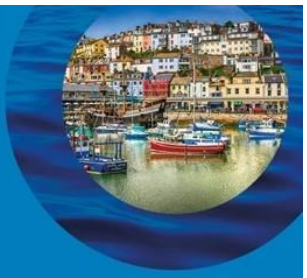
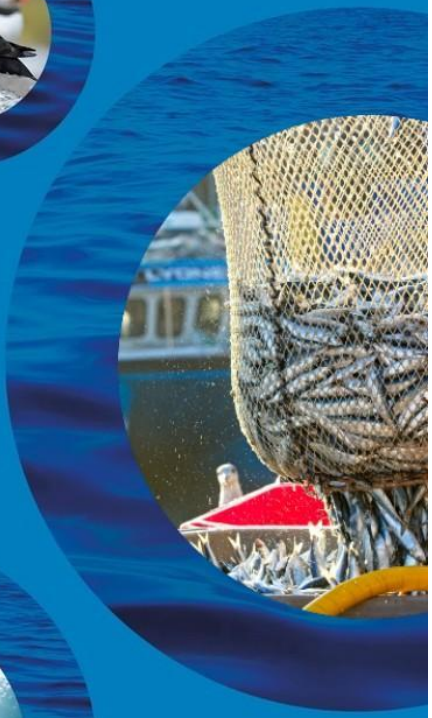
Marine Management Organisation

Crawfish (*Palinurus spp*) seasonal closure 2026/2027 consultation



April 2026

...ambitious for our seas and coasts

Crawfish (*Palinurus spp*) seasonal closure 2026/2027 consultation

Contents

1. Introduction

The aim of this consultation is to seek the views of stakeholders on a fourth 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 for all UK (United Kingdom) and EU (European Union) vessels with all gear types. The third seasonal closure is currently active until 31 May 2026.

The purpose of the seasonal closure is 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.

Decisions for this consultation will be made using the best available evidence and stakeholder feedback.

1.1. Structure of this document

Section 2 provides information on the 2026 crawfish stakeholder engagement, with summaries of meeting subjects and options on the potential seasonal closure.

Section 3 contains information on how you can respond to the consultation.

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

Annex 1 provides a background to the crawfish 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.

2. 2026 engagement

MMO held a workshop in Newlyn (February) and meeting in Hayle (March) with crawfish stakeholders to discuss the next seasonal closure (2026/2027) and explore options for longer-term measures (meeting notes are available on the South West RFG webpage).

There are continuing concerns from some stakeholders that the effort in the fishery is too high. There is no consensus on dates meaning annual consultations on the seasonal closure are required. This creates stakeholder fatigue along with uncertainty for business and fishing plans.

To ensure the stock remains both ecologically and economically sustainable MMO is considering longer-term management meaning the annual consultation on a seasonal closure may no longer be required. This will be subject to further engagement before any final decisions are made. As this work is longer-term the seasonal closure for 2026/2027 must be progressed. This online survey is an opportunity for any one unable to attend the engagement to give their views.

During the 2026 engagement MMO asked the meeting attendees to consider 4 seasonal closure options based on the end of the neap tide in November (like the current 2025/2026 closure). These options were:

- **option 1**: 22 November 2026 (end of the last neap tide) to 31 May 2027.
- **option 2**: 22 November 2026 (end of the last neap tide) to 10 June 2027 (1st full neap tide).
- **option 3**: 22 November 2026 (end of the last neap tide) to 24 June 2027 (2nd full neap tide).
- **other –** stakeholders could suggest a closure period

Option 1 – this provides an opportunity to select a closure like the 2025/2026 closure.

Option 2 and 3 - the closure start date has been selected following stakeholder feedback received during the 2025/2026 seasonal closure consultation.

MMO were advised that the previous closure that opened on 1 June saw large amounts of crawfish landed in poor condition. This led to many being rejected at the point of sale and the price falling. Neap tides are the preferred fishing period for this fishery.

Other - this provides stakeholders an opportunity to suggest a different closure period, should none of the presented options be preferred.

3. How to respond

MMO has published a short online survey to gather views on the 2026/2027 seasonal closure. This can be completed on a mobile phone, and it should take no longer than 5 minutes to complete. The survey is open until 23.59 on **12 May 2026.**

4. Next Steps

MMO will publish a summary of the final responses and the decision on the 2026/2027 seasonal closure for the crawfish fishery in English waters (ICES area 7). MMO will detail when, where and which vessels will be affected (if relevant). We will also present the decision at a subsequent South West RFG meeting.

Any changes to the fishery will likely be enacted by a licence variation in the first instance.

MMO will be engaging further with stakeholders on longer-term management options shortly after the outcome of the consultation is announced.

Annex 1 – Background and engagement

Background

The crawfish fishery is concentrated in the South West of England, with most activity taking place in inshore waters (to six 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 previously 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.

Crawfish landings and the number of vessels engaged in the fishery increased annually up to 2024. Landed quantities, vessel numbers and price per kilo all fell in 2025. Further details are found in Annex 2.

MMO engagement and consultations

Minimum conservation reference size (MCRS)

- In 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. This has now been superseded by a Statutory Instrument 'SI' (SI 2024/1028) which came into force on 16 December 2024.

Seasonal closures and effort management

- 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 ran until 31 May 2025, inclusive. Further information on the consultation and decision outcome is available here.
- In 2025, MMO ran a consultation to seek views on a further seasonal closure for 2025/2026. The consultation ran from 5 June 2025 to 20 July 2025. MMO also asked for suggestions for technical measures (other than effort management) that could be explored for future management. MMO

introduced a closure from 17 November 2025 to 31 May 2026 (inclusive). Further information on the 2025/2026 consultation, including the decision document, is available here.

- In 2026, MMO held stakeholder engagement events in Newlyn and Hayle to discuss the 2026/2027 closure, effort management and technical conservation measures in the fishery. The Newlyn and Hayle meeting notes can be found on the South West RFG web page.

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 2025 data used for this consultation is provisional. MMO monthly and annual statistics reports are available here. 2025 data will be verified and published in the annual MMO statistics report at the end of 2026.

Landings data

English crawfish landings annually increased from 41 tonnes (t) in 2021 and peaked at 117.1 t in 2024. Landings in 2025 fell to 104 t.

Figure 1 shows the monthly crawfish landings from 2021 to 2025. The graph 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.

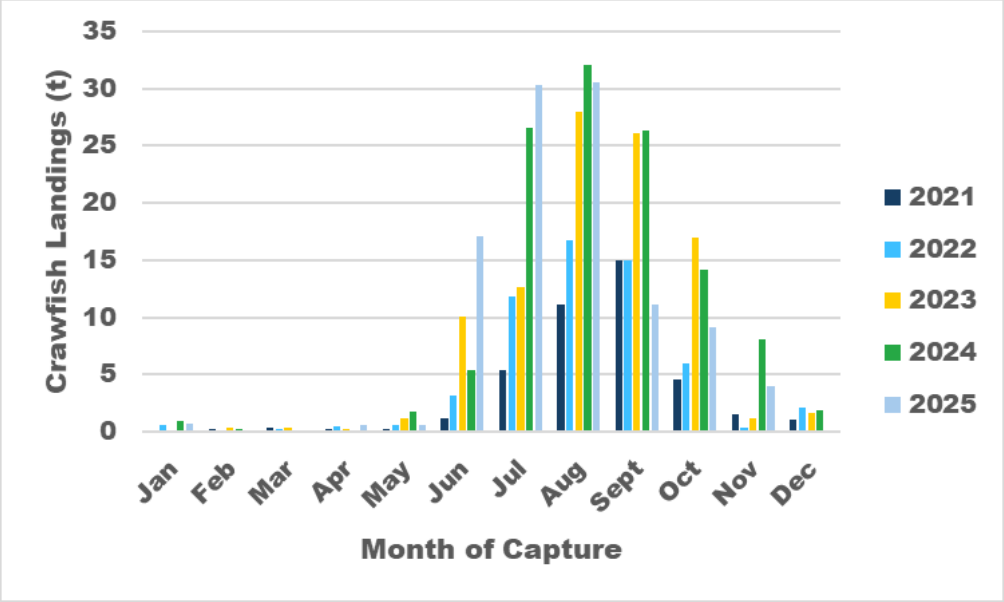


Figure 1. Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) monthly landings in tonnes (t), for all English waters and all gears, from 2021 to 2025.

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 in bad weather 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 2021 to 2025 landings data, apportioned by ICES area. ICES area 7e (Western Channel and South Cornwall coast) and 7f (North Cornwall

coast and Bristol Channel) have historically dominated the crawfish landings. In 2025 these areas accounted for over 95% of all UK landings.

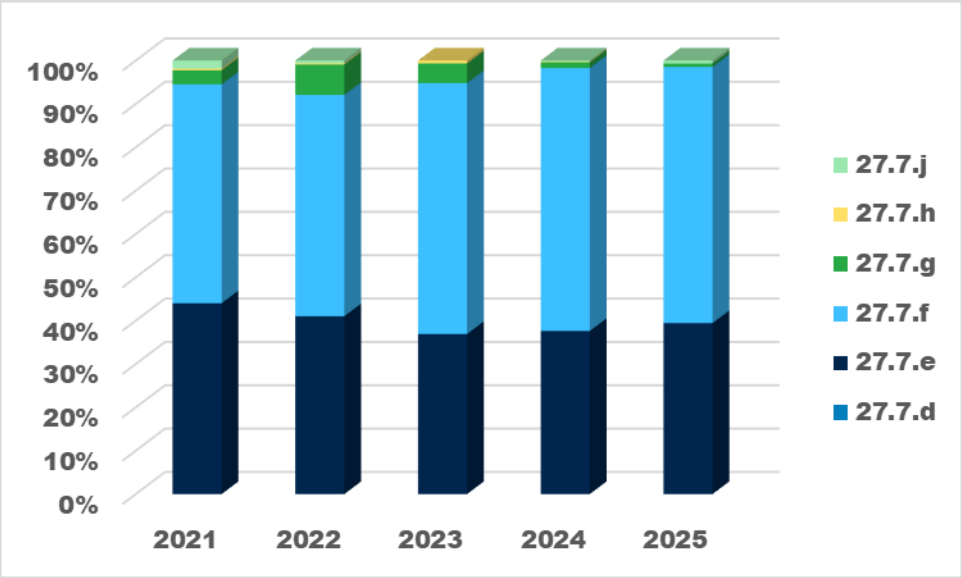


Figure 2. Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) landings (t) from ICES areas, 2021 to 2025, for all UK waters and all gears.

EU landing data

Analysis of EU data from 2022 to 2024 expressed in Table 1 shows that the amount of crawfish that have been caught in UK waters by the EU fleet has remained consistent. Approximately half of each year's catch is caught by trawlers which indicates it is likely a bycatch from a mixed fishery and not targeted species.

Table 1. EU landing data in tonnes (t)– Crawfish caught in UK waters (source STECF 'Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries')

Year	Total (t)	Trawled (t)	Netted (t)	Other (t)
2022	1.537	0.757	0.747	0.033
2023	1.468	0.764	0.695	0.009
2024	1.742	0.669	1.06	0.013

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. Figure 3 shows all English administered vessels engaged in the crawfish fishery from 2021 to 2025. Vessel numbers peaked in 2023 at 209 and fell in 2025 to 124, the most notable reduction in fleet size in the under 10 m fleet (from 159 vessels in 2023 to 93 vessels in 2025).

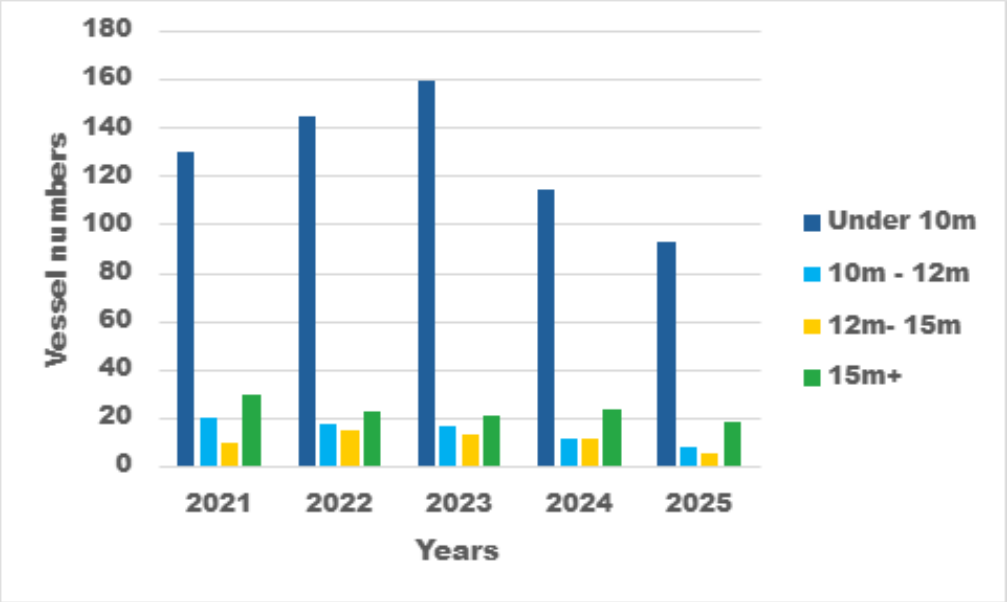


Figure 3. Number of English administered vessels landing Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) from all UK waters, from 2021 to 2025 by vessel size.

Crawfish landings from 2012 to 2025 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 a large proportion of the larger vessels have landed crawfish as a bycatch. In 2025 only 5 of the over 15 m fleet sector were actively targeting (over 1 t) crawfish.

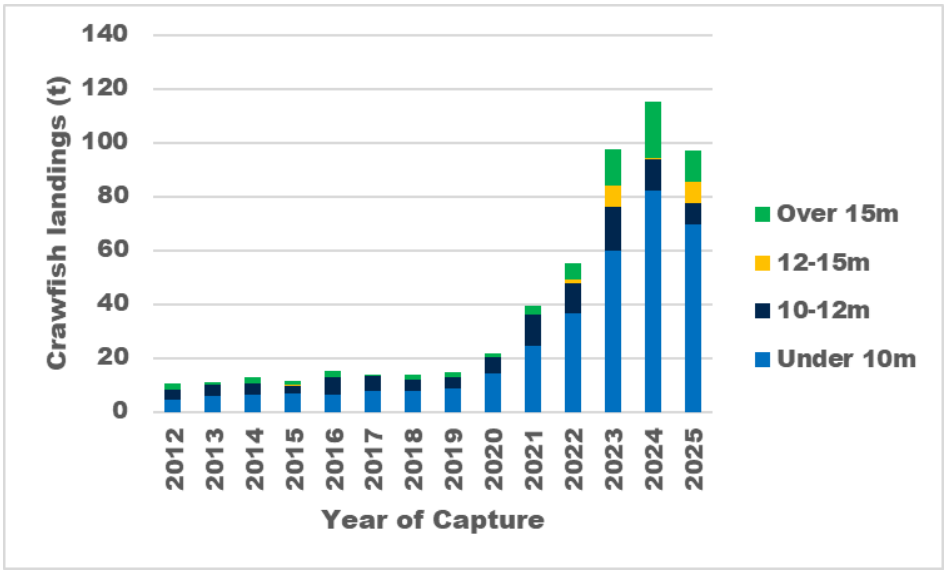


Figure 4. Crawfish landings apportioned to the fishing vessel fleet size

Principle gear types

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. Pot caught crawfish increased from 2018 to 2021. Since 2022 gill nets have dominated the landings, for example in 2025 over 77% of

all landings across all fleet sectors came from nets. Figure 5 indicates the landings by gear type from 2021 to 2025, taken from MMO landings data.

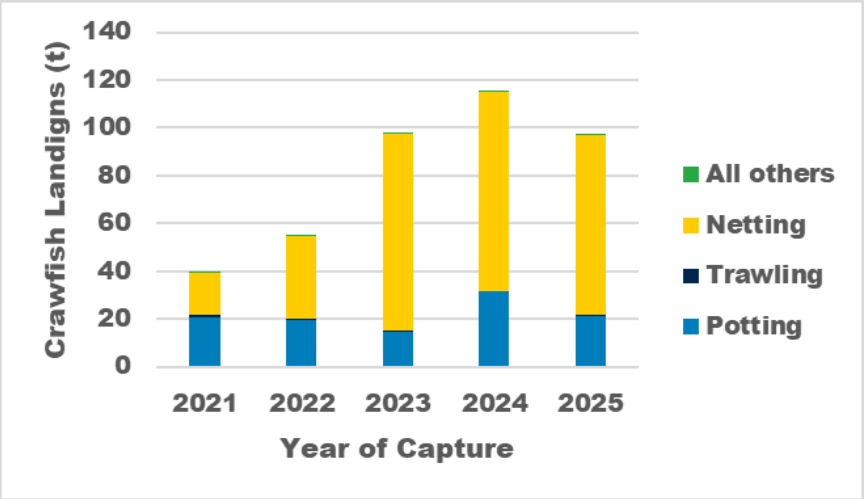


Figure 5. Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) landings in tonnes from all English waters, from 2021 to 2025 by gear type.

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). Net use also varies over the season. For example, MMO Catch App records for the under 10 m fleet show that the maximum overall length of nets deployed in one trip was 72,000 m. MMO Catch App records support that the total length of net deployed changes throughout the season, reducing in the winter.

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.

Social, economic and environmental considerations.

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 95 mm to 110 mm in all English waters.
- 2025/2026 Seasonal Crawfish Closure from 17 November 2026 to 31 May 2025 (inclusive) in English waters of ICES 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 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 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 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.

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

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 the average price per kilo in 2025 was £18/kg. Feedback from stakeholders was that the market was saturated with large landings from UK, France and Ireland and that supply had overtaken demand.

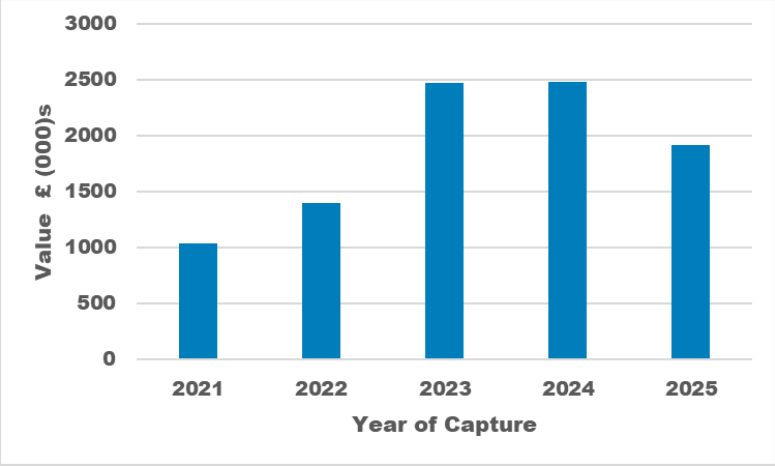


Figure 6. Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) landing value in £000s from all English waters by year, from 2021 to 2025.

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 2025 the closure started on 17 November which restricted access to the Christmas market.

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.

The Isles of Scilly (IoS) crawfish fishery

Challenges to the seasonal closure scenarios are increased with the inclusion of the IoS fishery. The IoS district is protected with additional vessel size restriction from the IoS IFCA byelaws that prohibits any vessel larger than 11 m and 10 gross t to work in the district. MMO acknowledge that the risks and concerns in the IoS district are different from the rest of the fishery, however the management of the fishery must be fair and applicable to all vessels.

MMO has held three meetings with the IoS fishers, the last meeting was in March 2026, and the meeting notes can be found on the South West RFG webpage.

The main points raised at the March meeting were.

- Economic significance of the December market for the IoS fishers.
- Consideration of the economic differences between the island and mainland fisheries.
    - There is no other viable winter fishery on the islands,
    - Income from crawfish landed in November and December must sustain individuals until the spring.
    - IOS fishers have further outgoings including increased fuel and parts prices and significant freight cost (example; £15,000 of freight cost for 2025).
- Concerns that 2026 fishing has more unknowns that may further impact the opportunities and income.
- Concerned that the closure process is revisited each year and options are chosen that aren’t consulted on.

A question raised at the meeting included the request of a staggered closure based on vessel size.