



Marine
Management
Organisation

South West brown crab: online survey

July 2025



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1. Overview

Marine Management Organisation (MMO) was commissioned by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to deliver Proposal 3 of the [crab and lobster fisheries management plan \(FMP\)](#) to ‘*pilot [trial] finer scale management for brown crab and lobster in selected fishery units*’.

As part of this work completed by MMO for proposal, there was unanimous support from the South West Crab Trial Group for harmonising the **Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS)**, also referred to as the minimum landing size, for brown crab in South West English waters.

Given the significant stakeholder support and anticipated long-term benefits to crab stocks in the South West, the government, subject to further stakeholder input, intends to implement the proposed MCRS increase as a permanent measure, rather than a trial.

The purpose of this document is to provide you with background information on how the proposed measure was reached and how you can share your views.

2. Background

To support the delivery of Proposal 3, the South West Crab Trial Group was established in autumn 2024. The group, facilitated by Seafish, brought together representatives from the fishing industry, MMO, Defra, and Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) to collaboratively explore potential management options for the South West brown crab fishery.

MMO and Defra reviewed a range of management options, including those outlined in the FMP—such as pot limits, days-at-sea limits, catch limits, and the ‘3-S’ approach (limiting catch by size, sex, and season). Additional options were identified through analysis of fisheries data and discussions with the devolved governments.

Following engagement with regional IFCAs, four management options (outlined in figure 1) were shortlisted for inclusion in an options paper presented to the South West Crab Trial Group.



Figure 1. The four proposed management options; harmonisation of brown crab MCRS, also referred to as minimum landing size; a pot counting programme; over 12 metre (m) vessels to fish outside of 6 nautical miles ‘nm’ if landings had exceeded 200 tonnes (t) in any 12-month period; and gear specific area(s).

The options paper, shared with the South West Crab Trial Group on 15 May 2025, outlined these four proposals as viable for progression, along with a rationale for excluding other options at this stage. The paper was discussed in two online meetings held on 3 and 5 June 2025.

The group unanimously supported the harmonisation of the MCRS. No alternative proposals were put forward during the meetings. While there was recognition of the potential value of other measures, particularly those related to effort management, the group agreed that these should not be progressed this summer due to current challenges in the South West relating to the octopus bloom.

MMO and Defra understand the importance of managing the crab stocks sustainably and will continue to work with industry through the implementation groups to progress effort management approaches as a priority. We are improving our data and understanding of the impacts of the octopus bloom on the fishery to inform the development of management proposals.

The group also recommended adapting the wider stakeholder engagement approach. Instead of formal in-person sessions, they suggested a short online survey, optimised for mobile use, to increase accessibility and response rates compared to traditional email-based consultations.

Please find the draft options paper and meeting summary notes on the [South West Regional Fisheries Group GOV.UK webpage](#).

3. What is the proposed option?

The government is proposing the permanent harmonisation of the MCRS for brown crab in the South West brown crab area (see Annex 1). This would establish:

- An MCRS of 160 millimetres (mm) for male brown crab
- An MCRS of 150 mm for female brown crab

This measure would apply to all United Kingdom (UK) and European Union (EU) commercial fishing vessels.

The implementation timeline will be informed by stakeholder feedback gathered through the online survey, particularly regarding the time industry may need to adapt to the increased MCRS.

Opportunities and benefits of this option:

- **Enhanced stock sustainability:** Increased opportunity for female brown crab to spawn, supporting long-term growth in stock biomass.
- **Simplified and consistent regulation:** A single, harmonised MCRS provides clarity and assurance for fishers, regulators, and supply chains.
- **Regionally focused management:** Supports evidence gathering on regional approach, helping to inform any future management approaches.

4. Your views



We would like to hear your views on the harmonisation of brown crab MCRS for the South West brown crab area.

We would also like to know if you prefer this style of consultation.

Please [follow this link](#) or scan the QR code to complete a short online survey.

The survey closes **at 23:59 on 17 August 2025**.

There are 13 questions which should take no more than five minutes to complete.

5. Next steps

Once the survey has closed, MMO will publish a summary of the responses and a decision. If the decision is taken to proceed then the decision publication will include how long industry will have to adapt to the change and the implementation method.

Although stakeholders have indicated that now is not the right time to explore alternative crab trial options, MMO will improve our data and understanding of the fishery to inform effective management in the region. We aim to continue developing effort management proposals with national and regional groups, and resume discussions with the wider industry.

6. Contact us



MMO FMP team: FMP@marinemanagement.org.uk

Defra Shellfish team: shellfish@defra.gov.uk

Regional Fisheries Group (RFG):

The South West RFG [page on GOV.UK](#) contains useful information on south-west fisheries. MMO will be publishing updates here.

General FMP updates:

The FMP blog can be found [here](#). The blog provides transparency to the programme of work and make it more open and inclusive to all stakeholders.

Annex 1: South West brown crab area

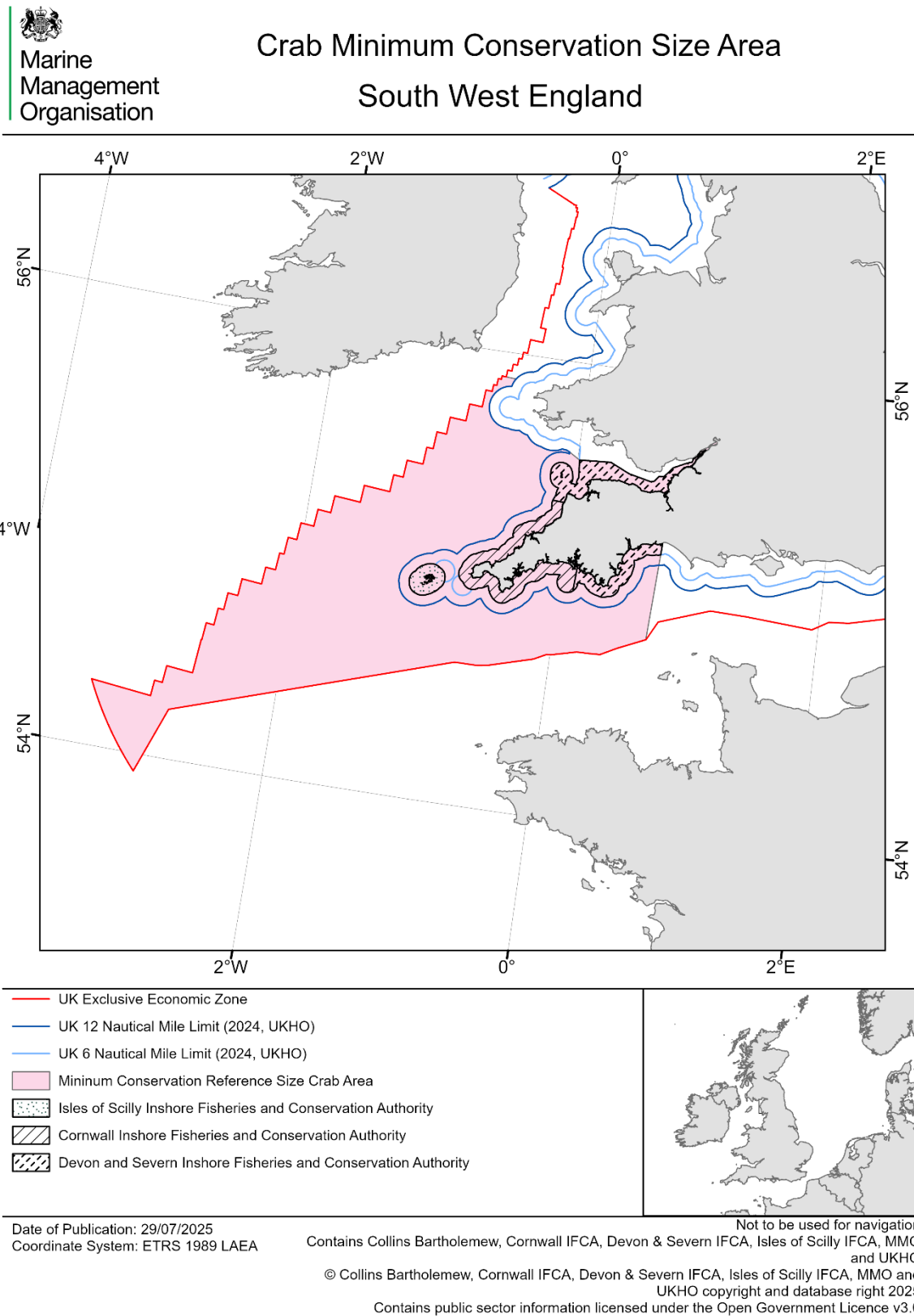


Figure 2. South West brown crab area. It would cover all English waters west of 2.946333 degrees west longitude and south of 52.000 degrees north latitude