



Marine
Management
Organisation

Crawfish seasonal closure 2026/2027 – decision document

June 2026



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Executive Summary

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) consulted on a fourth crawfish fishery seasonal closure in English waters of International Council for the Exploration of the sea (ICES) area 7 (Figure 1; Annex 1). 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.

The 2026 consultation was made up of stakeholder meetings and an online survey. The stakeholder meetings were held in Newlyn (February 2026) and Hayle (March 2026). The online survey ran from 28 April to 12 May 2026.

The options provided for the seasonal closure were:

- option 1: 22 November 2026 (end of last neap tide) to 31 May 2027.
- option 2: 22 November 2026 (end of last neap tide) to 10 June 2027 (1st full neap tide).
- option 3: 22 November 2026 (end of last neap tide) to 24 June 2027 (2nd full neap tide).
- other: for respondents to suggest.

There was full support for the closure but as with previous years there was no consensus regarding the closure dates. The two main themes that came from responses were concerns regarding sustainability of the fishery and economic impacts of the closure.

52 consultation responses were submitted in total (**16** during stakeholder events and **36** from the online survey). In response to the closure length, **27%** supported options 1 (22 November 2026 to 31 May 2027). The largest response, **35%** was to for option 4 (for respondents to suggest dates), however there was no consensus regarding what the other closure length should be.

In making the decision MMO has 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.

In consideration of the above, MMO has decided to prohibit fishing for; retaining on board; storing; or landing crawfish caught in English waters of ICES area 7 (using all gears) between **00:01 hours on 22 November 2026 to 23:59 hours on 31 May 2027**. The closure will apply to all UK and EU vessels and will be enacted through a fishing vessel licence condition.

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 a Statutory Instrument ([The Sea Fisheries \(Amendment\) \(No. 2\) Regulations 2024](#)) which came into force on 16 December 2024.

There have been three seasonal closures for crawfish administered by MMO. The first closure ran from 5 February 2024 to 30 April 2024, the second from 16 December 2024 to 31 May 2025 and the third from 17 November 2025 to 31 May 2026.

All closures have applied in the English waters of ICES area 7, covering 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 fourth seasonal closure (2026/2027). 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.

Section 4 – outlines 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 (English waters), quality assurance process and landings information).

2. Consultation

2.1. Overview

The 2026 consultation was made up of stakeholder meetings and an online survey. The face-to-face stakeholder meetings were held in Newlyn (February 2026) and Hayle (March 2026). The online survey ran from 28 April to 12 May 2026.

In total there were **52 responses** (**16** from the stakeholder engagement events and **36** from the online survey). MMO would like to thank everyone who came to the engagement events and who provided a response to the online survey. Your feedback has allowed us to make the most informed management decision.

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 2.2 below.

2.2. Summary of responses

This section provides the questions and responses grouped by the consultation section (seasonal closure; about you and your business). The responses collected during the 2026 engagement events have been incorporated into overall responses where questions were the same.

Please note that the number of answers for multiple choice questions will exceed the total number of received responses.

Question one stated that they did not need to proceed if they previously responded at a stakeholder engagement event

2.2.1. Seasonal closure

Question 2. Please choose an option for a seasonal closure that prohibits retaining and landing crawfish (*Palinurus* spp) in English waters of ICES area 7 for all UK and EU vessels using all gear types

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.'

You said:

Closure options	Responses
option 1: 22 November 2026 to 31 May 2027	14
option 2: 22 Nov 2026 to 10 June 2027	5
option 3: 22 Nov 2026 to 24 June 2027	11
option 4: for respondents to suggest in free text	18
No answer	4
Total number of responses	52

Question 2 was the only question common to both the stakeholder engagement and the on-line survey. The table above gives a summary of the options chosen by respondents to question 2.

Of the **18** responses selected the other option, **13** suggested a later closure start, closing the fishery either in December or January. Four suggested an earlier closure start of closing the fishery in October or earlier in November. There were less suggestions for a different closure end date, three suggested opening earlier in April and May and two suggested opening later in the year June and August. Please note many of the other answers suggested different start and finish dates for the closure.

Question 3. Briefly explain the reason for your answer (optional)

We asked:

'What is your reasoning behind your chosen closure option?'

You said:

Theme	Count
Stock sustainability & spawning protection	19
Economic survival (income pressure)	14
Market timing & price optimisation	9
Operational constraints (i.e. weather, vessel limitations)	6
Management design & fairness	4
Mixed / hybrid reasoning	8

Question 3 was only asked in the online survey, of which there were **36** responses. Many of the respondents selected multiple answers. The answers to question three have been grouped into six themes and summarised in the table above and as outlined below:

Sustainability: the top theme was stock sustainability. Respondents described concerns about the risks of overfishing, the need for stocks to recover (enough spawning time) and keeping fisheries productive in the future.

Economic survivability: economic pressures were also raised as a reason, particularly among smaller inshore operators. Respondents highlighted the

importance of maintaining income during winter months, the limited alternative fishing opportunities and reliance on high-value periods like the Christmas market.

Markets: responses also highlighted market factors, such as changing prices and product quality. Some noted that crawfish landed early in the season can be soft-shelled and less value, particularly for export markets that need live product.

Operational constraints: practical operational factors like weather and vessel size (capability) also mattered, with smaller boats having fewer chances to fish and less flexibility (adaptability and fishing opportunities).

Management design: a smaller number of responses stressed the importance of clear, simple rules that are easy to enforce and avoid loopholes.

Mixed: some responses recognised the balance between sustainability (conservation) and economic factors (livelihoods).

2.2.2. About you and your business

Question 4. How is the current closure (2025/2026) impacting you and your business?

We asked:

'How has the seasonal closure (2025/2026) impacted you and your business?'

This question was only asked in the online survey, of which there were 36 responses.

You said:

The impact of the 2025/2026 seasonal closure	Responses
Significant negative impact	9
Manageable negative impact	11
No difference	9
Positive impact	6
Significantly positive impact	1
Total	36

The impact of the current seasonal closure is having a negative impact upon 55% of those who answered the survey. However, 16% of the respondents who cited a manageable negative impact or significant negative impact stated that the closure was necessary to help protect the fishery for future years.

Question 5. What proportion of your business is reliant on the crawfish fishery?

We asked:

‘Do you consider your business to rely on the crawfish fishery? What proportion of your business is related to crawfish?’

You said:

Percentage of business reliant on the fishery	Responses
Not reliant	7
< (less than) 25%	9
25%	5
50%	11
75%	3
100%	0
No answer	1
Total	36

This question was only asked in the online survey which had a total of 35 responses, one respondent did not answer this question..

There were mixed responses to this question. For some, crawfish contributed significantly to their income with businesses not surviving without crawfish.

When these answers were analysed, there appears a strong correlation for those who expressed a high dependency on the fishery and the shorter closure options with an economic reason behind their selected closure option. The respondents who declared low dependency on the fishery tended towards the longer closure options and more sustainable arguments.

Question 6 If you are a vessel owner/agent or skipper: in which length group is your vessel?

We asked:

‘If you are a vessel owner/agent or skipper: in which length group is your vessel; under 10 metres (m), 10.00 m to 11.99 m, 12.00 m to 14.99 m or the over 15 m fleet?’

You said:

Vessel Group	Responses
Under 10m	28
10.00 m – 11.99 m	7
12.00 m – 14.99 m	1
15m +	1

This question was only asked in the online survey which had 36 responses. This was a multiple-choice answer to capture those with more than one vessel.

The under 10 m fleet had the most responses (28 responses; 75%). There was a notable relationship between the smaller vessels (under 10m) and the reasons given for the closure options. Some of the reasons given included:

- Concerns relating to economic viability.
- Limited fishing opportunities.
- Operational constraints linked with weather.

Question 7. What is your main port of landing?

We asked:

'If you are a vessel owner what is your main port?'

You said:

Port	Responses
Brixham	1
Cadgwith	1
Carteret, France	1
Douglas, Isle of Man.	1
Hayle	2
Isle of Scilly	2
Mullion	1
Newlyn	11
Newquay	2
Padstow	3
Plymouth	1
Port Isaac	2
St Ives	3
St Agnes	1
Salcombe	1

Sennan Cove	1
Not answered/not applicable	2

This question was only asked in the online survey which had 36 responses.

There were 17 ports listed in the responses, there were responses from most of the south and north coast ports of Devon and Cornwall. Included in the responses were and a couple of responses from further most notably, Douglas in the Isle of Man and one response from Carteret, France.

When the responses to Question 5, “What proportion of your business is reliant on the crawfish fishery?” were cross referenced to the port information, it was noted that Newlyn answers were evenly distributed across all answer options. Newlyn respondents expressed economic and market-based concerns frequently referencing the importance of winter income and access to export markets.

When the responses to Question 3, “Briefly explain the reason for your (closure option) answer” were cross referenced to the port information, it was seen that responses from smaller ports (for example. Padstow, Port Isaac, Cadgwith) were more commonly referred to operational limitations, including weather-related constraints and shorter workable fishing periods.

2.3. Consultation outcome

MMO will implement a closure of the crawfish fishery from **22 November 2026 to 31 May 2027** (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 (section 3 of this document has more information).

We hope that this decision provides more resilience to coastal communities whilst also protecting crawfish for the future. We value the continued engagement from industry in the crawfish management and hope to engage soon with further management proposals.

This decision does not set a precedent for any potential future management proposals. Any 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. 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.

3.2. 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. In 2025 the average price per kilo was £18.

The consultation included a question on the impact of the 2025 and 2026 seasonal closure. The impact of the latest seasonal closure is having a negative impact upon 55% of those who answered the survey. However, 16% of the respondents who cited a manageable or significant impact stated that the closure was necessary to help protect the fishery for future years.

3.3. 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, attending engagement events and responding to the survey.

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 22 November 2026 to 23:59 hours on 31 May 2027.”*

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 (English waters).

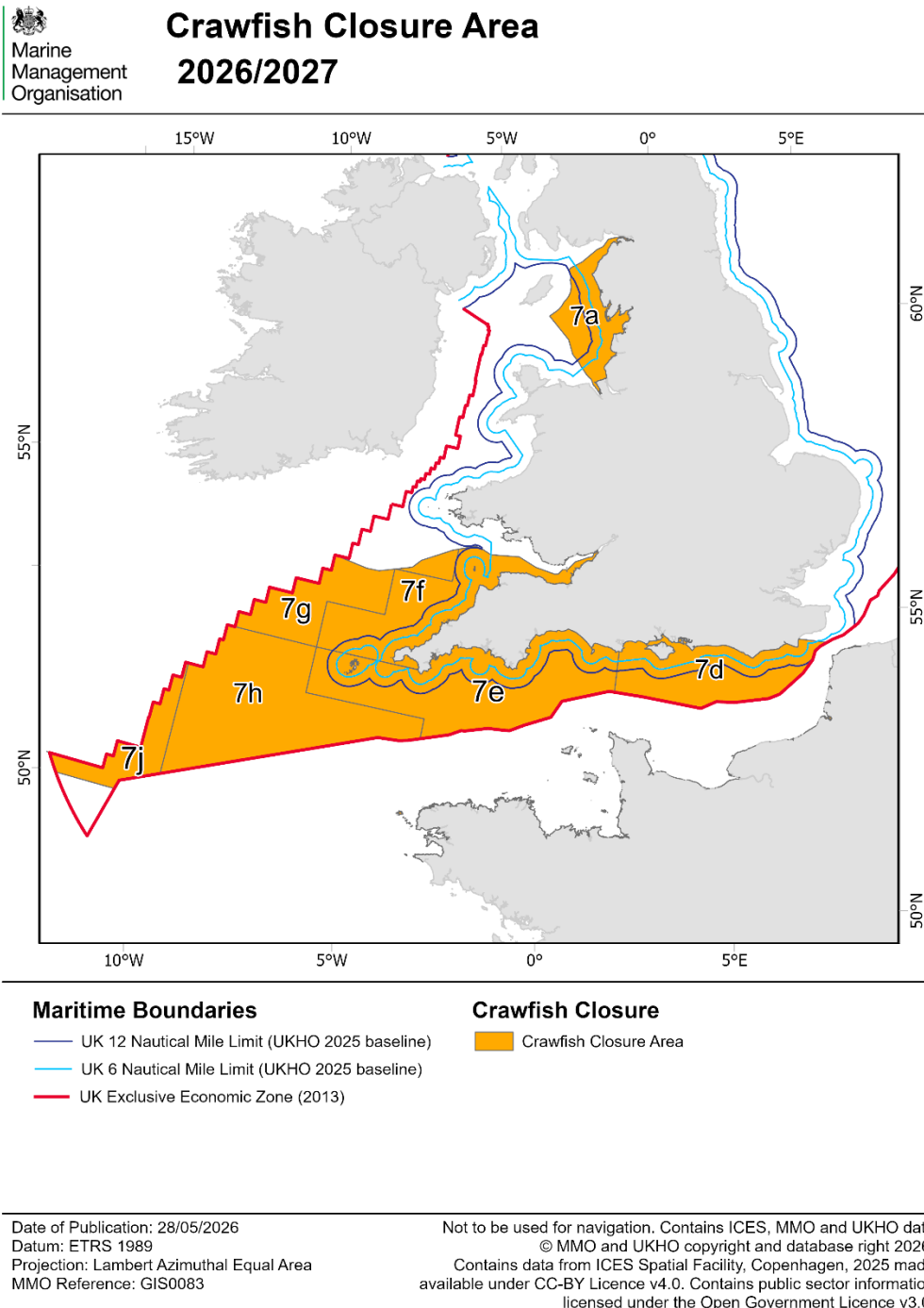


Figure 1. Map with orange shading showing English waters of ICES area 7.

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 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

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 – 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.

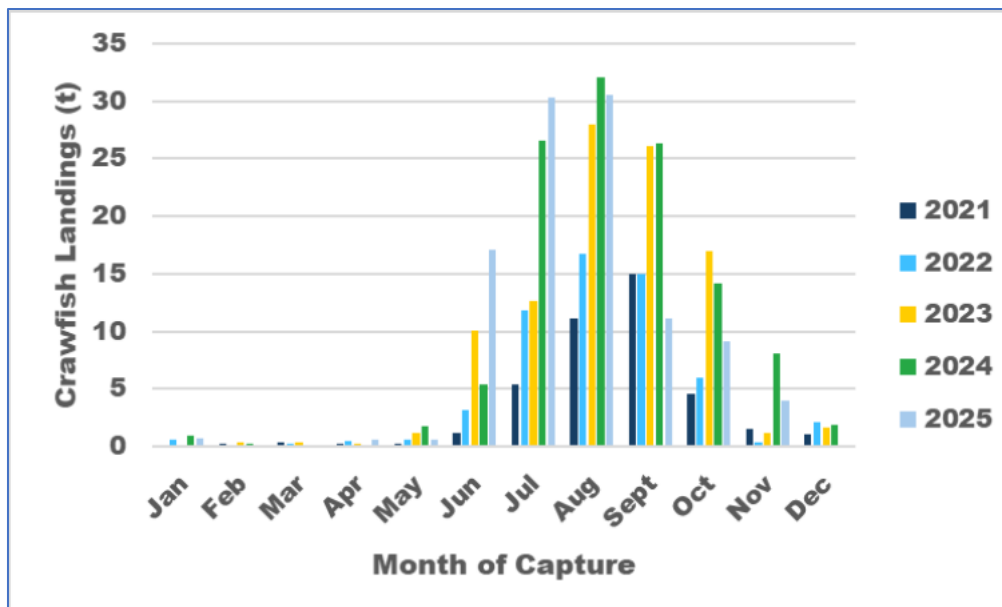


Figure 2. Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) monthly landings in tonnes (t), for all English waters and all gears, from 2021 to 2025.

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.

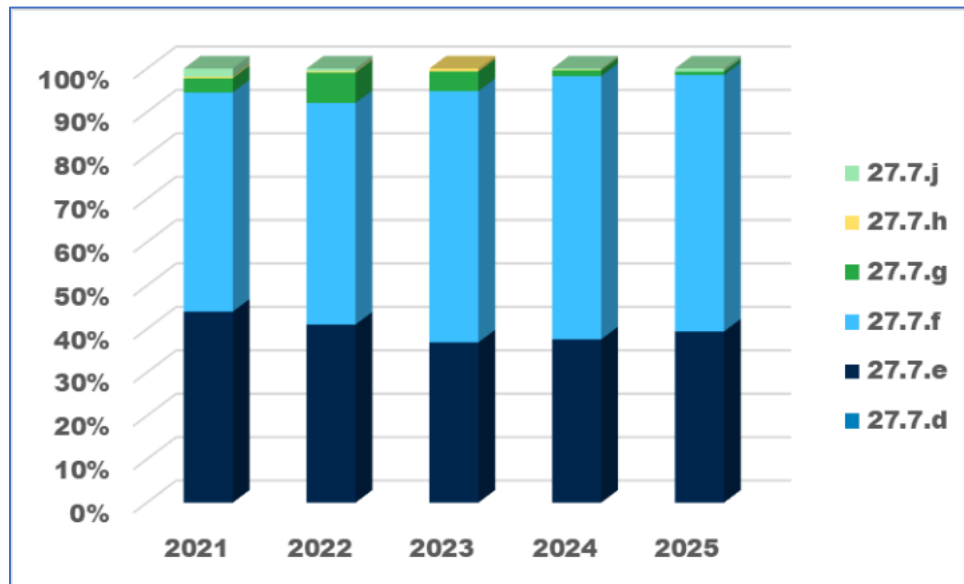


Figure 3. Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) landings (t) from ICES areas, 2021 to 2025, for all UK waters and all gears.

EU landing data

Analysis of EU data from 2022 to 2024 expressed in Table 2 shows that the number 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 m 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).

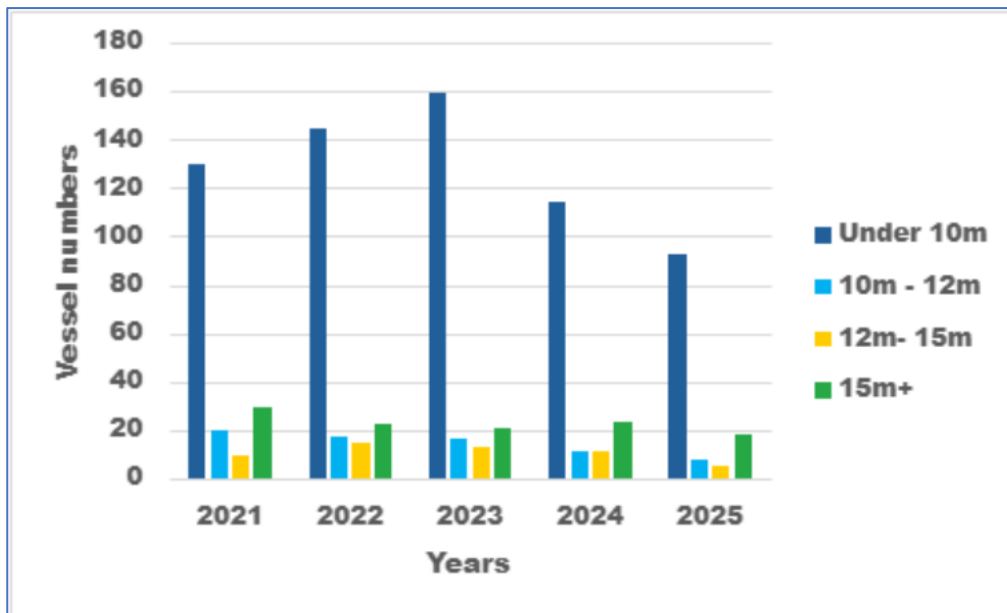


Figure 4. Number of English administered vessels landing Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) from all UK waters, from 2021 to 2025 by vessel size.

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.

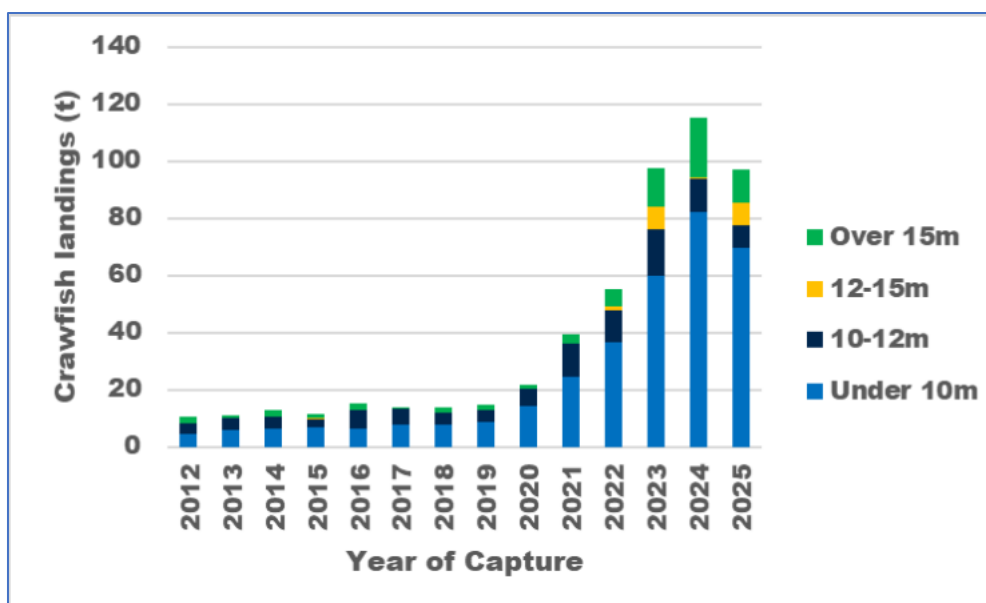


Figure 5. Crawfish landings apportioned to the fishing vessel fleet size

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.

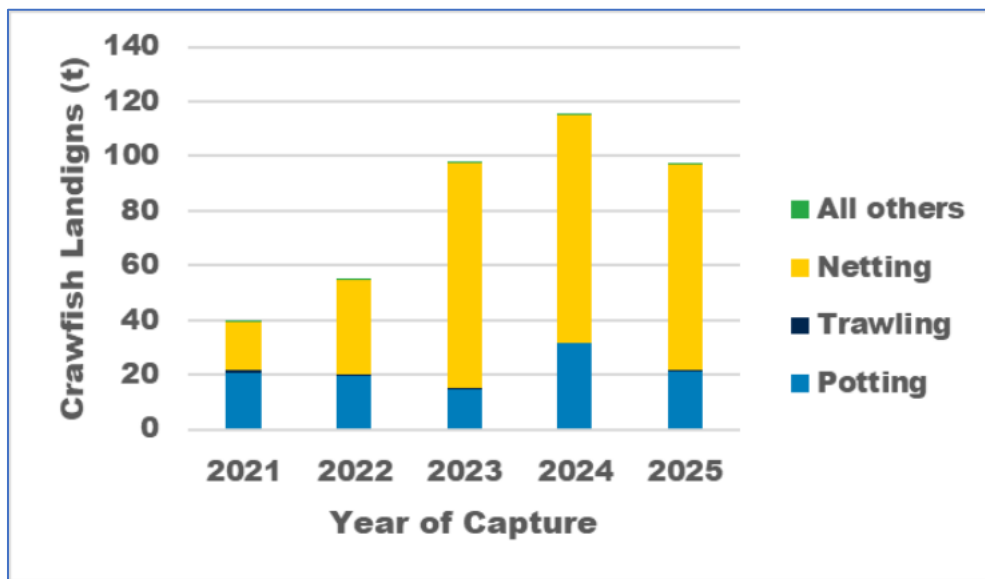


Figure 6. Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) landings in tonnes from all English waters, from 2021 to 2025 by gear type.

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); this 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 from 2021 to 2025.

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.

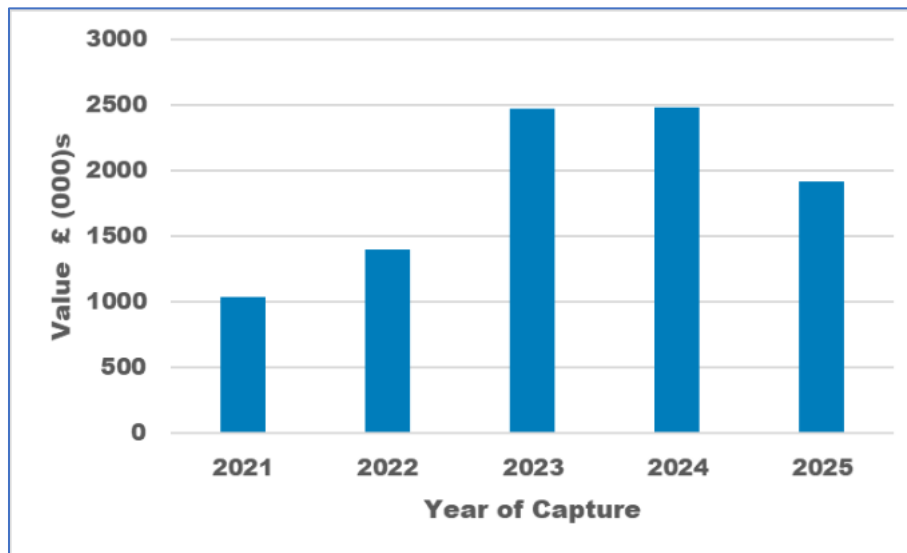


Figure 7. Crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*) landing value in £000s from all English waters by year, from 2021 to 2025.

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.