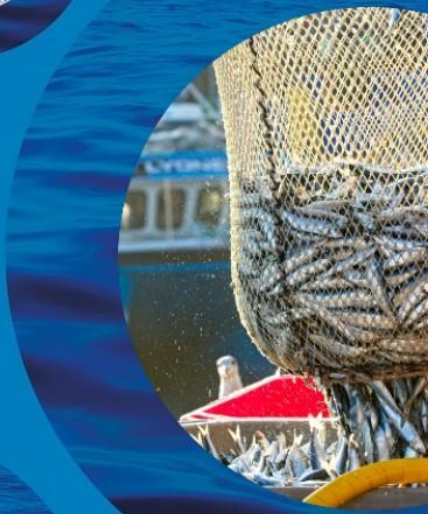
Marine Management Organisation

Crawfish (*Palinurus spp*) seasonal closure consultation 2025/2026



June 2025

...ambitious for our seas and coasts

Crawfish (*Palinurus spp*) seasonal closure consultation 2025/2026

Contents

1. Introduction

The aim of this consultation is to seek the views of stakeholders on a seasonal closure prohibiting the retaining and landing of crawfish (*Palinurus spp*) in the English waters of ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Seas) area 7 (Annex 3, figure 7) for all UK (United Kingdom) and EU (European Union) vessels with all gear types.

The purpose of the seasonal closure would be to:

- provide further protection and spawning potential by decreasing the number of removals and interactions with fishing activities.
- improve spawning potential by increasing the likelihood that crawfish can spawn and moult before interacting with fishing activity.
- improve the subsequent recruitment of juveniles into the fishery by protecting berried females for a specified period and allowing for settlement of juvenile stock.
- decrease the fishing activity and removals when fish are in a poor condition and more likely to suffer from high rates of mortality.
- reduce the risk of nets being left for long soak times or lost during the unpredictable winter weather.

There are 2 options being consulted on for the potential seasonal closure in 2025/2026. These options are:

- option 1: no closure.
- option 2: closure from 19 December 2025 to 31 May 2026 (inclusive).

The purpose of this consultation is to seek your feedback on whether a further seasonal closure is supported for the crawfish fishery, building on previous years' closures. Please see section 2 for the full list of consultation questions.

Option 1 provides an opportunity to select no closure for 2025/2026. The closure start date for option 2 has been selected following stakeholder feedback received during the 2024/2025 seasonal closure consultation, advising MMO that dates should not be simply administrative. Neap tides are the preferred fishing period for this fishery. 19 December allows access to the fishery during the last neap tide before Christmas. This option would provide industry with an opportunity to access the Christmas market (subject to weather conditions). The consultation also provides stakeholders an opportunity to suggest a different closure period, should neither of these presented options be preferred.

Decisions for this consultation and future years will be made using the best available evidence and feedback from a cross section of the stakeholders. Future effort management measures are not the subject of this consultation. We are monitoring the impacts of current management measures for the crawfish fishery and are in the process of developing crab and lobster management trials. Impacts on other species, including crawfish, will be monitored as part of these trials. The trials will gather evidence to inform the development of effective effort management measures for the future, beginning with crab and lobster as the priority species in the FMP.

Southwest octopus bloom

MMO is aware of an octopus bloom which is occurring in the southwest and the concerns raised by industry members regarding the impacts being observed in shellfish fisheries and effects on stocks in the surrounding areas.

MMO is closely monitoring the octopus bloom and has met with fisheries managers and scientists to assess the situation and impacts.

MMO remains committed to working collaboratively with stakeholders to understand the effects across fisheries and is meeting industry members to discuss concerns, share updates, and consider potential actions. MMO will update stakeholders with the outcomes of the discussions and is using the southwest regional fisheries group GOV.UK webpage to post updates.

1.1. Structure of this document

Section 2 sets out the consultation, outlining specific questions on the potential seasonal closure.

Section 3 contains information on how you can respond to the consultation and the information MMO would like you to include with your response.

Section 4 provides information on MMO's next steps after consultation.

Annex 1 provides a background to the fishery.

Annex 2 contains supporting information such as landings data, fishing fleet composition, principal gear types and value of the fishery. It also provides the rationale behind the potential seasonal closures, including environmental and economic considerations.

Annex 3 contains a diagram of ICES area 7.

2. Consultation

MMO would like to seek your views on a potential seasonal closure prohibiting the retaining and landing of crawfish from 19 December 2025 to 31 May 2026. Please note that any future management measures are not the subject of this consultation.

Please find the questions for the consultation in section 2.1 below. Supporting information such as the background and overview of the fishery can be found in Annexes 1 and 2.

2.1. Consultation questions

Potential seasonal closure

1. A potential seasonal closure for retaining and landing crawfish (*Palinurus spp*) in English waters of ICES area 7 for all UK and EU vessels using all gear types during the following:

   Please tell us which option and why.

   - **option 1:** no closure
   - **option 2:** closure from 19 December 2025 to 31 May 2026 (inclusive)

2. Do you consider there should be a different closure period which has not been included as an option? If so, please tell us what your proposed closure period is and provide or direct us to where supporting evidence is available.

3. Would you support a seasonal closure following the last neap tide before Christmas, remain in place for the future?

Other measures

MMO and Defra are in the process of developing crab and lobster management trials. The trials will gather evidence to inform the development of effective effort management measures for the future, beginning with crab and lobster as the priority species in the FMP.

4. Other than specific effort management are there any other technical measures that you would like to see introduced to the fishery?

About you and your business

5. How is the current closure (2024/2025) impacting you and your business?

6. How would the potential seasonal closure (2025/2026) impact you and your business?

7. Do you consider your business to rely on the crawfish fishery? What proportion of your fishing activity is related to crawfish? If this is a secondary fishing activity which other species and fisheries are you engaged in?

8. If you are a vessel owner/agent or skipper: in which length group is your vessel; 10 metre (m) and under, 10.01 m to 12 m, 12.01 m to 15 m or the over 15 m fleet, and which is your main port of landing?

3. How to respond

Please respond to the consultation by midnight on **20 July 2025.**

You can email your response to: FMP@marinemanagement.org.uk

or provide a written response to: Effort Management
MMO Lancaster House
Hampshire Court
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE4 7YH

In your response, please state whether you are replying as an individual or on behalf of an organisation and if you wish for your response to remain confidential.

If you are replying on behalf of an organisation or organisations, then please include the following in your response:

- which organisation(s)?
- what is your name and position?
- what is your email address?

We may need to contact you about your submission for further details. If you are happy for us to do this, please let us know in your submission, setting out the best method (for example, by email, telephone or post) and time to do this. We will not be able to contact you unless you provide permission.

4. Next Steps

MMO plan to meet stakeholders to further conversations regarding the crawfish consultation. Once the consultation has closed, MMO will publish a summary of the responses and a decision on any changes proposed related to the crawfish fishery in English waters. MMO will detail when, where and which vessels will be affected (if relevant). Any changes to the fishery will be enacted by a licence variation in the first instance.

Annex 1

Background to the fishery

The crawfish fishery is concentrated in the southwest of England, with most activity taking place in inshore waters (0-6 nautical miles ‘nm’), particularly within the districts of Cornwall Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (CIFCA) and Isles of Scilly Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IoSIFCA).

Crawfish was traditionally a summer fishery, with the fishing season usually starting around June and ending in September to October. Over the last decade the fishing season has lengthened, with increased landings. Fishers have accessed the fishery earlier in the year and adjusted to the closure scenario with continued fishing into December to access the Christmas market. December landings are subject to tide and weather conditions. The landings are summarised in Annex 2 below (please note that 2024 data is subject to change).

Over the last five years crawfish landings have increased annually. In 2024 117.1 tonnes (t) of crawfish were landed into the UK, compared with 98.6 t in 2023 (19% increase). The fishing season has extended with landings seen in the autumn of 2024 from most fleet sectors. The number of vessels engaged in the fishery increased to a maximum of 212 vessels in 2023 (this number was for all vessels/all gears landing crawfish in the UK). It was noted in 2024 the fleet size reduced to 160 vessels, with the most notable reduction in the under 10m fleet. Despite the reduced overall vessel numbers, it was noted that 23 new vessels entered the fishery in 2024 from the under 10m fleet sector. Most of the new entrant vessels worked in a mixed fishery and landed small quantities (under 10 kilograms ‘kg’) of crawfish.

Changes in the fishery, alongside its previous history of cycles of “boom and bust”, suggest that further intervention including a repeat to a seasonal closure is necessary to ensure that the fishery is sustainable. We are monitoring the impacts of current management measures for the crawfish and are in the process of developing crab and lobster management trials. Impacts on other species, including crawfish, will be monitored as part of these trials. The trials will gather evidence to inform the development of effective effort management measures for the future, beginning with crab and lobster as the priority species in the FMP.

MMO engagement and consultations

In 2023, MMO held stakeholder engagement events and a consultation regarding the management of the fishery. MMO administered the first seasonal crawfish closure in ICES area 7 from 5 February 2024 to 30 April 2024 inclusive. Further information on the consultation and decision outcome is available here.

Moving to 2024, MMO implemented a minimum conservation reference size (MCRS; also referred to as minimum landing size) increase from 95 millimetres (mm) to 110 mm, with this coming into force on 1 January 2024. This was enacted through a licence condition and has now been superseded by a Statutory Instrument ‘SI’ (SI 2024/1028) which came into force on 16 December 2024.

On 13 February 2024 MMO held a crawfish management workshop in Newlyn. The attendees included local fishers, fishing associations, charities, and representation

from local and national government. The aim of the meeting was to discuss current issues and propose further options for crawfish management including a seasonal closure for 2024 to 2025. In the workshop there was strong support for a further seasonal closure over a period that offers the most protection to the species. Further information on discussions and outcome of the workshop is available here.

In August 2024, MMO ran stakeholder engagement events alongside a consultation for the 2024/2025 seasonal closure. The second crawfish seasonal closure began on 16 December 2024 and will run until 31 May 2025, inclusive. Further information on the consultation and decision outcome is available here.

Annex 2

Supporting information

This Annex contains supporting information such as landings data, fishing fleet composition, principal gear types and value of the fishery. It also provides the rationale behind the potential seasonal closures, including environmental and economic considerations.

Please note that 2024 data used for this consultation is provisional. MMO monthly and annual statistics reports are available here. 2024 data will be verified and published in the annual MMO statistics report at the end of 2025.

Landings data

English crawfish landings have increased from 22.8 t in 2020 to 117.1 t in 2024. 2024 data is provisional and subject to change, for this report the 2024 data from the under 10 m fleet has been taken from sales notes. Figure 1 shows the monthly crawfish landings from 2020 to 2024 demonstrates the seasonality of the fishery, the recent extension of the fishery in spring and winter months, the opportunity to maximise the fishery according to weather opportunity and the potential impact of a closure. Analysis shows that there are very few landings of crawfish by EU vessels from UK waters during proposed closure period (50 kg in 2022 and in 340 kg 2023).

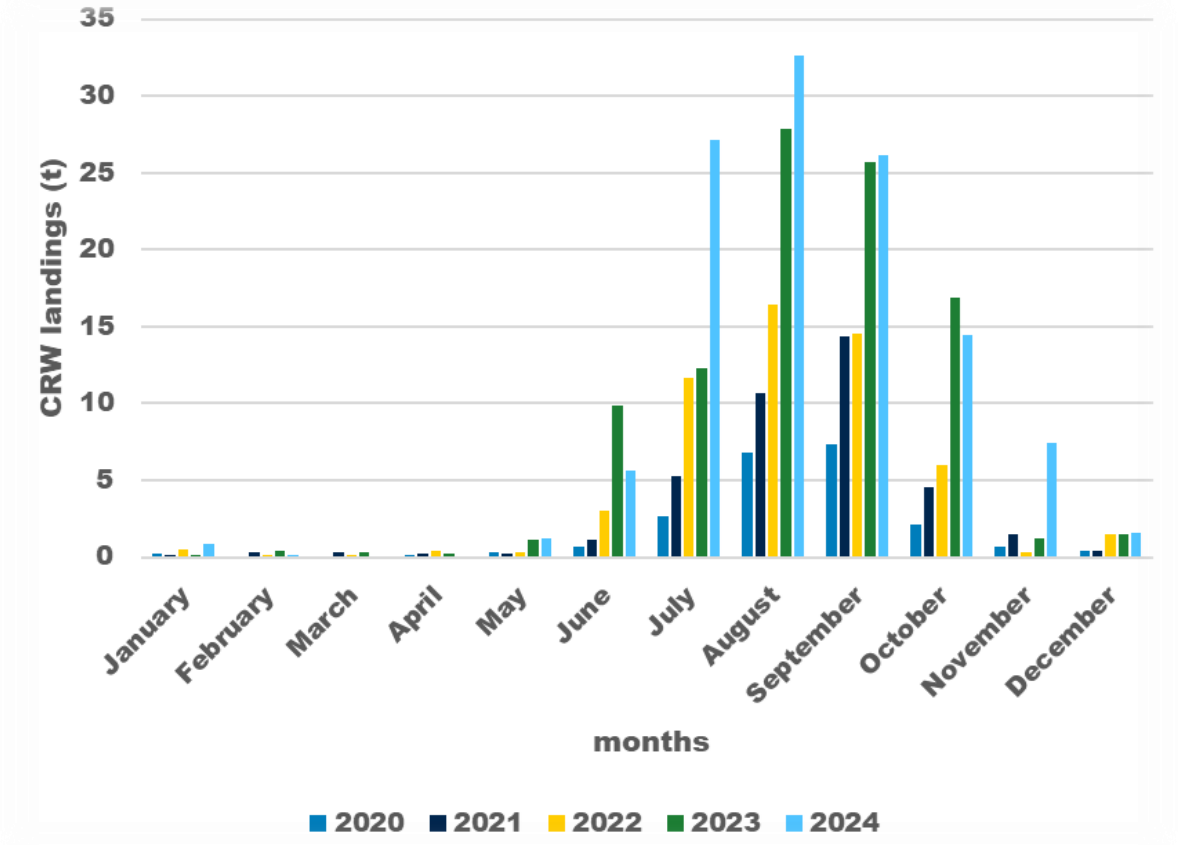


Figure 1. Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) monthly landings in tonnes (t), for all English waters and all gears, from 2020 to 2024 into English ports.

Despite the small percentage of landings during the winter months, fishers have expressed views about a potential increase in winter landings stating that small vessels (for example, under 10 m) cannot safely work the winter, so the fishery closes itself for the small vessels. However, more capable or larger vessels and may be able to work through the winter. The winter period is when most female crawfish are berried, the fish are in poor condition from recent moulting, and more likely to suffer higher rates of mortality during capture.

Figure 2 below represents 2023 landings data, apportioned by ICES area. ICES sub area 7e (western channel and south Cornwall coast) and 7f (north Cornwall coast and Bristol Channel) have historically dominated the crawfish landings. In 2023 these areas accounted for 93% of all UK landings. Full catch area data for 2024 is currently unavailable.

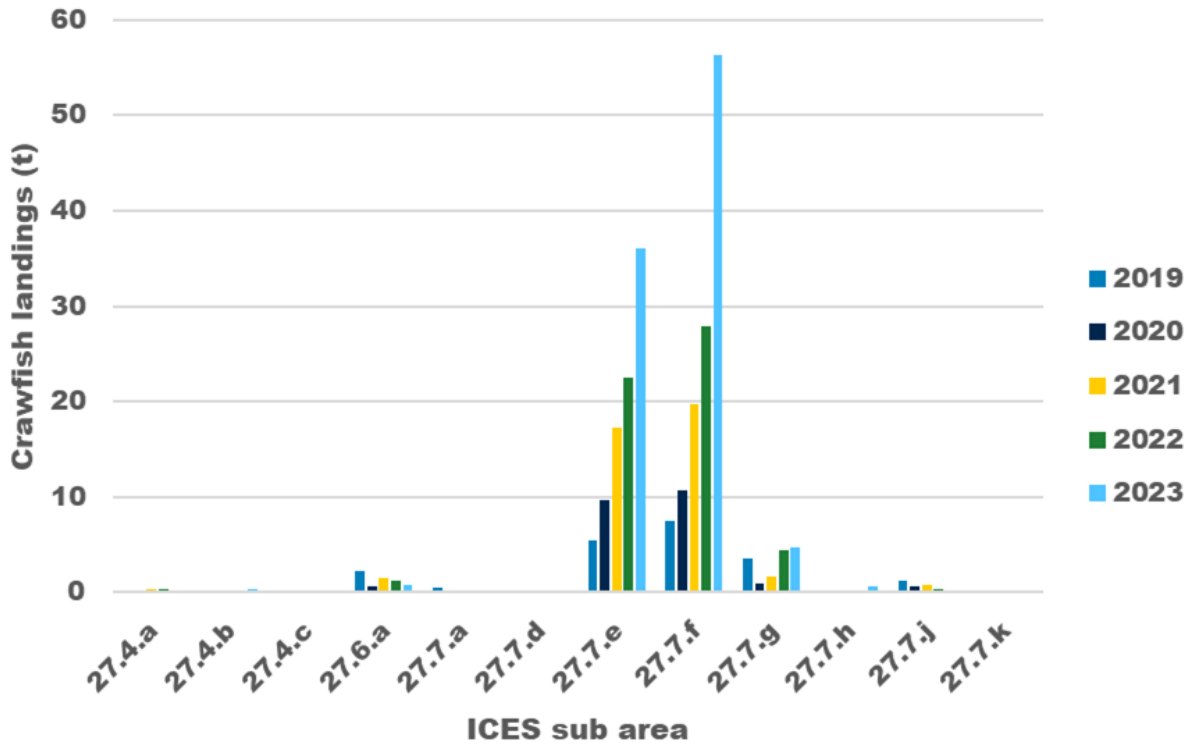


Figure 2. Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) landings (t) by ICES area 2019 to 2023, for all UK waters and all gears.

Fishing fleet composition

In the early 2000s there were 10 to 15 vessels accessing the fishery. From 2005 there has been considerable growth in the fleet size, with the largest growth in the under 10 m fleet. In the past 10 years the fleet size has nearly doubled from 97 vessels in 2013 rising to maximum of 212 vessels in 2023. However, in 2024 it appears that the overall vessel fleet size has reduced to 160 vessels, with the most notable reduction in fleet size in the under 10m fleet (from 157 vessels in 2023 to 115 vessels in 2024). There were 23 new vessels in the under 10 m fleet that landed

crawfish for the first time since 2019. Most of these new entrants landed small quantities, under 10 kg, as part of a mixed fishery throughout the year.

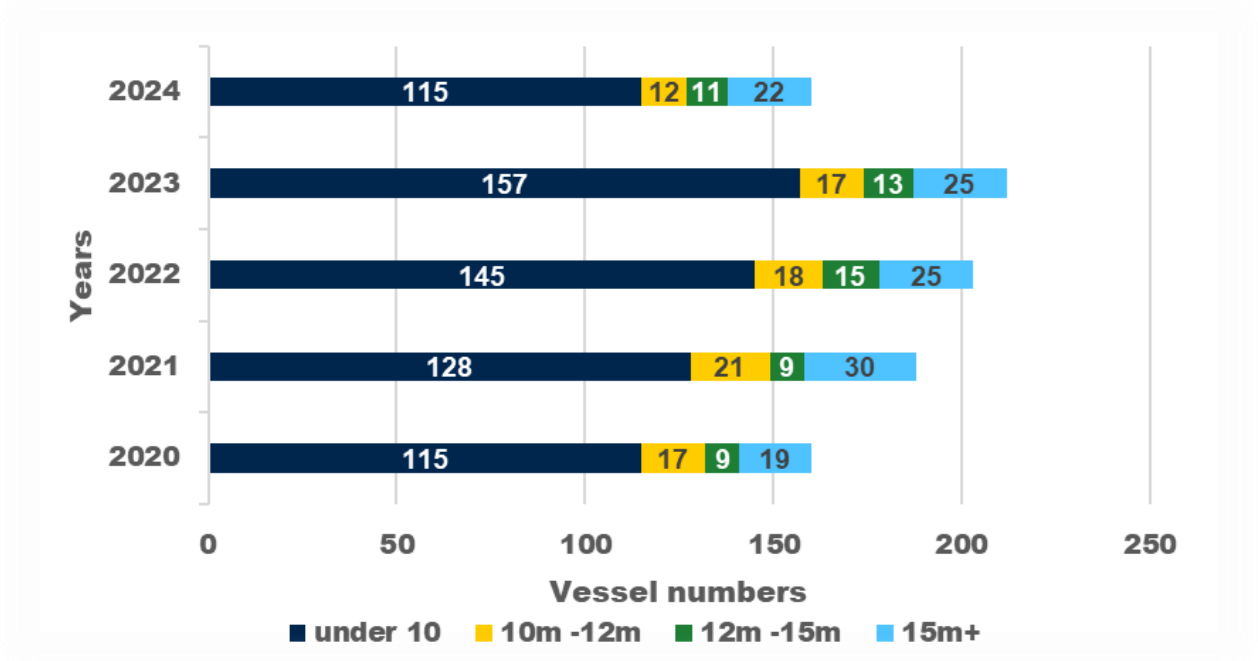


Figure 3. Number of vessels landing Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) from all UK waters, from 2020 to 2024 by vessel size.

The fishery fleet dynamic has become increasingly polarised with most landings coming from the under 10 m fleet and the over 15 m fleet.

Crawfish landings from 2020 to 2024 are summarised by fleet sector in figure 4. The graph shows that the landings were dominated by the under 10 m fleet, this would be expected when the number of vessels engaged in the fishery has been considered. Noted that despite the reduction in the number of vessels over 15 m the landings from this fleet sector have steadily increased.

In 2023, 1.3 t of crawfish were caught by EU vessels in UK waters. 0.58 t was caught in trawls and 0.7 t caught in gill nets, only 7kg was caught in pots. The French registered vessels accounted for 98% of all the EU removals in 2023.

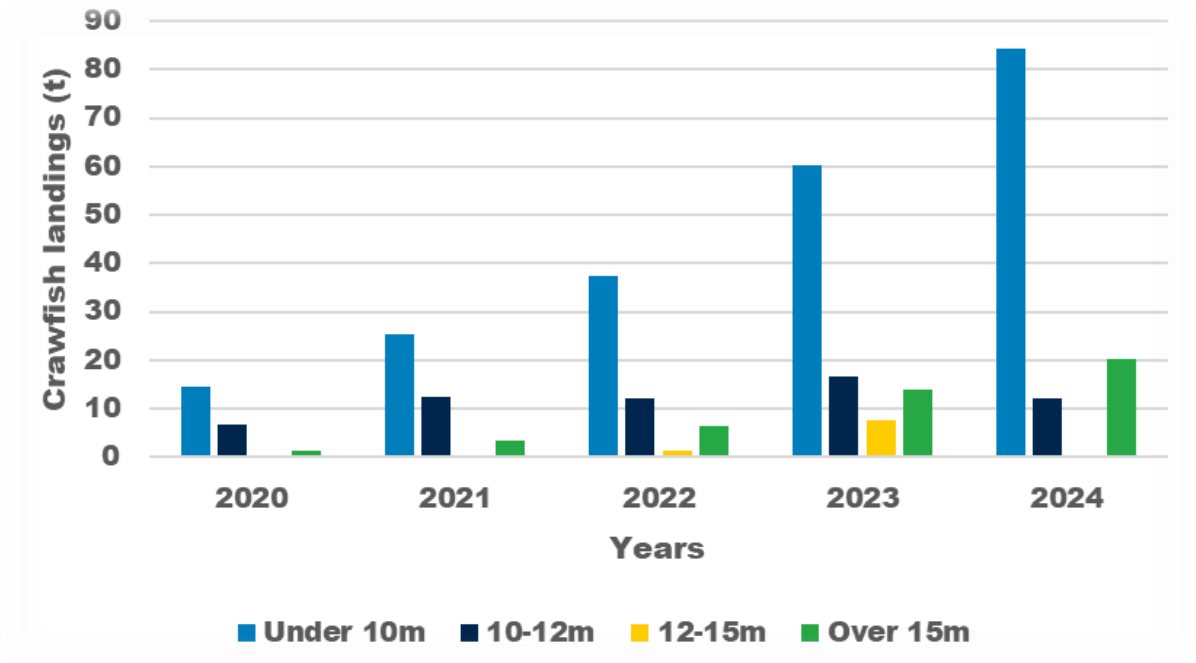


Figure 4. Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) landings in tonnes, from all English waters, from 2020 to 2024, by vessel size.

Principle gear types

2024 data for gear type within the fishery is not currently available. Previous information taken from MMO landing data records show that gear used to catch crawfish has changed. During 2012 to 2015, most crawfish landings were caught using pots and traps, with use of pots increasing from 2018 to 2021. Since 2022 gill nets have dominated the landings, for example in 2023 over 84% of all landings across all fleet sectors came from nets. Figure 5 indicates the landings by gear type from 2019 to 2023, taken from MMO landings data.

The change in gear type over the years may be an indication of the new entrants into the fishery. Potting is perceived as less efficient and a fishery that requires more knowledge and time to yield financial rewards.

Currently, there is not a defined net specification for crawfish and netting has proved an efficient method of capture. Tier length (total length of nets tied together) can range from 300 m to 500 m, and number of tiers can range from 3 to 10 deployed at one time depending on boat size and capability); this also varies over the season. For example, 2023 MMO CatchApp records show that the maximum overall length of nets deployed in one trip was 72,000 m. MMO CatchApp records support that the total length of net deployed changes throughout the season, reducing in the winter and that the average net length declared over one trip in 2023 was 3,340 m.

Soak times (the amount of time the net stays in the water) is usually 48 to 72 hours depending on weather and tide.

Nets typically catch more crawfish than pots for a variety of reasons, including for example, different scales of effort by the two gear types and different retention rates.

Crawfish catches in nets will also depend on soak time, with individuals attracted to organisms already captured.

There is a view that the net fishery will lead to higher mortality of juvenile crawfish. This is likely to occur through two mechanisms.

- nets anecdotally retain more juvenile animals.
- those retained animals suffering much higher rate of post-release mortality through damage than that seen in the pot fishery.

Crawfish are also particularly sensitive to excessive and/or rough handling, therefore vulnerable to damage as nets are processed and therefore consequences for survivability. Despite some studies on discard survivability in Mediterranean crawfish (*P. elephas)* trammel net fisheries, this remains a key evidence gap for UK crawfish fisheries.

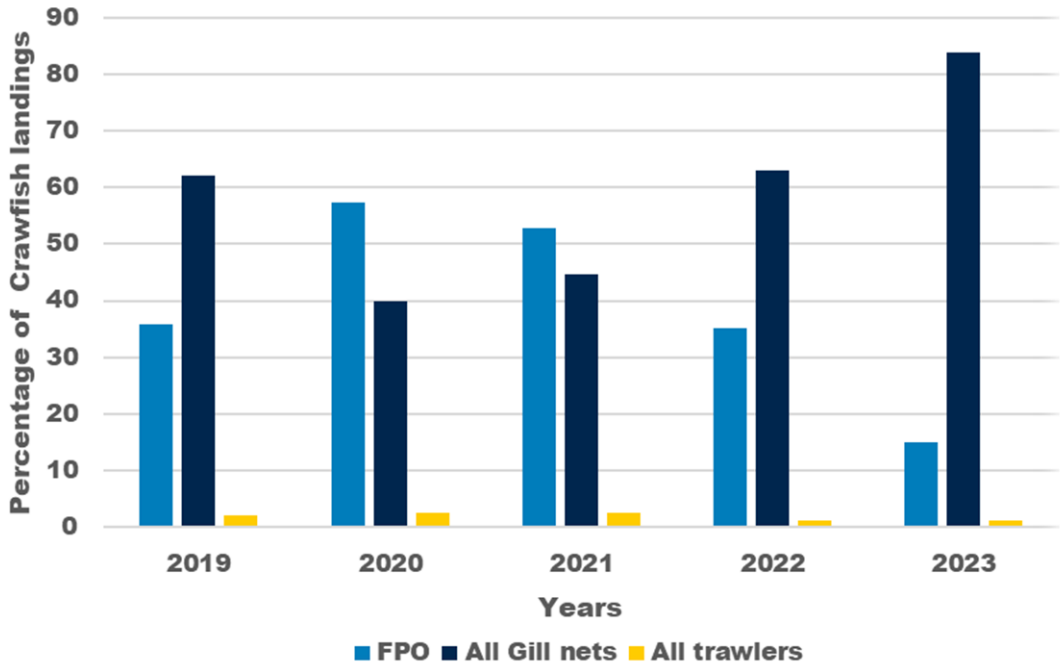


Figure 5. Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) landings in tonnes from all English waters, from 2019 to 2023 by gear type.

The value of the crawfish fishery

In 2020, £0.6 million of crawfish was landed, which increased to £2.5 million in 2024. Figure 6 shows the value of the fishery by fleet sector from 2020 to 2024.

In previous years the average price per kilogram (/kg) remained relatively static. In 2012, the average price/kg was £23/kg rising slightly to £24/kg in 2022. In 2024 the average price/kg fell in the summer months from £24/kg to £18/kg. The average price for the whole year was £21/kg. Feedback from stakeholders was that the market was saturated with large landings from UK, France and Ireland and that supply had overtaken demand.

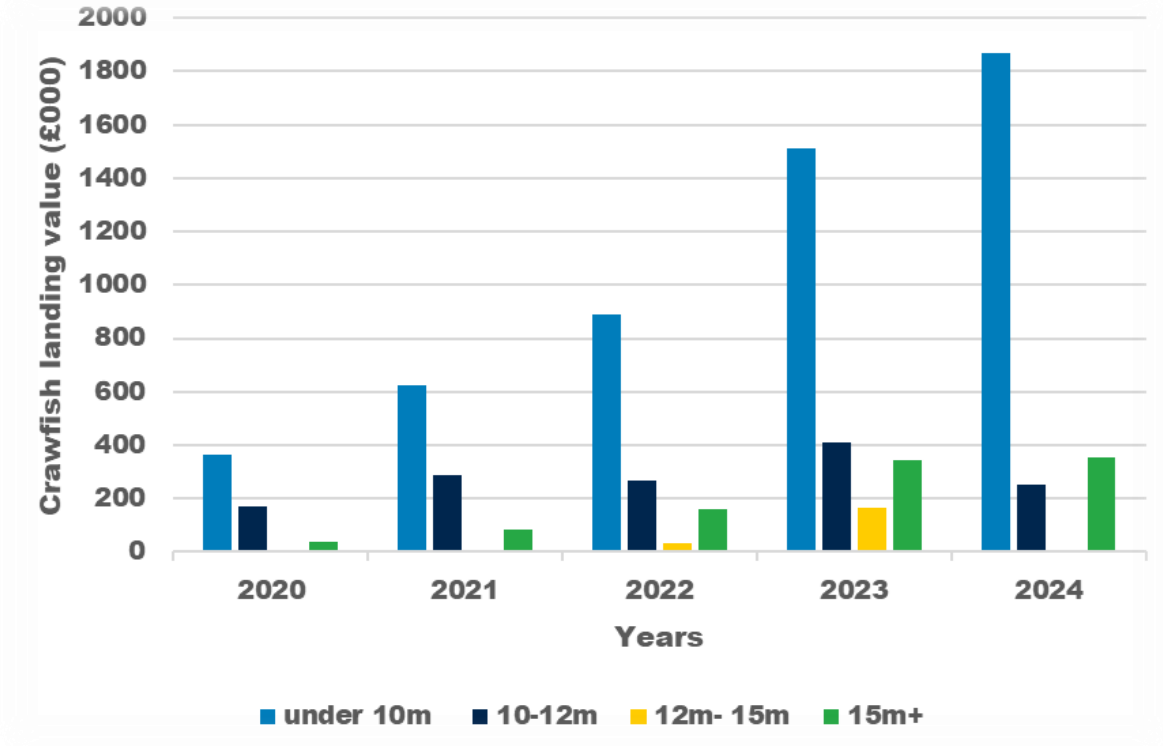


Figure 6. Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) landing value in £000s from all English waters by year, from 2020 to 2024.

Rationale behind a potential seasonal closure

Environmental considerations

The large landings in the summer months and the lengthened fishing season underpins both the fleet composition and the biological behaviours of the species. The 10 m and under fleet contribute the most landings and are more productive in the summer months when crawfish are known to be most active.

Vessels currently working in the fishery are subject to limited management measures:

- a shellfish entitlement on the licence allows vessels to land more than 5 lobster/crawfish and 25 crabs a day.
- the Lobster and Crawfish (prohibition of fishing and landing) (amendment) (England) order, 2017.prohibits all vessels from retaining and landing of V-notched, mutilated, and berried lobsters and crawfish.
- In 2024, MCRS increased from 95mm to 110mm in all English waters.
- 2024/2025 Seasonal Crawfish Closure from 16 December 2024 to 31 May 2025 (inclusive) in English waters of ICES sub area 7.

High levels of fishing pressure can deplete the spawning stock and impair recruitment, leading to reduced fishery productivity and resilience. There are no

current measures in place, nationally or locally, to limit fishing effort on English crawfish stocks. Therefore, if recruitment drops below threshold levels, the risk of a stock collapse increases. Current increases in fishing effort need to be monitored given the absence of a valid stock assessment, which creates uncertainties around stock status and how much fishing pressure crawfish stocks can sustain. This creates challenges for long term sustainable management, particularly in the context of a historically 'boom and bust' and data-limited fishery. The potential seasonal closure will directly address this risk.

Crawfish are also a species of conservation importance in marine conservation zones (MCZs) and there is a risk that a decline in crawfish populations in the southwest region (caused by increased fishing pressure) may impact populations within MCZs, preventing MCZ conservation objectives from being met.

As this species is relatively mobile, recruitment into populations within MCZs is likely linked to the wider population.

The purpose of the potential seasonal closure is to:

- provide additional protection and spawning potential by decreasing the number of removals and interactions with fishing activities.
- improve spawning potential by increasing the likelihood that crawfish can spawn and moult before interacting with fishing activity.
- improve the subsequent recruitment of juveniles into the fishery by protecting berried females for a specified period and allowing for settlement of juvenile stock.
- decrease the fishing activity and removals when fish are in a poor condition and more likely to suffer from high rates of mortality.
- reduce the risk of nets being left for long soak times or lost during the unpredictable winter weather.
- the potential seasonal closure offers protection and opportunity for further recruitment.

Moulting typically takes place at depth between June and October, with mating typically occurring two weeks after the females moult, and egg laying two weeks after mating. This means that Atlantic females are typically berried from mid-autumn to late spring. After around nine months of egg bearing, eggs hatch between March and June.

Therefore, a closure could provide protection during a large proportion of the time when females are berried, with the closure duration providing the best protection. This could increase the likelihood that crawfish can spawn and moult before interacting with fishing activity. If there is a reduction in fishing activity during the closure this could also lead to improved settlement of juvenile stock if it does not interact with fishing gear.

In addition to a reduction in removals of crawfish during the potential closure there may be additional benefits to the stock. This assumes that there will be a reduction in targeted fishing activity during the closure, although some fishing activity may still take place. In previous consultations a seasonal closure has been widely supported.

The potential impacts of any closures are uncertain. A closure would be expected to materialise as an increase in the average level of future recruitments. However, it

would be to separate management benefits from natural variability for a single event. The additional benefits of a longer closure compared with a shorter closure is also unknown.

Economic considerations

In 2020, £0.6 million of crawfish were landed, the annual increased value of the fishery was aligned to the increased landings to £2.5 million in 2024. The average price per kilo has remained relatively consistent between 2020 to 2023 averaging £24/kg. However, in 2024 this fell to an average of £21/kg.

During the winter period and particularly during the weeks before Christmas, the price for crawfish has increased. The extent to which the winter market is realised is unknown and likely to vary annually. During December 2023 and 2024, crawfish landings from the entire fleet were low in the lead up to the festive period due to poor weather restricting fishing activity. In 2024 the closure started on 16 December and curtailed any further fishing activity later in the month.

The 2024 closure has provided fishers access to the last neap tide before Christmas market. This closure scenario was supported by all sectors of the fishery during the consultation and the stakeholder engagement sessions.

There is a potential risk that fishers could increase fishing effort during the open season (for example, increased net and pot numbers) to compensate from loss of income from no longer being able to land crawfish during the closed season. The economic impact to industry of a crawfish fishery closure may be increased due to the influence of other fishery restrictions reducing the availability of fishing opportunities and diversification. During stakeholder engagement in 2024, concerns were raised that displacement into different fisheries for the inshore fleet could lead to further fishing pressure on other stocks, and that a longer closure would further exacerbate that.

In addition to stock benefits a closure may be considered beneficial in terms of product marketing, a seasonal closure creates demand and keeps the price stable at a higher level when the fishery is open. This could deliver benefits in terms of maintaining the value and profitability of the crawfish fishery, although it could increase costs for businesses further along the supply chain.

Annex 3

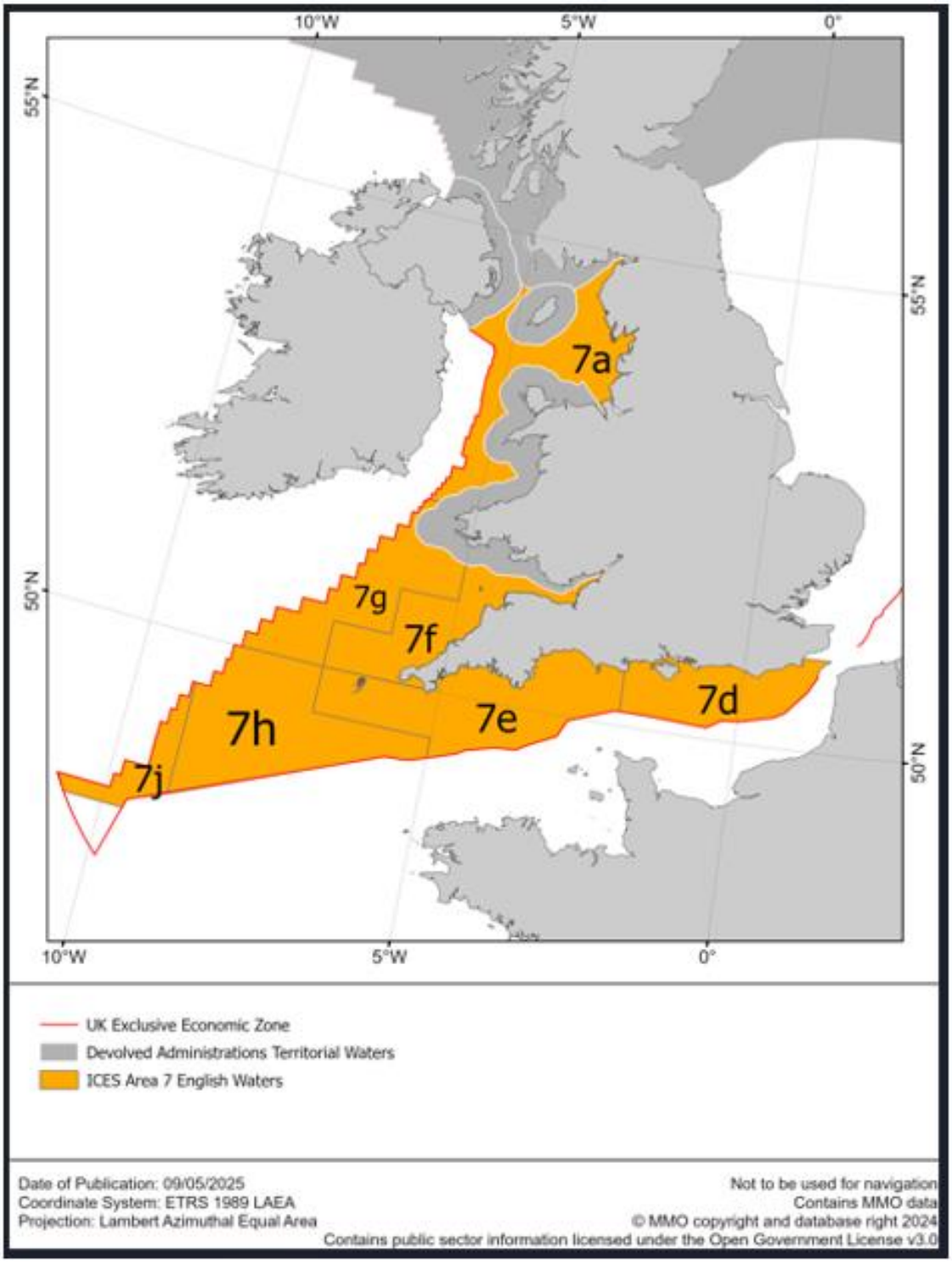


Figure 7. ICES sub area 7 showing the extent of the closure area in English waters.