



Marine
Management
Organisation

Regional Fisheries Network

Operations Plan 2024-2025



...ambitious for our seas and coasts

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Document guidance

The role of this document is to outline the operational delivery plans of the Regional Fisheries Network over the course the 2024-2025 financial year. This is subject to change based on emerging information and changes to fisheries, and informs part of the sustainable fisheries business plan.

Executive summary

The Regional Fisheries Network (RFN) consists of five Regional Fisheries Groups (RFGs) across the English coastline formed of fishing sector stakeholders and organisational partners to deliver sustainable fisheries management.

The Regional Fisheries Network (RFN) is currently operated by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) with the intention to provide a formal route in which the inshore fishing sector can collaborate with organisational bodies in order to input their views and firsthand experience into fisheries management.

Delivery centres around three key areas:

1. Communications

The RFN will provide an accessible communication channel for inshore fishers. Informal in person port side discussions will take place on a continual drop-in basis, or as requested by local stakeholders. Formally, each group may hold up to three regional level meetings per year, providing a forum for discussion between stakeholders and a safe space for fishers to air their views, concerns and suggestions.

Alongside this, the network aims to provide timely updates on a range of activities and policies which may affect fishing on a local or regional level.

2. Management measures

Projects such as the Lyme Bay Sole fishery have demonstrated the ability of the groups to facilitate open discussions on regional and local challenges faced by the inshore fishing sector, and of potential management solutions to these. As the Fisheries Management Plan implementation progresses, these groups will be an instrumental avenue in which the inshore fleet can influence the measures.

3. Non-sector quota management

The RFN offers a direct path for the fishing sector to suggest, support or object to amends on monthly catch limits of quota stocks. There will also be the opportunity to share their views with Defra to feed into EU negotiations.

Introduction

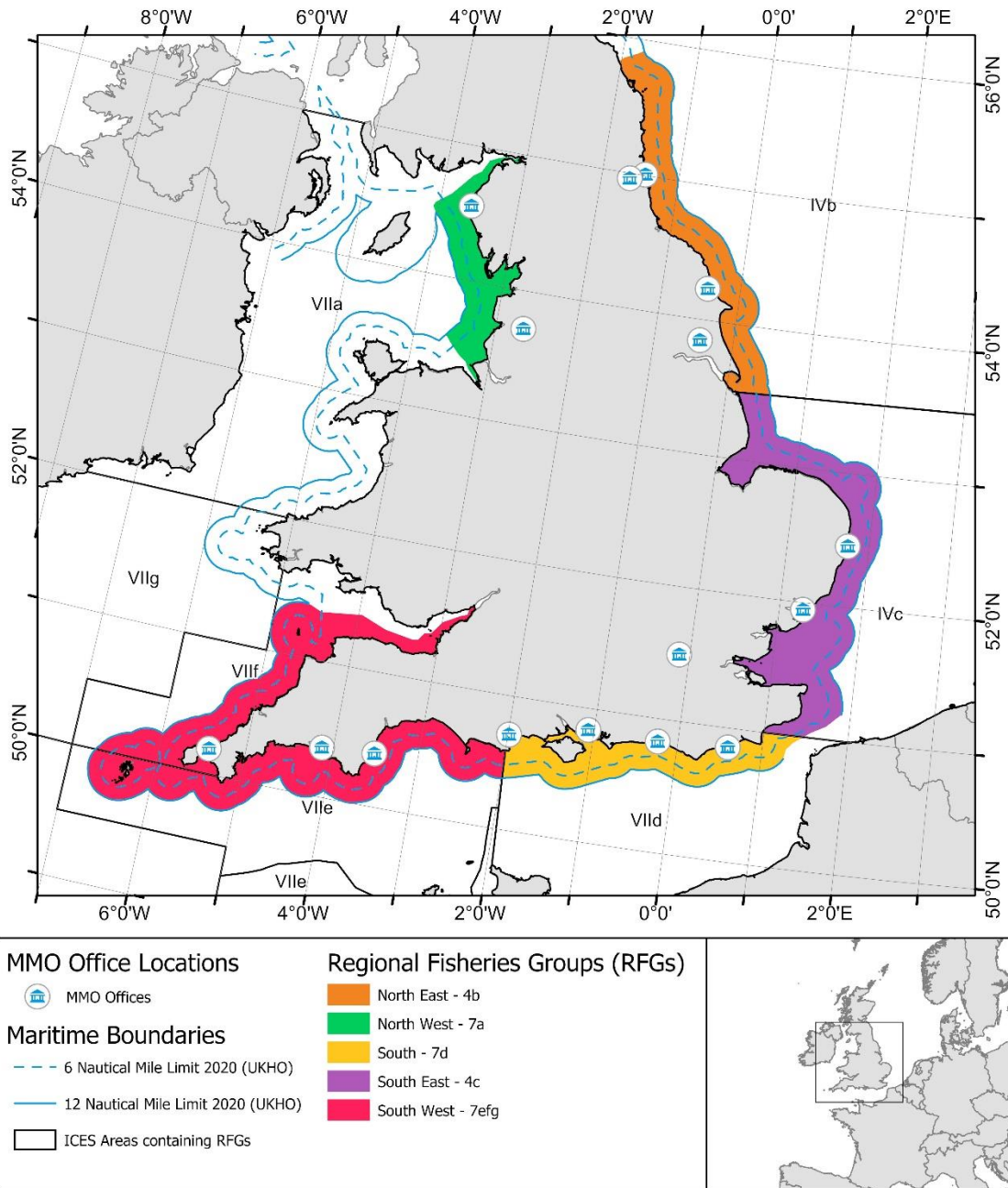
The Regional Fisheries Network is operated by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) since establishment in 2021.

The network was initially founded following a workshop jointly hosted by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and MMO with the inshore fishing fleet to aid collaboration and partnership working and to inform decision making at a more regional / local level. Discussion within the workshop focused on the objectives of cross sector working, identifying priorities and taking into account the preferences of local areas. The groups were adapted from the existing Quota Advisory Groups.

The network is made up of 5 regional fisheries groups (figure 1) formed of fishing sector stakeholders and organisational partners to deliver sustainable fisheries management. Inshore stakeholders include commercial fishers, skippers, vessel owners, recreational fishers, merchants and fisheries association representatives. Organisational stakeholders include MMO, Defra, local IFCA's, Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) and Marine and Coastguard Agency (MCA).



Regional Fisheries Groups (RFGs)



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Figure 1: Map outlining the locations of the RFGs

In 2023, the groups evolved from their initiation of 4 online meetings per annum per group dispersing regulatory and legislative updates to the current flexible engagement utilising a mix of virtual, hybrid and in-person engagements to better suit stakeholder needs and address fisheries management concerns. This new format was developed to be more accessible to fishing sector stakeholders, many whom spend large amounts of time at sea without access to online services or have the time to travel to a regional hub.

For fishers, the benefit of these groups is the access to discussions on fisheries management, clarity on the impact and design of legislative and regulatory changes and the opportunity to influence policy and management at a local and regional level.

For regulators and policy organisations, the benefit of these groups is to be able to account for firsthand experience in management measures, deliver key updates on legislative and regulatory updates, and test practicality of new policy/regulation.

Each group is managed by a Regional Fisheries Manager employed by the MMO, with full operation commencing from January 2024.

Vision and Principles

Our vision is to enable the inshore fishing sector to become part of the decision-making and consultation 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 key principles of the groups, as outlined in the Terms of Reference are:

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Respect
- Expertise
- Efficiency

Legislative landscape of 2024

Over the course of 2024 there are a number of challenges and opportunities coming to the way fisheries are managed, as well as other policy changes that may affect fishers and fishing operations. These include, but are not limited to:

- Implementation of the published fisheries management plans
- Consultation of drafted fisheries management plans including tranches 3 and 4
- Scientific fisheries trials such as bluefin tuna, small eyed ray and pollack.
- Implementation of the inshore Vessel Monitoring System (iVMS)
- Co-design and consultation of management measures on stocks, including those not addressed in fisheries management plans
- Co-design of regional and local level management measures

- Preparation for policy changes and/or measures as a result of 2023 fisheries consultations
- Utilisation of additional quota, changing catch limits and input into EU negotiations
- Provide a forum to inform, discuss and co-design any other fisheries management item as these arise throughout the year.

As the fisheries change over the course of the year, there may also be opportunities to investigate emerging fisheries, diversifying into alternative fisheries or innovation in early intervention management of fisheries.

2024 Strategic Goals and Outcomes

The strategic goals for 2024 of the Regional Fisheries Network are:

- Engage regularly with fishers and fishing sector representatives including regular visits to ports in the RFN area
- Present the opportunity for the fishing sector to represent their views in consultations and meetings with regulators and policy bodies, both virtual and in person
- Support sustainable inshore fisheries management in line with the Fisheries Act 2020
- Promote collaboration in design and implementation of management measures.

As a result of the goals, the Regional Fisheries Network expects to:

- Record engagement across all groups with inshore stakeholder 450 times
- Each group will have a minimum of 2 opportunities to discuss quota and catch limits, delivered by various methods suitable to the group
- Provide opportunity to all groups for assistance in submission of consultation responses and applications
- Prioritise projects developed in partnership with inshore fisheries stakeholders to manage, improve and/or develop their fisheries
- Where feasible, include collaboration with key organisations in regions where there are marine developments which affect fishing e.g. wind farm companies, crown estate, national grid.

While the network has strategic goals and outcomes, the MMO acknowledge that these cannot be achieved alone. These may only be achieved in collaboration with the inshore fisheries stakeholders and organisational stakeholders.

Resources

The Regional Fisheries Network delivers on the Joint Fisheries Statement section 3.4 of participatory decision making to facilitate inshore stakeholders views into fisheries management. However, the groups currently hold no independent budget.

There are six full-time members of MMO staff who operate the groups, five Regional Fisheries Managers, one for each group, and one Principal Fisheries Manager overseeing the activities of all groups.

Projects

The work of the Regional Fisheries Network varies across the groups resulting in a range of actions and projects which seek solutions for immediate issues as well as long-term solutions for broad management concerns. It is anticipated over the course of 2024 that a number of local level projects will emerge resulting from the published fisheries management plans as well as those brought forward by the fishing sector as emerging challenges or opportunities.

Examples of ongoing projects include:

1. National seal mitigation measures

Fishers have raised that growing seal populations across the UK are resulting in catches being depredated on, in some cases resulting in entire landings being eaten.

- The RFN have been working with researcher from the University of Oxford to understand the extent of the depredation and have encouraged fishers to engage with this research
- The RFN organised 2 workshops in May 2024 in areas of high seal activity to discuss with fishers possible mitigation and management, and presented the research and data collected.

2. Marine license consultation assistance

The fishing sector have raised that some marine license applications are not widely advertised in a manner and timeliness that allows them to engage with consultations.

- In 2023, the RFN piloted a consultation assistance programme in which the RFG Fisheries Manager would send key information to local stakeholders to enable them to submit responses
- In 2024, the RFN is rolling this programme out across all regions for new marine license applications. Early feedback is requested from the industry on this programme, and this will also be asked in the annual survey.

3. Lyme Bay sole fishery

High 7e sole catch limits in Lyme Bay led to concerns surrounding intense fishing effort in the bay, gear conflict and reported declining sole sizes. Over 2022 and 2023, data were collected, a workshop held and a consultation undertaken to produce a suite of management measures and future actions to pre-emptively tackle the sole fishery challenge in Lyme Bay

- In 2024, a second workshop was held in Lyme Regis to discuss management for gear conflict as well as take general views of the management measures introduced
- The RFN have committed to continuing with the actions resulting from the initial consultation including investigating the potential for mesh size changes and the suitability of sole MCRS.

4. Fisheries management plan (FMP) measures implementation

It is acknowledged within the fisheries management plans that fisheries are highly nuanced and can vary at a regional level. Some of the management measures suggested in the first set of published plans are at a regional and local level.

- The RFN team will use their regional level knowledge to promote and engage key stakeholders within the FMP implementation
- The RFN will be one of the primary forums in which implementation is delivered. They will facilitate conversations between fisheries managers and policy leads on the early management measures suggested and support engagements held for the development of the measures.

5. Communications improvements

Fishers have raised that at times there is an overwhelming amount of information delivered to them from organisations without clarity on what affects them at a regional level or affects their activities directly.

- The RFN have committed to sending regular updates with streamlined information on key news, policy and management changes which may affect the stakeholders of that group
- The RFN have committed to supporting submission of consultation responses and applications through group responses, or assistance in person
- The RFN will have meetings where information is complex and pertinent to their fishing, or there is an opportunity to directly influence the policy/regulation.

Measuring progress

The MMO commissioned a project to develop an evaluation framework and undertook a baseline evaluation, due to be published in July 2024.

The RFN commits to utilising the framework to measure continued progress of the groups and success. It is acknowledged that the pace and development of projects is not solely a result of the work of the RFN and as such can only be measured operationally.

The RFN will issue an annual survey to stakeholders to understand the impact the groups have on stakeholders and fisheries management, as well as identify areas of improvement and change.