

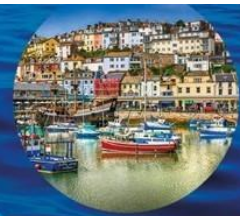


Marine
Management
Organisation

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

September 2025

...ambitious for our seas and coasts



Crawfish (*Palinurus spp*) 2025-2026 seasonal closure – response to consultation

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Executive Summary

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) consulted on a potential crawfish fishery closure in English waters of International Council for the Exploration of the sea (ICES) area 7 (Figure 1; Annex 1). This consultation ran from 5 June to 20 July 2025. The purpose of the closure is to provide protection to spawning potential; allow settlement of juvenile stock; and reduce risk of gear being lost or left for long soak times during unpredictable winter weather.

Questions were asked in the consultation about a closure period, with options for: no closure or a closure length of 19 December 2025 to 31 May 2026. The consultation also asked if a different closure period should be considered and if there were other technical measures that could be introduced to the fishery. The consultation also asked about the perceived impact of the previous and proposed closure options.

34 consultation responses were submitted. In response to the closure length **30** respondents expressed wanting a closure (with only 4 respondents either choosing option one (no closure), not selecting an option or not suggesting an alternative closure date). **13** respondents wanted a closure length from 19 December to 31 May. **18** respondents wanted a longer closure, and suggested alternative options for closure dates, with a mixture of those wanting to close the fishery earlier, open later or both.

Based on consultation responses, MMO's decision is to prohibit fishing for; retaining on board; storing; or landing crawfish caught in English waters of ICES subarea 7 between **00:01 hours on 17 November 2025 to 23:59 hours on 31 May 2026**. The closure will apply to all UK and EU vessels and will be enacted through a fishing vessel licence condition.

In making the decision MMO also considered environmental, social and economic factors along with legislative and policy considerations such as the fisheries objectives outlined in the Fisheries Act 2020, and Joint Fisheries Statement.

1. Introduction

MMO implemented a minimum conservation reference size 'MCRS' (also referred to as minimum landing size) increase from 95 millimetres (mm) to 110 mm for all English waters via a licence condition on 1 January 2024. This was then superseded by [The Sea Fisheries \(Amendment\) \(No. 2\) Regulations 2024](#) which came into force on 16 December 2024.

There have been two seasonal closures for crawfish administered by MMO. The first closure ran from 5 February 2024 to 30 April 2024 and the second from 16 December 2024 to 31 May 2025. Both closures applied in the English waters of ICES area 7, to all United Kingdom (UK) and European Union (EU) vessels using all

fishing gear types. These closures were administered through a vessel license variation.

This document provides the outcome of the consultation on a third seasonal closure (2025/2026). The purpose of the seasonal closure is to provide protection and spawning potential; allow settlement of juvenile stock; reduce risk of gear being lost or left for long soak times during unpredictable winter weather.

1.1 Structure of this document

Section 2 – provides information on the consultation, with more detail regarding the responses received and the consultation outcome.

Section 3 – sets out the consultation rationale; with an overview of the fishery background, the scientific, social and economic, and legislative and regulatory considerations that underpins the decision provides information on the consultation, with more detail regarding the responses received and the consultation outcome.

Section 4 – outlines MMO's conclusions and next steps, including how the closure will be administered.

Section 5 – provides contact details for MMO should you wish to contact us with regards to this consultation.

Annexes – provide supplementary information which may be useful to refer to (for example a chart of ICES area 7, quality assurance process and landings information).

2. Consultation

2.1 Overview

On 5 June 2025, MMO launched a consultation on possible options for a seasonal closure to the crawfish fishery in English waters of ICES area 7. The consultation ran until midnight on 20 July 2025. MMO would like to thank everyone who responded to the consultation. During the consultation we received **34 responses**. Your responses have allowed us to make the most informed management decision.

MMO have grouped the responses received by each question asked in the consultation. To provide transparency MMO has included the number of respondents who chose a specific option. However, it should be noted that decisions are made with consideration to many factors (such as environmental, economic, social and legislative) and not simply by the number of received responses. The consultation responses and MMO's response to these are outlined in section 3.2 below.

2.2 Summary of responses

This section provides the questions and responses grouped by the consultation section (potential seasonal closure; other measures and about you and your business). Please note that the number of answers for multiple choice questions will exceed the total number of received responses.

2.2.1 Potential seasonal closure

In this section of the consultation, we asked three questions asking respondents to select a closure option, provide an alternative suggestion and if there was support for the last neap tide before Christmas to be continued for future years.

Question 1. Option 1 or option 2?

We asked:

*'A prohibition of 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'*

You said:

Closure options	Responses
Option 1: no closure	2
Option 2: closure from 19 December 2025 to 31 May 2026	22
Neither option 1 or 2 selected	10
Total number of responses	34

The table above gives a summary of the options chosen by respondents to question one. It is important to note that some respondents selected an option and suggested an alternative date in response to question two or later questions.

22 responses selected option two (19 December to 31 May) but **nine** of these respondents went on to suggested alternative dates when reviewing their whole response. Similarly, **10** did not choose option one or option two but **eight** of these respondents suggesting alternative options when reviewing their whole response.

Question 2. Alternative options for consideration?

We asked:

'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'

You said:

Proposal of an alternative closure period	Responses
Yes – longer closure	18
No	6
Other	1

No response	9
Total number of responses	34

18 respondents suggested an alternative closure period. There were various suggestions for alternative dates. These included but were not limited to the following:

- Later opening of the fishery (for example, mid-July or mid- June). Some respondents suggested this due to the concern of soft-shelled crawfish being landed/caught.
- Earlier start of the closure (for example, 30 October; 31 October; 15 November) to 31 May 2026. Reasons for this suggestion included but were not limited to the following - berried hens can be caught at this time; it would further reduce the chance of winter gear loss/ghost fishing; it aligns more with traditional fishing patterns.
- Earlier start and later opening of the fishery (for example, 1 November to 1 July; mid-July to mid-November; 15 October to 15 June or nearest neap tide).

Question 3. Seasonal closure in the future?

We asked:

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

You said:

Repeating the seasonal closure	Responses
No response	23
Supporting a repeat of the closure based on the last neap tide before Christmas	6
Not supporting	6

There were a range of responses to this question. The crawfish seasonal closures remain a relatively new management measure we recognise that the closure is still finding the right balance and stakeholders may want changes for future closures.

MMO response to questions 1 to 3

MMO welcomes the support for continuing the seasonal closure for crawfish. We have considered the consultation responses, social and economic, scientific and environmental factors alongside the objectives of the Joint Fisheries Statement and the Fisheries Management Plan when deciding the outcome of this consultation.

MMO have decided a closure from **17 November 2025 to 31 May 2026** (inclusive)

for 2025/2026. We acknowledge that this was not one of the options that was consulted on. However, in coming to this decision MMO has considered the consultation responses and socioeconomics (outlined in section 2.3 and Annex 3).

The longer closure for 2025/2026 will provide increased stock protection and allow MMO to monitor socio-economic impacts of a longer closure to help inform future management options.

This year there was a stronger overall call from the consultation responses for a longer closure period. For example, responses received suggested that the socio-economic impact of the previous crawfish closure was manageable. The previous closure (the last neap tide before Christmas) allowed access to the market; given the limited opportunities available in the South West. As noted in section 2.3 above access to the Christmas markets in 2023 and 2024 does not appear to have been significantly utilised (and particularly not by smaller vessels; weather conditions may be a contributing factor).

We acknowledge feedback received for the end of the closure period being extended (for example, to mid-June or mid-July; due to soft shelled crawfish still being landed). MMO remain open to considering this for future closures but would like further discussions with industry.

MMO recognise the additional disruption the octopus bloom is causing to shellfish fisheries in the region. This was not raised by respondents during this consultation, but we are conscious of the socio-economic impact this is having for some in the region.

2.2.2 Other measures

Question 4. Technical measures

We asked

‘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.

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

You said

Respondents provided multiple suggestions for this question so the total number of responses is larger than the total number of respondents. The question asked for suggestions other than effort management, but it is clear from the responses received that effort remains a strong priority.

Other suggestions included:

- vessel size restrictions
- permits

- catch limits
- gear restrictions (such as gear type, mesh sizes, net length)
- Prohibition of landing female crawfish/maximum landing size for females
- increase in minimum conservation reference size (MCRS)
- bycatch during closed season (for example, 3-5 crawfish, 20-50kilograms)
- softer opening of closure period
- improvement in scientific evidence

MMO response:

We recognise the need for effort management is strongly being feedback. Defra and MMO have been considering effort management as part of the work to deliver objectives for the crab and lobster Fisheries Management Plan (FMP).

Regarding technical measures, MMO will consider your suggestions against relevant legislation and policies with Defra. This will help inform if they can be implemented as future management.

2.2.3 About you and your business

Question 5. Impacts of 2024/2025 closure

We asked

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

You said

The impact of the 2024/2025 seasonal closure	Responses
No response	28
Significant impact	4
Insignificant/little impact	2

Most respondents did not provide a response to this question. Those that did respond to the question had mixed views. Some noted that the current closure (2024/2025) had zero/no negative impact on their business. Conversely, some respondents noted that the current closure had a financial impact on their business. Despite this, some respondents stated they were willing to have this impact to protect the fishery. Another respondent stated that there has been a relatively small financial impact from the current closure as the weather during this time of the year can often be too poor to be at sea; meaning the closed season only really impacts larger vessels.

Question 6. Impacts of potential 2025/2026 closure

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

You said:

The impact of the potential 2025/2026 seasonal closure	Responses
No response	26
Significant impact	5
Insignificant impact	3

As with question 5, most respondents did not provide a response to this question. Of those that did there was a consensus was that a further seasonal closure would be beneficial and although there would likely be financial impacts respondents were willing to have these in order to protect the fishery for future years. Some thought that that they could adapt and work around the closure utilising access to other opportunistic fisheries.

Question 7. Reliance on the crawfish fishery

'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?'

You said

Repeating the seasonal closure	Responses
No response	24
Reliant on crawfish fishery	8
Less reliant on the crawfish fishery	2

There were mixed responses to this question. For some, crawfish contributed significantly to their income, with businesses would not surviving without crawfish. Reliance ranged from 20 to 90% depending on the fisher. Responses noted that crawfish takes pressure off other species and are critical for areas like the Isles of Scilly where alternative species are limited and weather impacts fishing. The pollack fishery moving to a zero TAC fishery had increased reliance on crawfish for some having to invest to adapt to the different fishery. Other species including crab, lobster, bass and mackerel were also targeted but crawfish was a core source of income.

Question 8. Vessel type and port location

We asked:

'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?'

You said:

Vessel Group	Responses
Under 10m	13
10.01 m – 12 m	3
12.01 m – 15 m	1
Over 15m	1
No response	19

Many respondents did not provide an answer to this question. Some responses referred to multiple categories of vessel size type as they were responding on behalf of an organisation. This means that there are more responses than respondents to the survey. Where multiple answers were provided a response has been added to each category. This may not reflect the number of vessels. The majority of those that did respond represented the 10 m and under size category. Many respondents did not provide a port location, however those that did showed a geographical spread including the mainland and Isles of Scilly.

MMO response to questions 5 to 8

MMO recognises the economic impact that any closure will have on the fishing industry.

The 2024/2025 crawfish closure ran from 19 December 2024 to 31 May 2025. This was to allow access to the last neap tide before Christmas to maximise fishing opportunities, particularly for areas that had limited alternatives to support their income. However, when reviewing the landings data (section 2.3 and Annex 3) access to the Christmas markets in 2023 and 2024 do not appear to have been significantly utilised. Landings in December 2024 accounted for less than 1.5 % (1.49 t) of the annual total taken from ICES area 7 and there were only 17 UK vessels of which 4 vessels landed more than 50 kg each in the month.

Unlike the previous seasonal closure responses there was a stronger overall call for a longer closure period, and although crawfish made up a significant contribution to incomes of some fishers, there appears an acceptable to a relatively short-term economic impact for the longer-term benefit for the stock through a longer closure period. The earlier closure will allow MMO to monitor potential socio-economic impacts which can then help to inform any future management decisions.

2.3 Consultation outcome

MMO will implement a closure of the crawfish fishery from **17 November 2025 to 31 May 2026** (inclusive) in all English waters. The closure will apply to all vessels (UK and EU) and will be implemented via a fishing vessel licence condition variation. The licence condition will prevent the fishing, retaining on board, storing or landing of crawfish.

In making this decision MMO has considered relevant policy/legislation (for example, marine plans and the Joint Fisheries Statement) to ensure the social and economic risks have been considered alongside the long-term health of the marine environment. We hope that this decision provides more resilience to coastal communities whilst also protecting crawfish for the future.

This is a longer closure (approximately 15%) to previous years and will provide increased stock protection. MMO will monitor socio-economic impacts of the longer closure (in combination with the impacts caused by the octopus bloom) to help inform future management options.

We really value the suggestions made for technical measures that could be considered for future management of the fishery. In order to give those involved in the fishery certainty for business planning and allow required notification processes we have decided to announce the seasonal closure now without any technical measures.

This decision does not set a precedent for any potential future management proposals. Future decisions and restrictions will be made using the best available scientific evidence and with input from a cross section of the crawfish industry and other stakeholders, alongside the implementation of the crab and lobster Fisheries Management Plan.

3. Rationale

The rationale behind the closure consultation has been summarised into 3 aspects: scientific and environmental; social and economic; and legislative. These aspects have underpinned the decision-making process and are outlined in the following sub sections.

3.1 Overview of the fishery

The crawfish fishery is concentrated in the South West with the main activity taking place in inshore waters (0-6 nautical miles 'nm'), within the districts of Cornwall Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (CIFCA) and Isles of Scilly Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IoSIFCA).

Crawfish is typically a summer fishery, with the fishing season usually starting around June and ending in September or October. Over the last decade the crawfish fishing season has expanded. Fishers have started to access the fishery earlier in the year and continued later into the year (October or November), some also fish into December to access the Christmas market.

Landings for crawfish have increased from 19 tonnes (t) in 2012 to 117 t in 2024. In the past 10 years there has been a near doubling in the number of UK vessels accessing the fishery, from 97 vessels in 2013 rising to a maximum of 160 vessels in 2024. The under 10 metre (m) fleet dominate the number of vessels landing crawfish; accounting for approximately 70% of the entire fleet. However, there is concern from stakeholders that fishing activity from the larger vessels equates to a far greater increase in the fishing effort and subsequent capacity. Further information on UK vessel numbers is presented in Annex 3 (figure 3).

June 2024

Approximately 6% of the total annual crawfish landings in ICES area 7 were landed during June 2024. Of the 6.02 t. landed, 4.8 t was landed in the second half of the month. There were 66 vessels engaged in the fishery at the season opening, of which 22 landed more than 50kg in the month.

There are two stakeholder concerns regarding the previous opening of the season; including the noncompliance with the closure opening data with nets being set before the closure end, and the number of soft shelled and crawfish in poor condition that are rejected by the buyers and processors.

November 2024

November 2024 accounted for approximately 5% (4.9 t) of the total annual crawfish landings in ICES area 7. Of the total November 2024 landings 4 t were landed in the first 2 weeks of the month.

There were 47 vessels engaged in the fishery, (please see annex 3 UK vessel numbers) approximately half of the peak vessel numbers seen during the summer months. November showed an increased market share from larger vessels sectors as it appears weather became an increasingly restrictive factor in vessel activity.

December 2024

The 2024 crawfish closure ran from 19 December 2024 to 31 May 2025. Factors that contributed to the closure decision included access to the last neap tide before Christmas to maximise fishing opportunities, particularly for areas that had limited alternatives to support their income.

In both 2023 and 2024 Christmas markets do not appear to have been utilised. In 2024 December landings accounted for less than 1.5 % (1.49 t) of the annual total taken from ICES area 7 (99.88 t). There were 17 vessels that worked the fishery in December, of which 4 vessels actively targeted the fishery and landed more than 50 kg each in the month.

MMO has access to EU landing data through the STECF website. This shows that in 2023 1.47 t was taken from UK waters by the European fleet. Only one vessel recorded a catch amount over 50kg, indicating that most removals are a bycatch from trawling and netting.

3.2 Scientific and environmental considerations

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 and no current stock assessment means there are uncertainties around stock status, and the level of 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 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 South West (caused by increased fishing pressure) may impact populations within MCZs, preventing MCZ conservation objectives from being met. MMO is currently consulting on [Stage 3 Marine Protected Area \(MPA\) work](#). This includes a proposal to prohibit the removal of crawfish (also referred to as spiny lobster) in a specified area of one MCZ. As this species is relatively mobile, recruitment into populations within MCZs is likely linked to the wider population.

The purpose of the 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.

3.3 Social and economic considerations

The value of the crawfish fishery has risen steeply in recent years from £214,000 in 2012 rising to £1,729,711 in 2024. In previous years the market price for crawfish was stable at approximately £24 per kilogram (/kg). In 2024 prices fell during the summer months from £24/kg to £18/kg, indicating market saturation from increased

landings in the UK, France and Ireland. At the start of the summer of 2025, prices were closer to the previous value at £23/kg.

The consultation included a question on the impact of previous seasonal closure and the potential impact from a further proposed seasonal closure. Feedback to the latter consultation question was low and landing data has been analysed for the months around the closure period.

Annex 3 contains further information on UK monthly landing figures and UK vessel numbers in 2024. A brief overview of the fishery in June, November and December 2024 is available in below. These months have been presented following responses received during this consultation.

3.4 Legislation and policy considerations

MMO has obligations relating to legislation and policy including, but not limited to:

- Being mindful of the principles of public law which includes requiring measures to be necessary and expedient for the regulation of sea fishing, as well as being proportionate and enforceable.
- Under the [Trade and Cooperation Agreement](#) article 496(3), notifying the EU about new measures which are likely to apply to their vessels. It has been agreed that 45 days' notice should be provided prior to new measures being applied.
- Reviewing the crawfish fishery from an environmental, social and economic perspective, in line with its obligations under the [Fisheries Act 2020](#).
- Delivering policies in line with the fisheries objectives as an obligation under the [Joint Fisheries Statement](#). Those most relevant to crawfish are the sustainable, precautionary, ecosystem and equal access objectives.
 - This crawfish seasonal closure proposal aligns with the sustainable objective to ensure the short term social and economic risks have been balanced with long term health of the marine environment. It provides resilience to coastal communities whilst protecting crawfish for future fisheries.
 - The crawfish seasonal closure proposal aligns with the precautionary objective because action is required due to the rapid increases in fishing pressure, the fleet profile has changed with an increase in larger vessels in the fishery.
 - The crawfish seasonal closure proposal aligns with the ecosystem objective in that any negative impacts on crawfish is minimised.
 - The crawfish seasonal closure proposal aligns with the equal access objective in that it ensures fair and equitable access and benefit is not impeded based on any vessels home port and that any decisions are based on the need to protect the stock.
- Having regard to national and international agreements as outlined in the [Joint Fisheries Statement](#). These include the [Marine Strategy Regulations 2010](#), which

require fishery bodies in the UK to take action to achieve or maintain Good Environmental Status (GES) in all UK waters and the [UK Marine Strategy](#) which is a key pillar of marine policy in the UK.

- Delivering in line with [MMO strategic goals](#) specifically, goal 6 - Assure the sustainable and transparent management of fishing opportunities to achieve a resilient and increasingly viable fishing sector.
- Complying with our public sector equality duty under the [Equality Act 2010](#). MMO has considered if people with any protected characteristics are likely to have different needs in relation to the decision made within this document or if the decision is likely to present unequal opportunity, result in discrimination or fail to foster good relations between people with different or diverse characteristics. MMO has very limited data on protected characteristics of people who fish in ICES area 7 for crawfish. However, MMO does not consider the decisions made will discriminate or disadvantage people with protected characteristics. MMO would welcome any comments or information on this matter.

4. Conclusion and next steps

MMO would like to thank everyone involved in the consultation, in particular the fisheries stakeholders and the fishers themselves who have dedicated the time to working with MMO.

The closure will be applied through a licence variation, applying to all vessels (UK and EU). The wording for the licence condition is:

*“This licence does not authorise fishing for; retaining on board; storing; or landing crawfish (*Palinurus spp*) caught in English waters between 00:01 hours on 17 November 2025 to 23:59 hours on 31 May 2026.”*

Any fisher who is the nominated contact on the domestic fishing vessel licence system will be informed via an email notification when the variation is enacted. All respondents to the consultation will be informed of the decision by email.

MMO remain committed to developing a collaborative approach to fisheries management and to ensure the crawfish fishery is managed in the most environmentally, socially and sustainable way possible.

5. Contact us

If you have any questions or queries, then please email or call our helpline using the details provided below:

Email: FMP@marinemanagement.org.uk

MMO helpline: 0300 123 1032

Annex 1. ICES area 7

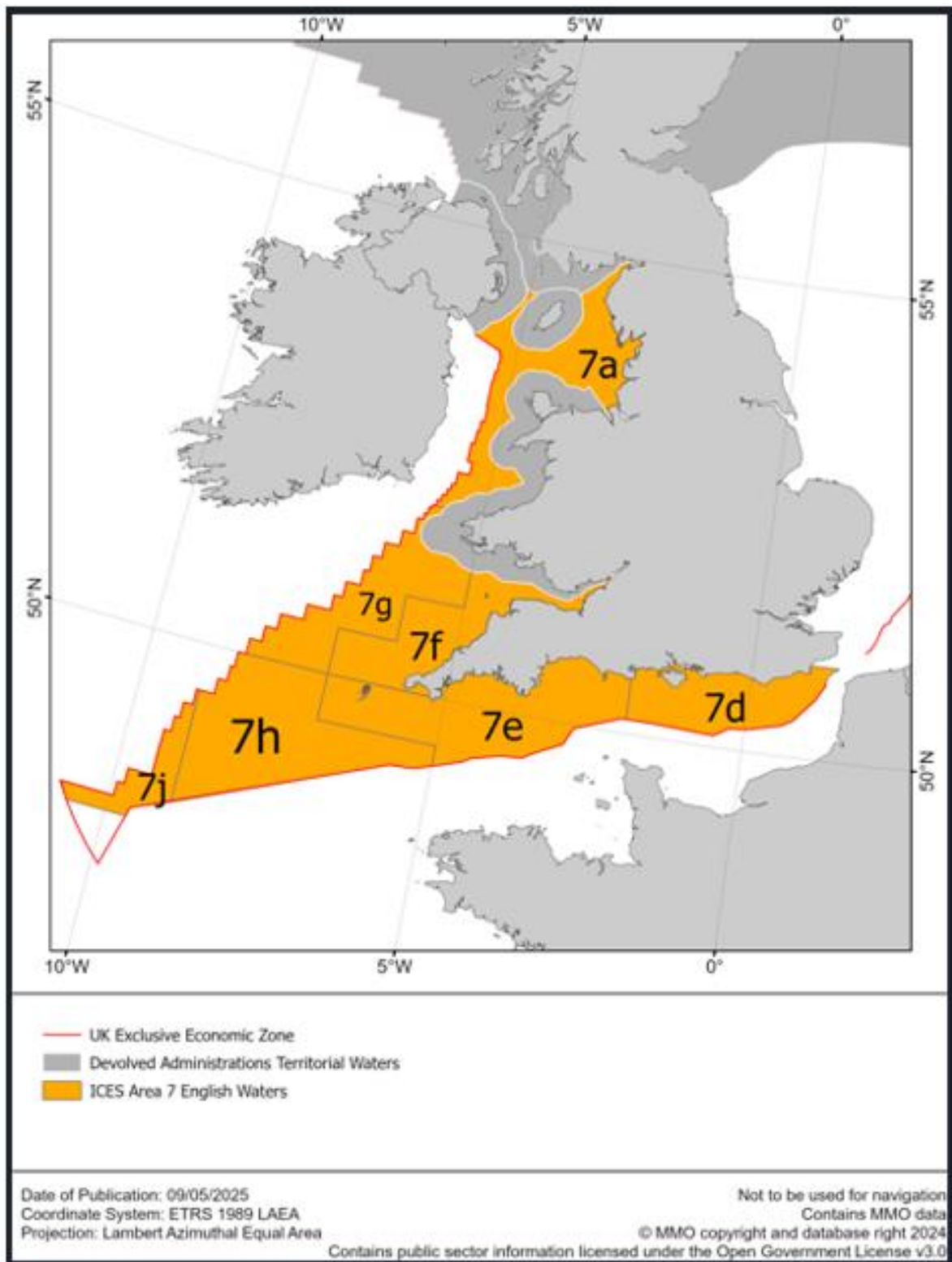


Figure 1. Map with orange shading showing English waters of ICES area 7.

Annex 2. Quality assurance

MMO seek to use the best available evidence to inform management decisions. This consultation provided an opportunity for stakeholders to provide additional evidence to inform the decision on a crawfish seasonal closure in ICES area 7 for English waters and development of crawfish management measures.

Knowledge and data are an important part of understanding fisheries. Evidence sources, including information from the fishing industry and local experts, help strengthen our analysis considering management options for a seasonal closure.

It is important to understand the strengths and limitations of any evidence to understand how it can contribute to decision making. Any additional information that was provided at the consultation has been analysed and verified through the MMO evidence quality assurance process – [Process for evidence quality assurance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Where appropriate and depending on the quality of the evidence submitted compared with that already used, new evidence can be used to inform proposed management measures.

Annex 3. Landings data

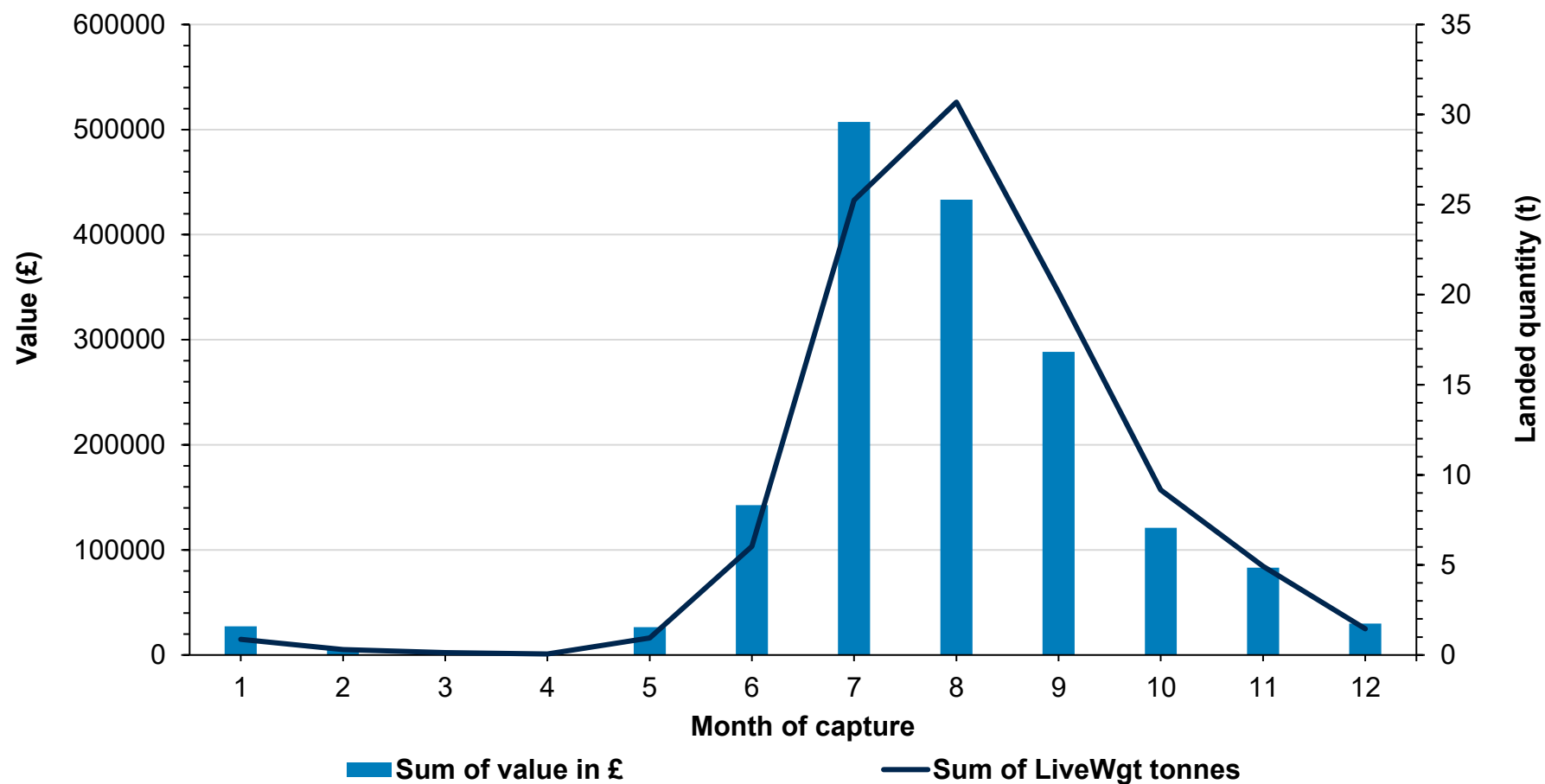


Figure 2. MMO landings data (quantity in tonnes 't' and value in pounds '£') for crawfish in ICES area 7 by month in 2024, landed quantity and value (UK vessels).

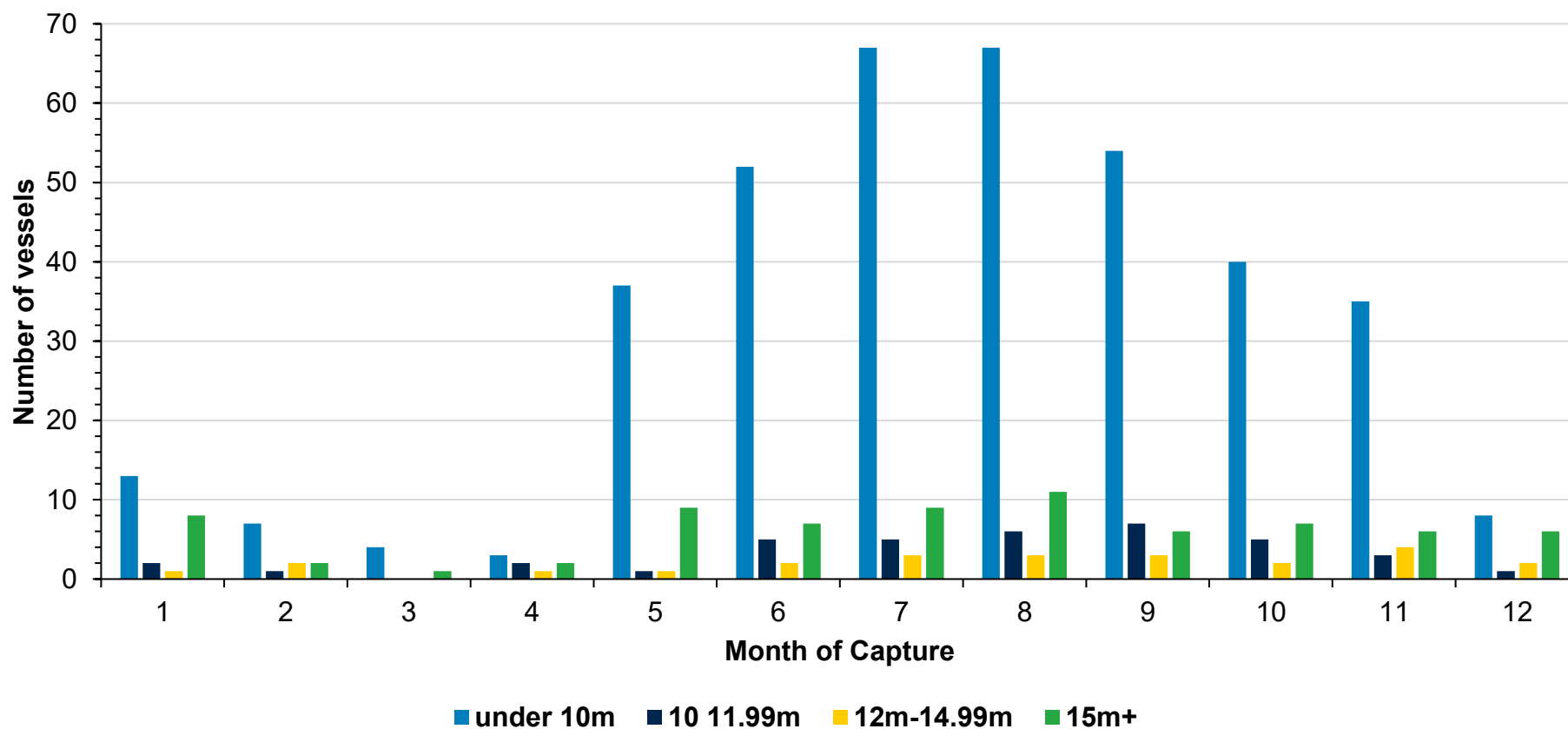


Figure 3. MMO landings data for 2024. UK vessel numbers broken down into vessel size category (ICES area 7).

Please note the landings during the 2024 closure period (5 February 2024 to 30 April 2024) have been investigated and cases concluded.