



Marine
Management
Organisation

Octopus Bloom: A Survey to Understand Stakeholder Requests for Support

Analysis of Response

Date: April 2026



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1. Executive summary

Throughout 2025, the southwest of England experienced a surge in the number of octopus being observed and caught by fishers, commonly referred to as an “octopus bloom”. The octopus bloom is widely reported to have disproportionately affected fishing stakeholders across the region.

Marine Management Organisation (MMO) invited fisheries stakeholders impacted by the octopus bloom, either positively or negatively, to take part in an online survey seeking to better understand the extent of impact. The aim of the survey was to gather information to help quantify the economic impact of the bloom on stakeholders across the southwest and identify options for support. The survey responses will be used to inform the consideration of appropriate next steps.

Survey overview

The survey ran for 15 days from 4th March to 19th March 2026, receiving a total of 43 complete responses. Unless otherwise stated, numbers presented below indicate general responses to the survey and are not indicative of the number of people each respondent represented. Two incomplete responses were received and discounted from the analysis.

The survey was hosted on the [South West Regional Fisheries Group \(RFG\) MMO webpage](#). A link to the survey was shared with the Octopus Management Group for members to circulate amongst wider relevant stakeholder groups, as well as being shared in emails and a newsletter sent out to the southwest RFG membership. Furthermore, the MMO Communications Team advertised the survey in a range of social media posts on the MMO Facebook, LinkedIn, X and Instagram.

All but one respondent to the survey identified as being part of the commercial fishing sector, with one completing the survey as a processor/supplier. 53% and 28% of respondents reported that their fishing activities take place in Cornwall and Devon, respectively. With one respondents' fishing activities taking place in both areas. 53% of stakeholders indicated that they operate within 0-3 nautical miles of the coast and 29% within the 0-6 nm region. 78% of respondents use vessels of 10m and under; primarily targeting crab and lobster, although a range of other species targeted were also reported. While respondents in the commercial fishing sector often held a number of roles, 96% identified themselves as skippers and/or vessel owners.

An overview of the economic impact of the octopus bloom

- Most stakeholders who provided details on the economic impact of the bloom reported financial losses (19/21 respondents) due to octopus predation on their preferred target stocks. Two respondents reported a positive financial gain as a result of catching and landing octopus, and one respondent said that the overall impact was neutral, as although they experienced significant losses in shellfish catches, this was negated by income made by catching octopus.

- The highest number of specific survey responses self-reporting a negative economic impact of the octopus bloom were received from fishers who usually fish in the 0-3nm area, however impacts have been reported across all areas.
- From those who reported the financial impact that they have experienced over the last year, impacts ranged from around 10-100% loss of income compared to previous years (median of self-reported percentage loss was approximately 59%).
- Several fishers noted that both octopus and traditional target species such as crab and lobster remain highly unpredictable, making it difficult to anticipate conditions for the 2026 season.
- There is significant concern from survey respondents on the future of businesses as a result of the decline in shellfish stocks, thought to be associated with octopus. Multiple respondents reported to either “tie up their boats”, or “attempt to sell them at a loss”, while still financing ongoing operational costs.
- Economic pressures on fishing crews were highlighted explicitly by two respondents, both emphasising increasing difficulty in attracting and retaining crew under current conditions.
- Other concerns regarding increased fishing effort, growing spatial competition, and associated gear conflict were raised explicitly by three respondents.
- For a small number of respondents, octopus provided a valuable additional source of income during the shortage of shellfish. While this was profitable for a few (3 respondents), it did not offset the financial losses caused by reduced shellfish catches for many others.

An overview of the support that would be welcomed by stakeholders

40/43 responses were submitted for the question “*Please list the specific types of support that would benefit you, your business and/or your community. Where possible, list each idea separately and briefly explain what positive impact it would have*”. The below summarises the responses:

- **Financial Support** – The overarching theme of financial support was the most frequently mentioned request, raised by over half of all respondents (29/40). Emergency funding was raised by eight respondents, with examples including help with maintenance, running costs or support to alleviate financial hardship. A decommissioning scheme was also recommended by eight respondents, with views differing on how the scheme could be targeted. Financial support for diversification was raised five times and a further six responses also recommended financial support but did not note specific uses. Funding for ice machines was stated in two responses. Other recommendations included compensating fishers to the value of their shellfish entitlements or providing financial support for scallopers unable to travel safely to fish elsewhere during the seasonal closure.
- **Support for Diversification** - Beyond financial assistance for diversification, three respondents requested general support to help them move into alternative fisheries. Several respondents suggested quota and regulatory changes to enable access into other fisheries. Four responses referenced increasing pollack quota, three requested an increase in bass entitlements. Individual respondents also suggested relaxing

non-quota species bycatch limits for scallopers, relaxing wider fish quotas, and reopening the crawfish season.

- **Gear Adaptation** - Support for gear changes was highlighted by five respondents, with three requesting general assistance to improve fishing activities and two asking specifically for help adapting gear to better target octopus.
- **Introduce management** - Requests for new management measures were raised six times. Examples included a pot limit for crab and lobster, closed areas and a non-local vessel exclusion zone. One respondent also raised a request for crab management in the form of a closed season and a maximum landing size to help preserve remaining stocks.
- **Processing Related Support** - Two respondents also requested support aimed specifically at processing activities. This included support to diversify processing operations and Government backed processing of octopus.
- A number of additional comments were also recorded.

Next steps

MMO will work alongside Defra policy colleagues to ensure the results of the survey and stakeholder's experiences are fully understood, and that next steps are evaluated. The survey, along with any feedback will then be shared with members of the Octopus Management Group and wider stakeholders.

Since the development of this report, it has been confirmed that the only funding route available to support stakeholders will be through the [Fisheries and Seafood Scheme](#) (FASS), which is funded using the [Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund](#). Defra and MMO welcome discussions with fishing stakeholders on how support can be accessed through the funding opportunities available. MMO Grants Team contact details can be found through the FASS link above.

2. Introduction

Background of the octopus bloom

During 2025, the south west of England experienced a surge in the number of octopus being observed and caught by fishers, commonly referred to as an “octopus bloom” ([Stewart et al., 2026](#)) (Figure 1).

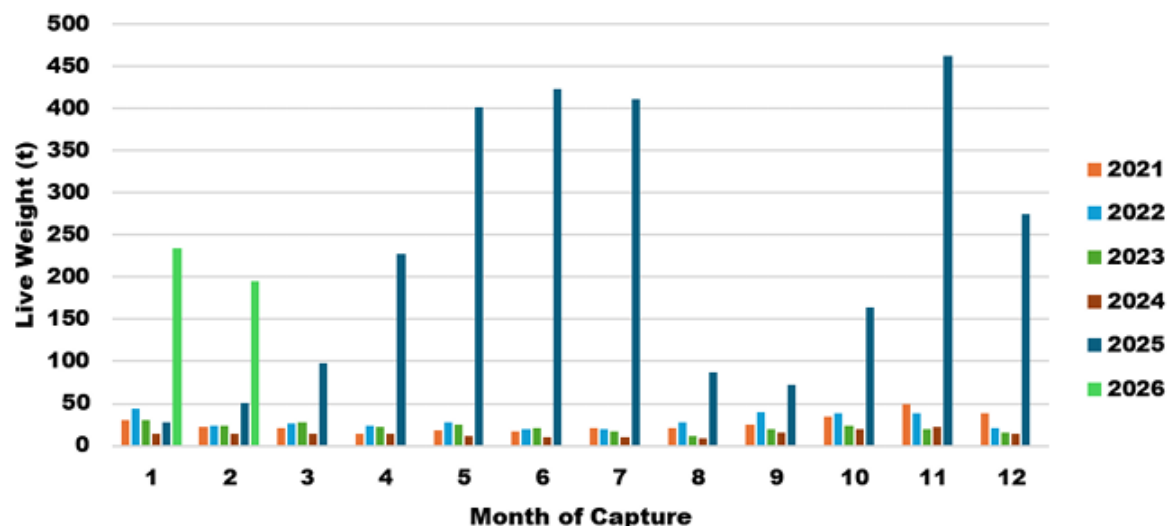


Figure 1. MMO landings data. Live weight of octopus in tonnes (t), from all UK vessels landing into all UK ports from 01 January 2021 to 02 March 2026.

This influx had varied impacts across the fishing industry. While some fishers benefitted from catching octopus due to its relatively high market value, others were negatively affected as octopus preyed on their usual target species. Octopus are known to opportunistically feed on shellfish such as crab, lobster and scallops, and many stakeholders in the shellfish sector reported considerable financial losses linked to declining shellfish stocks, which they believe have been exacerbated by increased octopus presence in areas across the south west.

Discussions with stakeholders also highlighted that the risks posed by octopus predation on shellfish may be disproportionately affecting some fishers more than others, as octopus are not uniformly distributed across the region. While some fishers have been able to adapt their practices to target octopus, others have been unable to do so, either because they cannot easily modify their gear or because spatial restrictions and small vessel size prevent them from moving to alternative grounds.

Why was a survey conducted?

In February 2026, MMO staff visited Brixham, Dartmouth, Salcombe, Newlyn and Mylor, where they met with fishing stakeholders to discuss their experiences during the octopus bloom. Stakeholders described a wide range of impacts on their fishing activities and many

highlighted the need for support, emphasising that, for some, assistance is now critical to keep their businesses viable.

Following requests from industry, MMO developed a survey to better understand the economic impacts on fishers across the south west and to identify the types of support stakeholders would welcome. The personal experiences and suggestions provided can be used to inform the consideration of appropriate next steps for support.

3. Methods

The GOV.UK Forms survey ran for 15 days from the 4 March to 19 March 2026, receiving a total of 43 complete responses. Unless otherwise stated, numbers presented below indicate general responses to the survey and are not indicative of the number of people each respondent was representative of. Two incomplete or unrelated responses were received and so were removed from the analysis. See [‘Annex 1’](#) for a list of the questions included in the survey.

The survey was hosted on the [South West Regional Fisheries Group \(RFG\) MMO webpage](#). A link to the survey was shared with the Octopus Management Group for members to circulate amongst wider relevant stakeholder groups, as well as being shared in emails and a newsletter sent out to the south west RFG membership. Furthermore, the MMO Communications team advertised the survey in a range of social media posts on the MMO Facebook, LinkedIn, X and Instagram.

The survey comprised both multiple-choice and free text questions. Multiple-choice responses were analysed by counting how many respondents selected each option; where multiple selections were permitted, each chosen category was counted once per respondent. As a result, some graphs and related narrative may include a higher number of responses than the total number of respondents. Free text answers were analysed by categorising answers into themes and providing a count for the number of responses linked to each theme. Where necessary, relevant additional details were included within the analysis of each response.

The scope of “support” was intentionally kept broad to allow industry to propose ideas without being overly directed. However, a few examples, such as assistance with gear adaptation, infrastructure needs, and guidance on specific processes and procedures, were provided as an initial starting point. While the survey does not guarantee that specific support will be introduced, the feedback provided will be used to guide the exploration of options and considering what may be possible.

While the survey provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. For example, the sample size was small, with only 43 responses, and only around half of respondents provided economic information. As a result, findings may not fully represent the wider sector or the fleets referenced and should be interpreted as contextual rather than comprehensive indicators of the impacts attributed to the octopus bloom. As the survey was directed toward those seeking support, respondents who were less affected, or who benefitted from the bloom, may have been less inclined to participate, further limiting representativeness.

Additionally, a range of other anthropogenic and/or environmental factors may have also contributed to some of the experiences reported by stakeholders. Further research would be required to better understand these influences. The absence of named suggestions for support should not be interpreted as disagreement with ideas; the list generated reflects only the options proactively put forward by respondents. Additional, targeted engagement would be required to quantify the support for specific categories. Finally, numbers presented below indicate general responses to the survey and are not indicative of the number of people each respondent represented. Two respondents reported that they were responding on behalf of multiple stakeholders; where relevant, this is noted.

4. Survey demographics

A total of 43 complete survey responses were received. Of these respondents, 93% (40/43) responded as an individual, 5% (2/43) responded on behalf of a business, organisation or charity and 2% (1/43) responded on behalf of a fisherman's association or industry group.

Almost all respondents were part of the commercial fishing sector (98%, 42/43), with one respondent answering as a processor/supplier (2%, 1/43).

As shown in Figure 2, more than half of all respondents' fishing activities take place in Cornwall (53%, 23/43), followed by Devon (28%, 12/43), with one stakeholder specifying they fish in both Cornwall and Devon (2%, 1/43). A total of 7% (3/43) of respondents' fishing activities occur in Dorset and a small number of respondents fish in the Channel Islands, Sussex and the Isles of Scilly.

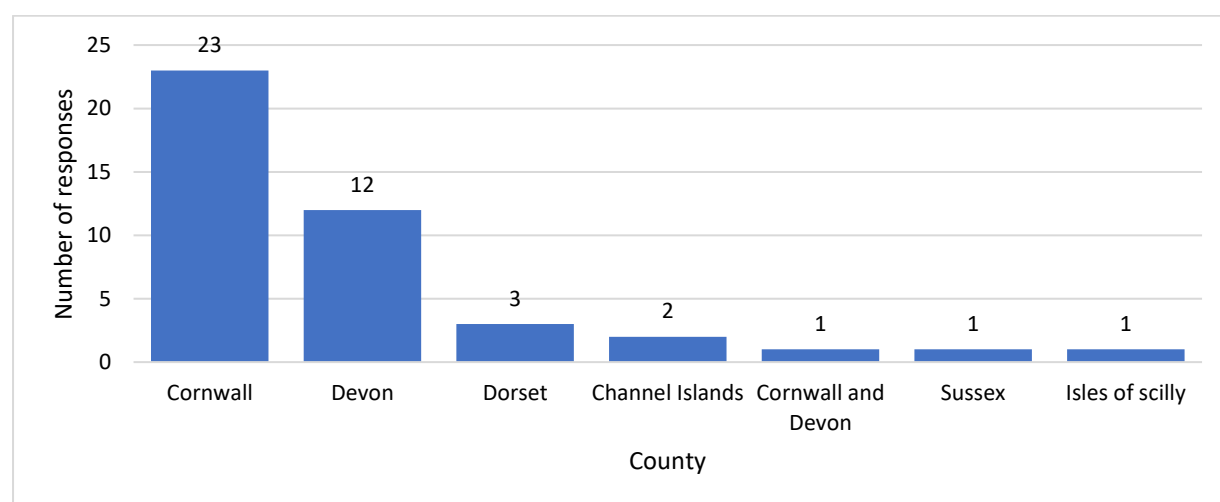


Figure 2. The number of survey respondents that fish in the named English counties. Individual counts for each category have been provided.

As illustrated in Figure 3, most survey respondents fish in inshore waters, with 53% (35/66) operating within 0–3 nautical miles (nm) of the coast and 29% (19/66) within the 0–6 nm region. 12% (8/66) of respondents fish from 6.1–12nm and 6% (4/66) usually operate beyond 12.1 nm. As described in the 'Methods' section above, this question permitted multi-select options and so one respondent may have disclosed that they fish in more than one of the

categories provided. Hence, there is a higher number of responses (66) than the total number of respondents (43).

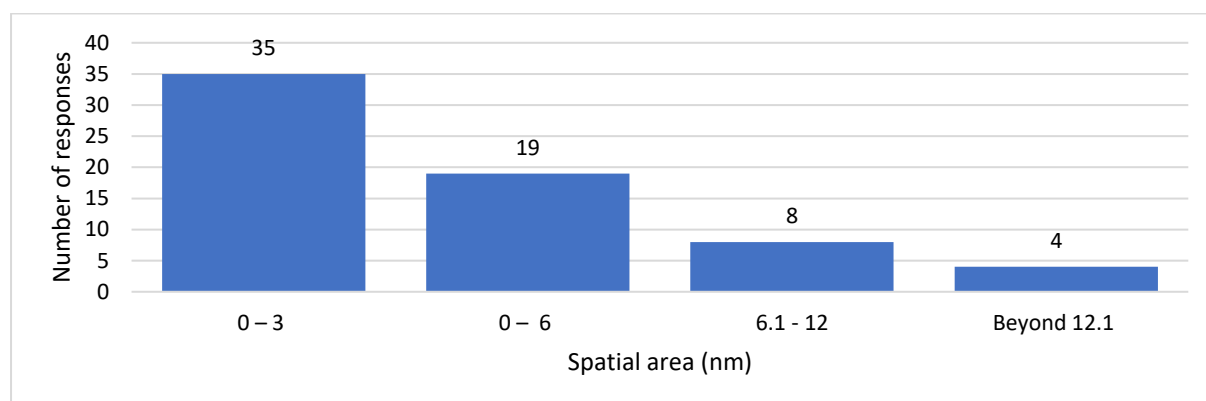


Figure 3. The number of survey respondents whose fishing activities take place in the named distances from shore (nautical miles). Individual response counts for each category have been provided.

Figure 4 presents the vessel size classes from which survey respondents' fish. The data reflect the range of vessel size classes used by respondents rather than total vessel numbers, as respondents could fish from or own several vessels in the same or different size categories. Over half of respondents use vessels 6-9.99 m in length (53%, 24/45). A total of 24% (11/45) of stakeholders in the survey use vessels up to 5.99 m in length. 9% (4/45) of respondents use vessels in the 10-11.99 m and 12-14.99 m category, and two stakeholders use vessels that are 15m and over. On these commercial fishing vessels, respondents often held a number of different roles. 52% (37/71) of respondents reported that they are skippers, 44% (31/71) are vessel owners and 4% (3/71) are crew.

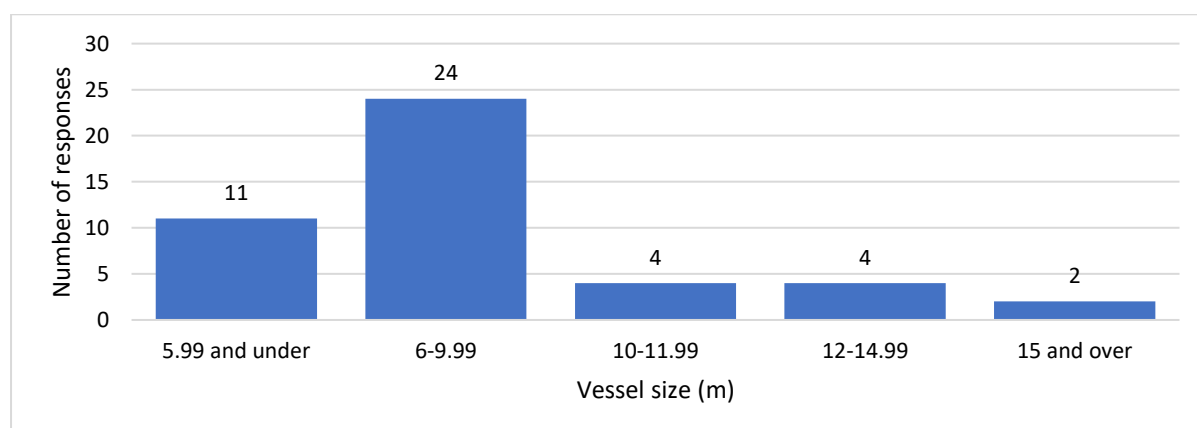


Figure 4. Vessel sizes (meters) used by survey respondents. Individual response counts for each category have been provided.

Survey respondents were also asked which species they are most dependent on catching, or which species usually make up the greatest proportion of their catch. Many reported relying on a combination of species. A total of 44% (34/78) of responses indicated that lobster forms the largest share of their catch, and 36% (28/78) identified crab. Finfish were mentioned in 10% (8/78) of responses, while crawfish, whelk and scallops were reported less frequently, as illustrated in Figure 5.

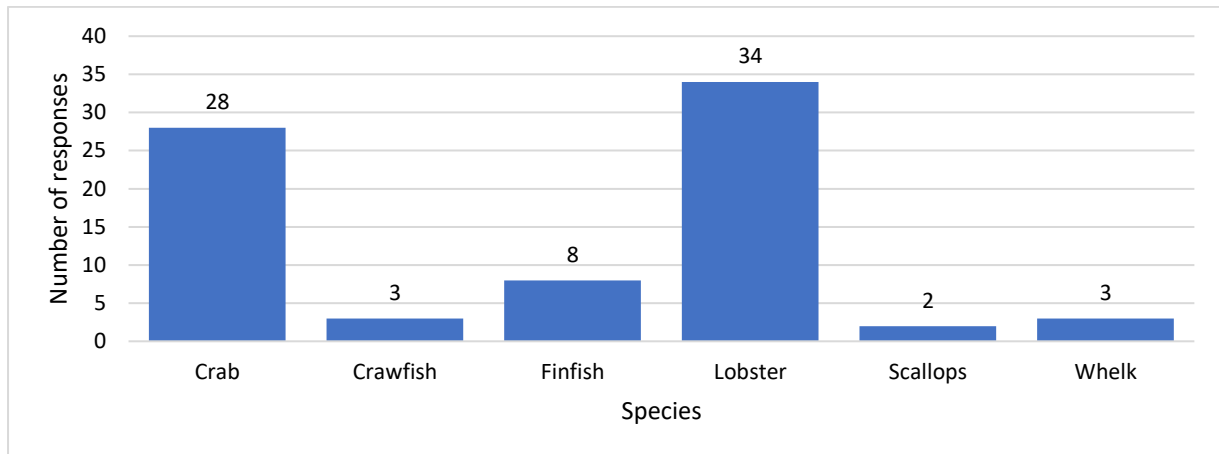


Figure 5. The species that survey respondents are most dependent on catching. Individual response counts for each category have been provided.

5. Economic impact of the octopus bloom

Overall economic impact of the octopus bloom

Stakeholders were asked to provide a general description of the overall economic impact the octopus bloom has had on them.

Survey question: *Comparing your financial situation before the bloom to now, which option best describes the overall economic impact on you or your members?*

- *Very bad - Significant negative economic impact*
- *Bad - Somewhat negative economic impact*
- *Little to no change - Roughly the same as before the influx of octopus*
- *Good - Somewhat positive economic impact*
- *Very good - Significant positive economic impact*

Results

Most survey respondents reported experiencing economic losses as a result of the octopus bloom. A significant negative impact was identified by 44% (19/43) of respondents, while 37% (16/43) reported a somewhat negative impact. A small proportion (7%, 3/43) noted no notable change in their financial situation as a result of the bloom. Positive impacts were reported by 10% (5/43) of respondents, comprising 9% (4/43) who experienced a somewhat positive effect and 2% (1/43) who reported a significant positive impact (Figure 6).

Further analysis was undertaken to assess the overall economic impact by vessel size. In this case, negative economic descriptors were used across all vessel sizes but described most often by respondents with vessels 10 m and under.

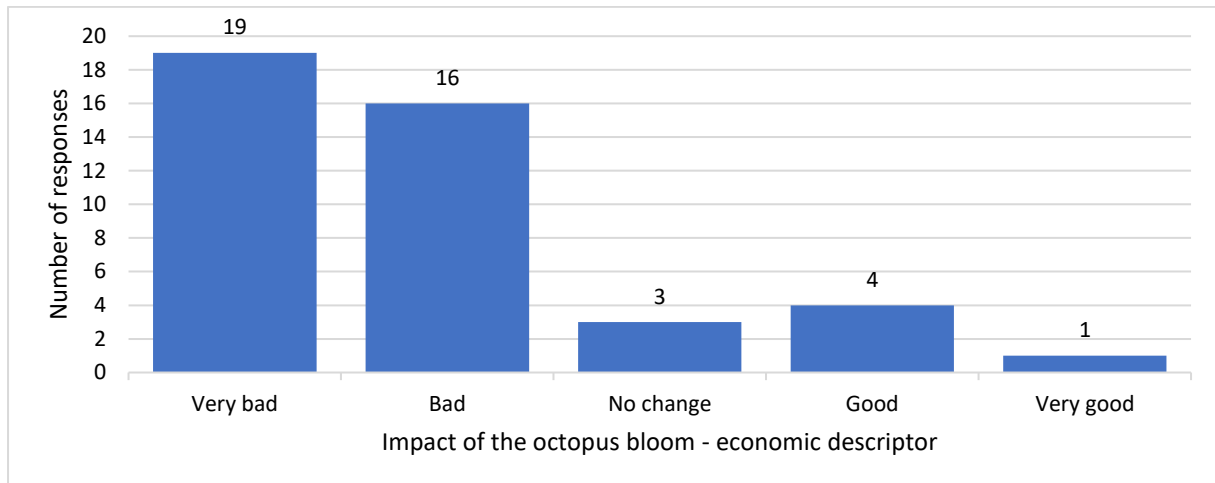


Figure 6. The overall economic impact survey respondents experienced as a result of the octopus bloom. Individual response counts for each category have been provided.

Quantifying the economic impact of the octopus bloom

To help MMO understand the economic impact experienced by stakeholders, respondents were invited to provide estimates of the financial losses or gains they attributed to the octopus bloom.

Response overview: Respondents could either skip the quantifying questions, provide estimates directly within the survey, or supply them by email at a later date.

- **30% (13/43)** of respondents did not wish to share this information.
- **56% (24/43)** selected that they would supply these details in the survey itself.
- **14% (6/43)** said they would respond via email. One stakeholder emailed to provide additional details to quantify their economic experience.

A number of responses received in this section may not have included specific economic information or they may have detailed additional descriptions of economic pressures. Where relevant, these have been retained and incorporated into the “*Qualitative responses detailing economic impact*” section below.

Quantitative responses detailing economic impact

Responses to this question were provided in a free text format. See the summary table in ‘[Annex 2](#)’ for an overview of the quantitative responses received for this question. The full responses are listed below. Stakeholder responses have been anonymised by assigning each respondent a number from #1–43. The figures provided have been self-reported by the respondents.

0-6 nm fishers (targeting crab, lobster, whelk, crawfish)

Negative economic impacts

- Fishers targeting **crab**:

- Fisher #1: reported an 80% loss.
- Fishers targeting **lobster**:
 - Fisher #2: Around 33% decrease on lobster fishing, which a “fair estimate of £8000 loss [compared to their usual earnings of] around £4,000 to 5,000 in September, October and November.”
 - Fisher #3: Reported that their lobster income decreased by “25-50% or more” in some areas during the bloom and “more than 50% post bloom, particularly offshore.”
 - Fisher #4: Reported a reduction of 40% compared to pre-bloom years.
 - Fisher #5: Reported a reduction of 60% in lobster catch [compared to pre-bloom years].
- Fishers targeting both **lobster and crab**
 - Fisher #6: Reported that their earnings were “50% down on lobster [and] 90% down on crab.” They also stated that they made little to no value in octopus sales.
 - Fisher #7: Reported a 75% loss of income.
 - Fisher #8: Reported that their “[overall] earnings [from] August to December 2025 – earnings decreased by 72% compared to 2024 (which was around ~£60,000).” They stated that “crab landings for 2025 decreased over 95% compared to 2024, [and that] the value of crab landings decreased by 93% and lobster landings by 64%.”
 - Fisher #9: Reported that they were “grossing approximately £95,000, [which is] about £55,000 down on average.” They reported only taking about £10,000 for earnings and that the crew has earned around £13,000 for the year.
 - Fisher #10: Reported a loss of “over 75% on previous years income.”
 - Fisher #11: Reported a loss of “close too £20,000.” Their estimates were modelled “based on low impact and marketing our own catch.”

Fishers targeting crab, lobster and whelk:

- Fisher #12: Reported a loss of “£60,000 (a third of our income).”
- Fisher #13: Reported a 50% reduction in catches, “working with 50 more pots.”
- Fisher #14: Reported that “between £100k and £150k [was] lost from shellfish depleting caused by predation of octopus. This is equivalent to 55-60% of [their] income.”
- Fishers targeting **crab, lobster and scallops**:
 - Fisher #15: Reported a “100[%] loss of earnings.”
- Fishers targeting **crawfish**:
 - Fisher #16: reported that they “are down roughly 30% on the year before. However, the percentage of that made up by [their] usual catch of shellfish is down by 60-70%.”

Positive economic impacts

- Fishers targeting both **lobster and crab**:
 - Fisher #8: reported that the octopus bloom helped [their] overall earnings. Providing them around the same end of the year earnings as 2024. *Note –*

unspecified whether these earnings were from catching octopus instead or continued crab and lobster catches.

- Fisher #2: reported catching some octopus (worth £1000), but emphasized that this was no where near making up for the income they lost.
- Fisher #3: reported a positive impact in addition to a negative impact. Noting that “five tonnes of octopus averaged £6.50 per kilo. [Highlighting] that this £32,500 of income [they] did not expect.” However, they noted they lost money due to not catching lobsters.

- Fisher targeting **finfish**:

- Fisher #17: reported that they did “three times [their] usual annual turnover in just three months”

0-12 nm fishers (targeting crab, lobster, whelk, crawfish)

Negative economic impacts:

- Fishers targeting both **lobster and crab**:

- Fisher #18: approximated a 30% loss in earnings in 2025 (£20,000).
- Fisher #19: reported “75 to 80% [loss].” Writing that this was so impactful that they stopped fishing and tied the boat up.

- Fishers targeting **crawfish**:

- Fisher #20: reported a 10% loss.

Note: No positive economic impacts were submitted by fishers who selected the 0-12nm fishing area.

Beyond 12nm fishers

Negative economic impacts:

- Fisher #21 (targets crab, lobster and cuttlefish): reported that “over the two boats [they] own [experienced a] loss of revenue [estimated around 20% of their income (£45,000)] from crabs, lobsters and cuttlefish [eaten] by octopus.”

Note: No positive economic impacts were submitted by fishers who selected the beyond 12 nm fishing area.

Qualitative responses detailing economic impact

Respondents were invited to add “additional comments” on the economic impacts of the octopus bloom via a free text format. Participation in this question was optional. As a result, not all survey participants responded to this specific question. Responses were grouped into themes and summarised below.

Impacts on shellfish stocks

Two respondents provided additional comments on the reductions in crab and lobster availability. One long standing fisher reported hauling “400 pots for as few as four crabs on most occasions. Over a six-month period, daily landings routinely fell below ten crabs, with catch rates now approaching zero for both crab and lobster.” Another fisher noted a marked

increase in crushed or empty shells recovered from pots, suggesting heightened predation with increased octopus presence.

Scallop vessels have experienced parallel challenges. One respondent, who represented nine scalloping vessels, reported poor fishing conditions in area 7e directly linked to the bloom. They explained that scallopers are unable to offset losses by targeting octopus due to two primary constraints: low catchability of octopus in dredge gear and the 5% non-quota species (NQS) bycatch limit, which prevents meaningful commercial retention. These pressures have been “compounded by the expansion of the seasonal scallop closure across the entirety of 7e.” The respondent also highlighted the supply chain impacts of this, as processors are dependent on a consistent scallop supply.

Two respondents who target crawfish also provided additional comments. One fisher observed “around 50 dead crawfish in nets as a direct result of octopus attacks, with several octopus still attached to carcasses when hauled aboard.” They also heard reports from larger vessels operating northwest of Pendeen that indicated losses of “hundreds of crawfish per week.” Another respondent was concerned that this predation issue may be present from the outset when the crawfish fishery reopens in May.

Concerns around the continuation of the bloom

Concerns about the sustainability and future trajectory of the octopus bloom were raised explicitly by four respondents, each highlighting significant uncertainty surrounding stock dynamics and the resulting implications for their livelihoods and business planning. Several fishers noted that both octopus and traditional target species such as crab and lobster remain highly unpredictable, making it difficult to anticipate conditions for the 2026 season. Multiple fishers expressed concern that neither octopus nor shellfish stocks may return, creating a scenario in which the fishery could face a complete absence of harvestable species.

A second fisher, whose primary business is crabbing, explained that the loss of crab and lobster catches “resulted in a five month period of severe financial distress.” Although octopus landings had provided some mitigation against losses in crab and lobster catches, the fisher emphasised that their vessel is old and difficult to sell, and the business is heavily dependent on the availability of a stable primary species. Another fisher stated that without octopus present in the coming year, the business would likely face “a substantial reduction in annual turnover, as shellfish stocks remain depleted.” The degree to which octopus now functions as an economic buffer was highlighted as a major vulnerability, given the unpredictability of the resource.

Increased effort, spatial squeeze and gear conflict

Concerns regarding increased fishing effort, growing spatial competition, and associated gear conflict were raised explicitly by three respondents. One fisher reported that, despite experiencing losses in crab and lobster catches, the ability to sell octopus had provided an unexpected, temporary income stream. However, this opportunity has attracted a surge of additional vessels deploying pots in Cornwall. The respondent raised that this rapid influx has intensified pressure on already limited shellfish resources and contributed directly to spatial squeeze.

A second fisher described a pattern of displacement from offshore grounds, noting that vessels traditionally operating farther from the coast have been forced inshore, likely due to

stock changes linked to the bloom. This has resulted in formerly less crowded inshore grounds becoming saturated with pots, severely limiting fishing opportunities for long established local operators. The fisher emphasised that they are unable to relocate to alternative grounds, and that the displacement pressure now threatens the viability of their operation after 50 years of sustainable fishing in the same area.

Forced reduction or cessation of fishing activity

Concerns about vessel viability and financial hardship were explicitly raised by five respondents. One fisher reported selling their vessel at a significant loss, with their second vessel now unsellable because the crab and lobster fishery has collapsed. Two fishers stated that they had been forced to tie up their boats, with one reducing operations to a smaller vessel and another, in the Channel Islands, ceasing fishing entirely due to untenable catch losses.

One fisher noted that while a small number of vessels had performed well during the octopus bloom, “a larger number” had suffered negative impacts, arguing that a decommissioning scheme is now needed to bring fleet size back into balance with reduced fishing opportunities. Another respondent pointed to the risk of early retirement, citing declining vessel and licence values and the likelihood of financial hardship.

Economic impact on crew

The difficulty of attracting and retaining fishing crews were highlighted explicitly by two respondents. One fisher reported that the sector is no longer economically viable for crew members, noting that crew shares have become so low that they are not considered worth the effort. They highlighted an additional barrier: new recruits are required by the MCA to complete safety training before going to sea, which can cost several hundred pounds. According to this fisher, many potential crew are unwilling to invest this money when the risk of returns is insufficient.

Another fisher reported significant financial pressures due to their income during the bloom being less than their high fixed monthly operational costs; these amount to approximately £4,000 for insurances, vehicle rental, store rental, harbour dues, moorings, freezer rent, utilities, and VMS charges, excluding variable costs such as crew shares, bait, fuel, and gear repairs. This fisher also described that during the second half of 2025, they had to cover the wages of three crew members to retain them. They noted that crew stability is essential for the vessel to operate, as crew members must also meet basic living costs and may otherwise leave the industry permanently. The respondent stressed that there are no spare crew available, and the uncertainty surrounding the fishery is a strong deterrent for new entrants.

Pressure to diversify and the structural barriers involved

Diversification emerged as a significant theme, with seven respondents highlighting the need to broaden fishing opportunities, while also identifying substantial barriers to do so. Two crab and lobster fishers noted that diversification into wet fish or other mobile species was not feasible due to existing spatial constraints, including longstanding gentleman’s agreements that limit movement into other inshore fishing areas, as well as the presence of trawlers outside the 6nm limit.

A common barrier mentioned by multiple respondents was also the lack of access to key quota species. Several fishers pointed to the loss of pollack quota, once an important winter fishery, and restrictions on bass as major obstacles preventing them from shifting effort to alternative

stocks. One fisher described a 40% loss in revenue from a vessel that can no longer target winter pollack, while another emphasised that even modest handlining opportunities (e.g., 500–750 kg of pollack per month) would have provided meaningful financial relief.

Two respondents highlighted the compounding effect of multiple stock pressures, stating that with declines in brown crab, lobster, restrictions on crawfish, and increased predation on monkfish, “there are not a lot of species left to catch” for an inshore vessel. This has left some fishers facing severe financial insecurity, including one who expressed concern about potentially losing their home if the current situation continues.

Within the scallop sector, one respondent noted that the expansion of seasonal scallop closures has reduced access and limited scope for diversification within this fishery. They warned that these constraints may lead not only to vessel and job losses but also to reduced throughput for processors who rely on consistent supply.

Positive economic impacts of the octopus bloom

Two fishers who experienced a positive economic impact during the period also provided additional comments. A finfish fisher in the 0-3nm area explained that this unexpected profitability had enabled them to invest more heavily in measures to future-proof their business. One respondent who represented several stakeholders observed that the beamer and potter vessels that were able to switch from crab fishing to octopus, had benefited substantially. They noted that the sale price for octopus had remained consistently high, contributing to strong financial returns for those able to adapt their fishing practices.

6. Support requested by stakeholders

MMO received a range of suggestions from stakeholders on the types of support they would welcome in response to the octopus bloom. To better understand these needs and help guide the exploration of feasible options, the survey included a question asking stakeholders to specify these forms of support.

Survey question: *Please list the specific types of support that would benefit you, your business and/or your community. Where possible, list each idea separately and briefly explain what positive impact it would have.*

Overview of responses

40/43 support specific responses were received in response to this question, with many respondents providing a number of different suggestions for support. The options for support are separated into the following themes:

Financial support

Financial support emerged as the most commonly referenced theme, featuring in over half of responses (29/40). The suggestions provided under this theme have been grouped into the following categories:

- Emergency funding – Eight responses noted that financial support in the form of emergency funding is required to assist with maintenance and running costs, or to

help those experiencing financial hardship to maintain their businesses or employment.

- Decommissioning – Eight responses referenced the need for a decommissioning scheme to support those working in the shellfish industry. Several stakeholders noted that declining shellfish stocks have made shellfish vessels increasingly difficult to sell, with some already being sold at a loss. Suggestions for how such a scheme could be targeted varied: one respondent recommended prioritising the vessels most affected, another suggested focusing on vessels that fish exclusively for crab, and a further respondent proposed limiting eligibility to older vessels operating in South Devon and Cornwall.
- Specific financial support for diversification – Five responses included requests for financial support to assist with diversification, to help stakeholders access other fisheries. One respondent noted that this would help them be less dependent on shellfish potting should it become unviable in the future.
- Unspecified financial support – Six responses requested financial support but did not provide detail on what this support might cover.
- Funding for ice machines – Two responses requested support through the provision of ice machines.
- Other recommendations for support: compensating fishers to the value of their shellfish entitlements (one response) or provide financial support for scallopers unable to travel safely to fish elsewhere during the seasonal closure due to small vessel size (one respondent representing nine scallop vessels).

Additional support for diversification

As mentioned above, five responses specified financial support to assist with diversification. An additional three responses requested that general support could be provided to help stakeholders diversify into other fisheries. It is worth noting that one of these respondents, however, did note their concern that while diversification is an option, it will put additional pressure on other stocks.

Several respondents requested support for diversification through quota or regulatory changes. Responses included under this wider theme have been broken down into the following categories:

- Increase pollack quota – Four responses requested support through increased pollack quota. One respondent specified that quota specifically for rod and line would help them and another noted that it would be appreciated if fishers could set their own limits for pollack.
- Increase bass entitlements – Three responses requested support in the form of increasing bass entitlements. One respondent specified that bass licenses should be issued to fishers working inshore on under 8m vessels. Another requested that 250-500 kg of bass a month can be landed by all inshore vessels.
- Other recommendations for support: relaxation of NQS bycatch limit for scallopers to allow for retention of bycatch (e.g., cuttlefish or octopus) during this difficult period (one respondent representing nine scallop vessels); relax fish quotas to enable those impacted by octopus better adapt (one response); open crawfish season (one response).

Specific support with gear adaptation

Support with gear adaptation was mentioned several times. In total, three respondents requested assistance with gear changes to help improve their fishing activities more generally. A further two specifically asked for support with adapting gear to better target octopus.

Introduce management

A number of responses suggested that support could be provided through the introduction of specific management measures. Individual suggestions included: setting pot limits (two responses - one referring to crab pots and one to lobster pots); creating closed areas to restrict trawling or dredging and protect gear and fish stocks (one response); establishing set exclusion zones to restrict access for non-local vessels (one response).

One respondent, concerned about the increasing number of fishers targeting crab in their local area, suggested implementing a closed season for crab and establishing a maximum landing size to help protect the remaining stocks.

Processing support

Two respondents requested support specifically for processing activities. One respondent, who represented 37 others in the sector noted that this support would help them diversify their processing operations, the other asked for Government backed processing of octopus.

Additional points raised:

- One respondent suggested that the Isles of Scilly should be reported separately from Cornwall due to notable differences in the (unspecified) fishery.
- One respondent raised concerns that funding provided for gear to target octopus could be misused, noting the belief that most fishers should be able to catch octopus using their existing crab, lobster, cuttlefish and whelk pots.
- One respondent noted that they are dependent on the outcome of the upcoming season before they can propose any specific forms of support.
- One respondent requested that support for smaller inshore vessels be considered separately from larger crabbing vessels, highlighting that the experiences of smaller operators differ, with very few new entrants.
- One respondent expressed concern about the provision of compensation, arguing that the octopus bloom is a natural phenomenon to which fishing is always exposed.
- One respondent highlighted that the inshore potting fleet is an aging community with fewer younger crew and skippers joining. There is a risk of losing this industry.

7. Next steps

MMO will work alongside Defra policy colleagues to ensure the results of the survey and stakeholder's experiences are fully understood, and that a range of next steps are evaluated. The survey, along with any feedback will then be shared with members of the Octopus Management Group and wider stakeholders.

Since the development of this report, it has been confirmed that the only funding route available to support stakeholders will be through the [Fisheries and Seafood Scheme](#) which is

funded from the [Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund](#). Defra and MMO welcome and encourage discussion with fishing stakeholders on how support can be accessed through the funding opportunities available.

Annex 1

Octopus bloom: A survey to understand stakeholder requests for support – Survey questions

Marine Management Organisation (MMO) invites fisheries stakeholders who have been impacted, either positively or negatively, by the recent octopus bloom to take part in this voluntary online survey.

We are gathering information from those impacted by the octopus bloom on what support would be welcomed. The responses will help us to identify economic impacts, preferred routes of support, as well as contributing to the development of a long-term strategy for octopus and affected fisheries.

Although completing the survey cannot guarantee that specific support will be introduced, your feedback is important and will help us build a clearer picture of what types of support stakeholders feel would be most helpful. This will guide us as we explore options and consider what may be possible.

Approximate time required - 15 minutes.

If a large print of this form is required, please get in touch with fmp@marinemanagement.org.uk

For more information on our data privacy policy:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/marine-management-organisation/about/personal-information-charter>

SECTION 1: Introduction

1. Are you answering as an individual or on behalf of an organisation or group? (mandatory)

- As an individual
- On behalf of a fisherman's association or industry group
 - If yes, 'please type the name below' (optional)
 - If yes, 'how many stakeholders are your answers representative of?' (optional)
- On behalf of an organisation, business or charity
 - If yes, 'please type the name below' (optional)
 - If yes, 'how many stakeholders are your answers representative of?' (optional)
- Other (please specify) (mandatory)

2. Which sector are you mainly involved in? Please select one primary choice (mandatory)

- Commercial fishing (including fishers or producer organisations)
 - If yes to commercial fishing, what position do you hold?
- Skipper
- Crew
- Vessel owner
- Others (*please specify*) (*optional*)
- Fish processor / supplier
- Coastal business / Community Interest Company (CIC)
- Other - Please specify

3. Which area/s of English waters do your activities take place in/from? (mandatory)

Please select all that apply.

- Cornwall
- Devon
- Dorset
- Hampshire
- Sussex
- Other [fill in – mandatory]

4. What size vessel do you mostly fish on/buy from? (mandatory)

- 5.99 metres_and under
- 6 - 9.9m
- 10 – 11.9m
- 12 - 14.9m
- 15m and over
- Not applicable [specify why - mandatory]

SECTION 2 – Impact of the octopus bloom

5. Traditionally, which species form the greatest proportion of your catch/ you are most dependent on catching? (mandatory)

- Crab
- Lobster
- Scallops
- Whelk
- Finfish
- Other [specify - mandatory]

6. What spatial area do your fishing activities usually take place in? (mandatory)

- 0-3nm
- 3.1-6nm
- 6.1-12nm
- Beyond 12.1nm
- Other [option to specify that this is not applicable due to different role in the supply chain]

7. Economic Impact of the octopus bloom

We would like to better understand the economic impacts of the octopus bloom (both positive and negative).

Comparing your financial situation before the bloom to now, which option best describes the overall economic impact on you or your members?

Please select one of the following options (mandatory)

- Very bad - Significant negative economic impact
- Bad - Somewhat negative economic impact
- Little to no change - Roughly the same as before the influx of octopus
- Good - Somewhat positive economic impact
- Very good - Significant positive economic impact

8. Are you willing to provide value estimates to help us better understand the economic impact the octopus bloom has had on you? (mandatory)

If selecting > Yes - now via survey < you are indicating that you can and would like to provide an estimate of the economic impact now.

- You will be asked a few follow-up questions.
- This information will be treated confidentially.

If selecting >Yes - Later < you are indicating that you would prefer to provide figures another time.

- You will be able to preview the follow-up questions. Please press 'Continue' through them.
- Please email [fmp@marinemanagement.org.uk] with any estimates of lost or increased earnings you are happy to share.
- This information will be treated confidentially.

If selecting > No < you are indicating that you do not want to share this information.

- You will skip the follow-up questions.

Please select one of the following options (mandatory)

- Yes – Now via survey
- Yes – Later via email
- No

9. Negative economic impact of the octopus bloom (optional)

- An estimate of your loss of earnings as a result of the octopus bloom
- This loss expressed as a percentage of your usual annual fishing income

Please provide these details below (optional)

Press 'Continue' if this question does not apply to you, you do not wish to respond, or you plan to answer it via email at another time.

10. Positive economic impact of the octopus bloom (optional)

- An estimate of your increase in earnings as a result of the octopus bloom
- This gain expressed as a percentage of your usual annual fishing income

Please provide these details below (optional)

Press 'Continue' if this question does not apply to you, you do not wish to respond, or you plan to answer it via email at another time.

11. Additional information on the economic impact(s) of the octopus bloom (optional)

Where necessary or desired, add any further detail regarding:

- the economic impact detailed previously
- what this might mean for you and/or your business/members

Please provide these details below (optional)

Press 'Continue' if this question does not apply to you, you do not wish to respond, or you plan to answer it via email at another time.

SECTION 3 – What could MMO do to support you?

12. Ideas for support (mandatory)

MMO has been contacted with some ideas for support, including help with gear adaptation, infrastructure, and guidance on certain processes and procedures.

Please list the specific types of support that would benefit you, your business and/or your community. Where possible, list each idea separately and briefly explain what positive impact it would have.

Please note: while we cannot guarantee that any specific support mechanisms can be delivered, your feedback is essential. Your ideas will help us build a clearer picture of what support stakeholders feel would be most helpful and will guide us in exploring what may be possible.

What specific support would you welcome?

SECTION 4 – Contact details and data sharing

13. Contact details and data sharing

To include you in any wider stakeholder communications regarding octopus or to contact you regarding your survey responses, we need your permission to use your personal information. If you consent to us contacting you, please provide your details below.

If not, please select 'Continue'.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Your contact information will be used internally only. Any data used as a result of this survey will be aggregated and anonymised.

Please see our privacy statement: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/marine-management-organisation/about/personal-information-charter>

If you are supplying economic information, please provide your name. (optional)

First name: _____

Last name: _____

14. Contact details and data sharing

To include you in any wider stakeholder communications regarding octopus or to contact you regarding your survey responses, we need your permission to use your personal information. If you consent to us contacting you, please provide your details below.

If not, please select 'Continue'.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Your contact information will be used internally only. Any data used as a result of this survey will be aggregated and anonymised.

Please see our privacy statement: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/marine-management-organisation/about/personal-information-charter>

If you are supplying economic information, please provide your email address. (optional)

Email address: _____

15. If you are supplying economic information, provide your vessel PLN. (optional)

We may choose to carry out further analyses of landings data. To do so, it is helpful to have vessel-specific information. If you are not content sharing, please select 'Continue'.

Vessel PLN: _____

Survey close

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

If in the survey you selected that you are happy to provide economic/financial impact estimates at a later date, please email fmp@marinemanagement.org.uk ([opens in new tab](#)) with:

- An estimation of any loss or increase in earnings as a result of the octopus bloom.
- This loss/gain in earnings expressed as a percentage of your usual annual fishing income
- Where necessary, add any further detail regarding the economic impact and what this might mean for you.

If you have any further thoughts or questions about the content of the survey or have any projects and evidence you would like us to be aware of please email fmp@marinemanagement.org.uk ([opens in new tab](#)).

If you would like specific information on applying for grants and would like to speak with MMO Grants Team directly, please contact FaSS.Queries@marinemanagement.org.uk ([opens in new tab](#)) or call 0208 026 5539.

Annex 2

Table 1. A summary of responses to the survey question requesting estimates of stakeholder financial losses or gains attributed to the octopus bloom. Responses were anonymised by assigning respondent numbers (#1–43), and all figures are self-reported. Colour key: green (gross positive impact), yellow (neutral impact / cancelled out), red (gross negative impact).

Respondent number	Vessel size category (m)	Usual target species	Financial gain	Financial loss	Impact category
1	10-11.99	Crab	-	80%	Unspecified
2	6-9.99	Lobster	£1000 in octopus landings but did not make up for lost income.	33%	Catch decrease
3	6-9.99	Lobster	£32,000 in octopus landings but did not make up for lobster losses.	50%	Income loss
4	< 5.99	Lobster	-	40%	Unspecified
5	< 5.99	Lobster	-	60%	Catch decrease
6	6-9.99	Crab, lobster	-	90% crab 50% lobster	Income loss
7	< 5.99	Crab, lobster	-	75%	Income loss
8	12-14.99	Crab, lobster	Octopus made up for losses, achieving same gross income as previous years.	72% total 93% crab 64% lobster	Income gain, Income loss, landings value loss
9	6-9.99	Crab, lobster	-	£55,000	Income loss
10	6-9.99	Crab, lobster	-	75%	Income loss
11	6-9.99	Crab, lobster	-	£20,000	Income loss
12	10-11.99	Crab, lobster, whelk	-	33%	Income loss
13	6-9.99	Crab, lobster, whelk	-	50%	Catch decrease
14	12-14.99	Crab, lobster, whelk	-	55-60%	Income loss
15	6-9.99	Crab, lobster, scallops	-	100%	Income loss

16	6-9.99	Crawfish	-	"Are down roughly 30% on the year before. However, the percentage of that made up by [their] usual catch of shellfish is down by 60-70%."	?
17	6-9.99	Finfish	"Three times [their] usual annual turnover in just three months"	-	Income gain
18	6-9.99	Crab, lobster	-	30%	Income loss
19	12-14.99	Crab, lobster	-	75 to 80%	Unspecified
20	<5.99, 6-9.99	Crawfish	-	10%	Unspecified
21	6 - 9.99	Crab, lobster, cuttlefish	-	20%	Income loss
22 survey respondents did not provide an answer for this section.					