry representatives such as Producer Organisations (PO), where appropriate, may also form part of these groups.

Representation in RFGs encompasses government bodies, inshore fishing industry including recreational sea anglers. Other relevant stakeholders may be invited depending on the agenda of the day. Working collaboratively across these sectors supports inclusive dialogue and engagement. The secretariat for each of the RFGs will continue to be provided by MMO/Defra for a further 24-month period until January 2027, after which the group progress will be reviewed, and an appropriate secretariat identified.

To ensure the highest standard of accountability and constructive discussion, in line with best practice, this Code of Conduct sets out the minimum standard required for all members of the Regional Fisheries Groups network. This Code of Conduct applies in addition to any other terms or procedures in place for RFG members.

Purpose of the groups

- To discuss and work collaboratively as a group to co-design management options for the sustainable exploitation of fish stocks and highlight stakeholder priorities to the relevant organisations.
- To participate in the evaluation of existing fisheries management techniques within the wider statutory framework.
- To discuss with, make recommendations to, and work closely alongside policy makers, scientists and regulators on fisheries management-related matters considered to be of importance to the group.
- To support and develop detailed collaborative science proposals and work together as a group to implement these.
- To critically evaluate the data for fisheries management and where necessary identify how data gaps can be filled.

- To ensure all fishing activities within the region are represented (when appropriate).

Engagement

The MMO Regional Fisheries Group team may conduct a range of engagements to achieve the purpose of the groups. The primary ways these activities may take place are through:

- Local port visits – MMO RFG team member(s) and relevant stakeholders will meet with inshore fishing sector representatives at their local port.
- Formal meetings – meetings held either virtually or in a hybrid format where government, organisations and the inshore fishing sector are invited.
- Regional or local workshops – meetings to discuss a specific challenge or measure, held either in person, virtual or hybrid to discuss regional fisheries management. This may be formed of nominated representatives in a steering group.
- Bulletins – The MMO RFG team members will issue timely bulletins highlighting items of regional and national importance to members.

This list is not exhaustive and other engagement events may occur on an ad-hoc basis, in line with the below principles.

Events are likely to take place in conjunction with other MMO teams, organisations or associations in order to respect and maximise the time members involved.

Principles

The members of the Regional Fisheries Groups are held to the core values of transparency, accountability, expertise and respect.

Transparent and Accountable

- A draft summary of the formal meetings will be made available to the group within one month of the RFG meetings for amendments. Following this, the summary will be made publicly available on the .gov.uk website.
- The name of the individual attendees and (if relevant) the organisation(s) that they represent will be publicly available.
- External queries regarding RFGs or outcomes of port visits and meetings will in the first instance be directed through the relevant MMO RFG lead. Details of the team members can be found on the 'Meet the Team' webpage.
- Contact details for RFG members will only be provided where verbal, recorded or written permission has been granted to do so, or where contact within the organisation would assist in supporting statutory functions.
- The members of the groups may be expected to declare their interests, and the interest of whom they represent at the beginning of any engagement and at any

time that an interest become apparent during a formal meeting or engagement event.

- Delegates attending any engagement events must behave appropriately and treat fellow RFG members and organisational (e.g. MMO, Defra, IFCA etc) attendees with courtesy, consideration, and respect. Those that are not adhering to these standards will be held accountable to the MMO Unreasonable Customer Behaviour policy.
- Members of the groups shall provide access to information in a way that is open and enhances accountability on items of discussion. Efforts will be made by all members to protect the confidentiality of sensitive information, except where disclosure is authorised.
- Where agreement is given by attendees, formal meetings will be recorded and made available on the MMO YouTube channel for viewing.

Expert and Efficient

- Wherever possible, expert local knowledge and scientific expertise will be brought into discussions to help inform and further the approach of the group. This may include but is not limited to statutory nature conservation bodies and, where appropriate to the agenda, Non-Governmental Organisations.
- RFG members will always seek to address issues in a timely manner.
- Where possible, timelines for issues raised will be made clear.

Respect and Facilitation of Discussion

- Discussions must be professional, constructive, and respectful by all parties.
- Where appropriate, discussions may be conducted by written correspondence.
- Discussions and attendance at RFG meetings will be agenda led and can include, but not be restricted to, issues raised by its members.
- During formal meetings, the chair has authority over the timings, agenda and facilitation of discussion. Instructions from the chair on how best to engage during meetings will be given at the start and reminders may be issued throughout. This can include, but not limited to, using the 'raise hand' function on MS Teams, pre-submitted questions and moving to new items on the agenda.
- Members of the RFG shall aim to reach a consensus on key issues for the regional inshore fishing sector. Recording of these positions will be taken in the drafted summary of formal meetings or port visits. Where a consensus cannot be reached, majority/minority positions may be recorded.
- Working groups may be established to progress specific issues. Such groups will be required to provide regular progress reports to the RFG at formal

meetings.

- There will be an opportunity and clear process for appropriate resolution where the general arrangements and spirit of engagement are considered by one or more party not to have been met. Until this process is drafted, the MMO and or Defra complaints procedure should be followed if necessary.

Representatives of the RFG

- Defra and MMO will provide support for the organising and facilitation of the formal meetings.
- With the permission of the secretariat or chair, other experts, or salient members of the community may attend meetings to input to particular agenda items.
- Group members can nominate an alternative person to represent their interests at a meeting by informing the RFG chair or secretariat in advance of that meeting taking place.
- In time, delegates may be selected from the groups who fairly represent the demographics of that regional inshore fishing sector. Criteria these delegates should meet will be provided to the groups for approval prior to selection.

Fair and Balanced

- Membership of RFG should be representative of the inshore commercial and recreational fishing activities within the region, and relevant policy making, regulatory and scientific bodies.
- There is no requirement for the full range of offshore fishing activities to be represented but offshore interests may be invited as appropriate.
- Individual attendees may represent themselves or wider organisations. However, the attendees must have a vested interest in the particular region the group is representing.
- There is no requirement for POs to be represented as POs already have formal lines of communication with government bodies, but in some cases, POs may form part of the group and provide insight into inshore fishing issues, where they have a membership base that reflects this.
- The group will record the balance of membership, identifying any gaps in membership, and actively encourage participation from any underrepresented group; any gaps or omissions in membership should be identified and the RFG encouraged to actively fill such gaps / omissions.

Catch limit decisions for quota stocks

- The MMO is the competent authority responsible for setting catch limits for quota species, in consultation with the RFG and the wider fleet.
- The MMO will seek the advice of the RFG on quota priorities and the seeking of catch limits. These decisions will be published on the RFG .gov.uk website where appropriate.
- Defra will seek the views of the RFG and wider industry on quota priorities ahead of EU negotiations each year.

Frequency of RFG engagements

- Unless otherwise agreed between the representatives, the RFG will formally meet up to 3 times a year, or more frequently by exception.
- Unless otherwise agreed between the representatives, the MMO RFG team members will endeavour to conduct port visits on a frequent basis across the region, or more frequently by request.
- The date and time of forthcoming RFG meetings and port visits will be circulated via email by the MMO RFG team. Further communications may be received via social media and text.
- For formal meetings held in a hybrid fashion, the RFG team will ensure meeting venues include video conferencing to ensure inclusivity for individuals that cannot attend in person.

Failure to comply with the Code of Conduct

For any individuals whom conduct themselves in contravention to the Code of Conduct, or in a manner where the spirit of engagement is considered by one or more parties not to have been met, their membership of the groups will be considered for withdrawal.

Withdrawal from the Regional Fisheries Groups

A person or persons can be removed from the Regional Fisheries Groups for the following reasons:

- When their behaviour is in contravention of the Code of Conduct or
- Falls into the realms of the MMO Unreasonable Customer Behaviour policy.

While a comprehensive list of actions and behaviours is difficult to provide, these generally fall into the categories of:

Unreasonably persistent or vexatious: This consists of contact (written or verbal) which we consider places an unreasonable demand on our colleague's time; continuation to seek to pursue an issue, including complaints, where the concerns identified are not within the remit of the MMO and this has been previously explained

or where our complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and exhausted.

Aggressive or unacceptable: Behaviour (written or verbal) that might intimidate, bully, harass or offend members of the RFG including speakers and MMO staff.

Please refer to the [MMO unreasonable customer behaviour policy](#) for more information.

Review

- This code of conduct will be reviewed every 2 years, or earlier as needed.

Annex

Regional Fisheries Groups .gov.uk page -
[Regional Fisheries Groups - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Meet the MMO RFG team page -
[Regional Fisheries Group - Meet the Team - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

MMO Unreasonable Customer Behaviour Policy -
[20220324 MMO UnreasonableCustomerBehaviour Policy v.1.0.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)