



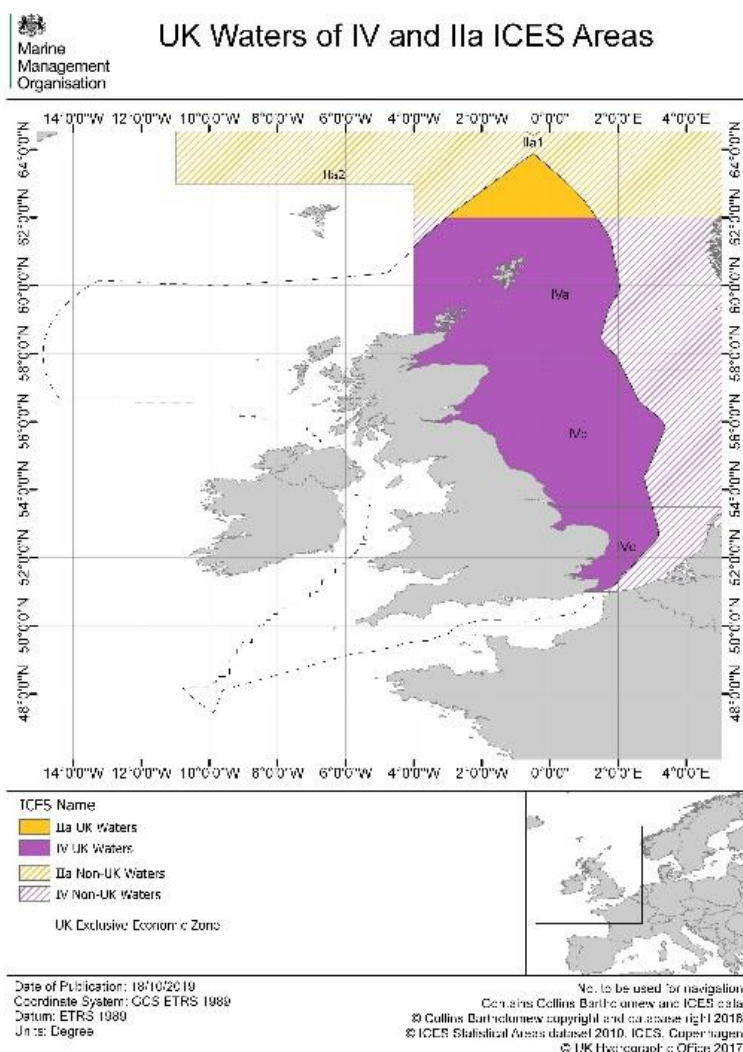
Marine
Management
Organisation

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Fishing gear requirements and Landing Obligation exemptions. Updated January 2025

Applicable to Demersal towed gears fishing in UK waters of the North Sea

See separate guidance for Nephrops vessels and Beam Trawlers





Introduction

To ensure you are accessing the latest guidance please check

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fisheries-management-landing-obligation>

The guidance explains rules on the fishing gear you should be using in UK waters of the North Sea when fishing for demersal species with towed gear (other than Beam Trawls or fishing for Nephrops) and summarises which Landing Obligation exemptions are available to you.

The guidance is for all sizes of fishing vessel (including those under 10 metres). It does not cover IFCA byelaws – please consult your local IFCA for further information.

When operating in EU waters please refer to the EC rules on discarding

https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/fisheries/rules/discarding-fisheries_en

General fishing gear rules:

All mesh sizes given in this document are minimum sizes. You can choose to use a larger mesh than that stated.

- 8mm maximum for single twine cod-ends. (Further single twine restrictions apply in Farne Deep (5mm))
- 5mm maximum for double twine thickness
- UK non-beam trawls operating in IVb and IVc north of 53°N using multi-rig cod-ends must be of ≥ 95 mm.
- Square mesh panel must be fully fitted within 12m of cod-line for cod-ends between 80 to 119mm.
- The baseline mesh size in this area is now a 120mm cod-end and this must be used where catches exceed 20% of cod haddock and saithe combined.
- If you have a landed catch of less than 20% of cod, haddock and saithe combined, then you may use a mesh size below 120mm as specified below in table 1.
- North Sea prohibition on demersal towed nets of mesh size range 70 to 79mm in area IV



Gear selectivity requirements

All mesh sizes specified are the minimum.

Table 1: Standard gears that you must use

Fishery	Gear(s)	ICES Area	Conditions
Plaice and Sole and non-TAC species	All demersal trawls	IVb	100mm cod-end and 90mm square mesh panel
Mixed demersal fishery including Skates and Rays, and non-TAC species	All demersal trawls	IVc	80mm cod-end, 90mm square mesh panel and 140mm headline panel.
Sole (minimum 40% sole)	All demersal trawls	IVc	80mm cod-end and 80mm square mesh panel

Landing Obligation exemptions

In the table below is a brief summary of exemptions from the Landing Obligation for these fisheries which allow you to discard fish. All quantities of fish discarded under the Landing Obligation must be recorded in your logbook but will not come off your quota.

You must ensure that the following rules are complied with:

- All catches of quota species must be kept on board, landed and counted against quota, except where the exemptions listed below apply.
- All catches and discards must be recorded in your logbook.
- Any fish returned to the sea under the exemptions described below must be kept in good condition in order to maximise their survival chances. This includes keeping them wet, handling them carefully and releasing them promptly.

Survival exemptions - allow you to discard fish under certain conditions based on the likelihood of a fish being able to survive being caught and returned to the sea. You are permitted to discard certain species of fish provided you comply with the conditions specified in the table below.

De minimis exemptions - allows a small percentage of the total catch of certain species to be discarded because it is difficult to completely avoid unwanted catches. It is important that discards are recorded in your logbook. *De minimis* exemptions may be withdrawn where discard levels are too high.



Species you can discard	Gears	UK ICES Area	Exemption Type	Conditions
Skates and Rays	All Gears	Ila and IV	Survival	No Conditions
Dover Sole (SOL) below the minimum size of 24cm	Otter Trawls	IVc	Survival	<p>Fishing takes place no more than 6 nautical miles from the coast but outside identified nursery areas.</p> <p>The fishing vessel is no more than 10m long (LOA). Maximum engine power is 221kW.</p> <p>The depth of water is no more than 30m.</p> <p>The towing time is less than 90minutes.</p> <p>Minimum cod-end mesh size of 80mm.</p>
Plaice (PLE)	Danish Seine	IV	Survival	No Conditions
Plaice (PLE)	Otter trawls and Pair trawls	IV	Survival	Minimum cod-end mesh size of 80mm.
Nephrops (NEP)	Otter Trawls	Ila and IV	<i>De Minimis</i>	Cod-end mesh size of 80mm to 99mm.
Whiting (WHG) below the minimum size of 27cm	Otter Trawls and Seines	IV	<i>De Minimis</i>	Cod-end mesh size of 80mm to 99mm.
Mackerel (MAC) and Horse Mackerel (JAX)	Otter Trawls and Pair Trawls	IV	<i>De Minimis</i>	Cod-end mesh size of 80mm to 99mm.
Sprat, Sandeel, Norway Pout and Blue Whiting	Otter Trawls, Pair Trawls and Seines	IV	<i>De Minimis</i>	Minimum cod-end mesh size of 80mm*

The following exemptions below will cease from 28/02/25

Cod (COD) below the minimum size of 35cm	Otter trawls and Seines	IVc	<i>De Minimis</i>	Cod-end mesh size of 80mm to 99mm.
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