Marine Management Organisation

Cuttlefish Roadshow Summary Report 2026








MMO Cuttlefish Roadshow Summary Report, 2026

Report prepared by:
Laura Lovett

Report prepared for:
Marine Management Organisation

Contents

Contents 3

Executive summary 4

Introduction 6

Roadshow outputs summary 7

Overview and Attendance 7

Key Discussion Themes: Cuttlefish Fishery 7

Cuttlefish Survey Analysis 10

Overview 10

Key survey results 10

Summary of Survey 14

Conclusion 15

Annex 16

Annex 1 16

Cuttlefish Survey Analysis 16

Annex 2 35

Cuttlefish roadshow survey 35

Executive summary

The English Channel cuttlefish fishery (ICES Divisions 7d and 7e) is a valuable source of income for many fishing businesses, particularly within the inshore fleet. Despite its importance, the fishery remains data-poor and is increasingly influenced by environmental change, effort displacement and operational pressures. In response, the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) published the Cuttlefish Fishery Action Plan in April 2025, focused on improving evidence, monitoring and stakeholder engagement.

To support the first review of the Action Plan, MMO undertook structured engagement during 2025–26. This included a stakeholder roundtable in November 2025, a cuttlefish roadshow delivered in March 2026 across south coast ports from Newlyn to Hastings, and a stakeholder survey available both in person and online. This report brings together insights from 38 roadshow participants and analysis of 76 survey responses from commercial fishers, vessel owners, Producer Organisations, Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA) officers, Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (eNGOs) and government bodies.

Key messages from stakeholders

Across both the roadshow and survey, stakeholders described the cuttlefish fishery as highly variable, differing significantly by location and from year to year. Western Channel ports generally reported higher abundance and landings, while some central and eastern areas reported reduced catches or localised declines. In several ports, cuttlefish were described as one of the last economically viable fisheries, although some stakeholders considered landings to have peaked around three years ago.

Environmental conditions such as weather, swell, currents and seabed characteristics were consistently cited as major influences on catchability. Habitat condition was also highlighted as critical, with concerns around siltation, loss of kelp, aggregate dredging and seabed disturbance affecting spawning and egg survival. Offshore wind farms were raised in some areas as having altered local seabed conditions, though some stakeholders noted that artificial structures may also provide additional substrates for egg laying.

A key theme was the lack of robust data. Many stakeholders were unaware that more than one cuttlefish species is landed in the Channel, and most reported difficulty identifying species at sea, particularly when specimens are damaged or inked. There was strong support for clearer identification guidance, wider distribution of identification materials and more practical reporting approaches, including undertaking detailed species identification ashore where feasible.

Cuttlefish eggs and voluntary measures

Egg deposition on pots and ropes was widely reported from early spring. Stakeholders described observing both black and white eggs but expressed uncertainty about egg viability, particularly where eggs are exposed to air, disturbed during hauling or removed during cleaning. While voluntary codes of practice to protect eggs were broadly supported in principle, many stakeholders highlighted practical constraints, including rapid gear fouling, gear loss risk, safety concerns and uneven application across gear types. Interactions with mobile gears and pressure-washing of recovered gear were also raised as risks to egg survival.

Survey findings

Survey responses largely reflected the views of the inshore under-10 m fleet, with pots and traps the most reported gear. For most respondents, cuttlefish is a seasonal or supplementary fishery fished mainly in spring during spawning migrations.

Perceptions of stock health were strongly divided. Some respondents viewed the fishery as healthy or stable, emphasising the short life cycle of cuttlefish and environmentally driven population cycles. Others, particularly inshore static-gear operators, IFCA officers and eNGOs, raised concerns about declining numbers of mature cuttlefish, reduced average size and increased capture of juveniles, often linking these trends to winter fishing pressure and effort displacement from quota-managed fisheries.

Confidence in species identification and reporting was low, with few respondents confident in identifying all species and many reporting difficulties with electronic reporting systems. These challenges were generally viewed as operational barriers rather than unwillingness to comply.

Overall conclusion

The roadshow and survey demonstrate a strong appetite for improved evidence, clearer communication and continued engagement. Stakeholders agree that current data limitations constrain understanding of stock status and the development of proportionate management. There is broad support for management that is practical, equitable across gear types and informed by both scientific evidence and local knowledge. The findings closely align with the priorities of the Cuttlefish Fishery Action Plan and provide a strong basis to inform its next iteration, supporting the long-term sustainability and value of the English Channel cuttlefish fishery.

Introduction

The cuttlefish fishery in the English Channel (ICES Divisions 7d and 7e) has been identified through the Channel Demersal Non-Quota Species (NQS) Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) as an economically important yet data-poor fishery. Marine Management Organisation (MMO) developed a Cuttlefish Fishery Action Plan (published April 2025) with an initial focus on improving evidence, monitoring and stakeholder engagement.

As part of the Action Plan review process, MMO undertook a programme of structured stakeholder engagement. The Action Plan and early progress were first reviewed with key stakeholders at a roundtable engagement event held in November 2025. This event provided an opportunity for initial feedback on the Action Plan, an update on progress of actions, discussions of any emerging evidence to consider, and identification of key issues for further exploration with the wider fishing industry and other interested stakeholders.

MMO carried out further engagement through a cuttlefish roadshow in March 2026. The roadshow was delivered across a series of south coast ports and fishing communities, specifically: Newlyn, Plymouth, Brixham, Lyme Regis, Weymouth, Poole, Portsmouth, Shoreham-by-Sea, Eastbourne and Hastings. The purpose of the roadshow was to engage directly with fishers and other stakeholders to discuss the current state of the cuttlefish fishery, provide an update on progress under the Action Plan, share findings from cuttlefish market sampling and species identification work, explore views on voluntary measures (including cuttlefish egg survivability), and provide updates on developments related to harvest control strategies. The roadshow also aimed to communicate why this work matters for the long-term sustainability and value of the fishery, including the role of improved data in supporting future management.

The cuttlefish survey was first introduced during the roadshow events as a mechanism for capturing structured feedback from a wider group of participants. Following completion of the roadshow, the survey was made available online to stakeholders unable to attend in person. Conducted in early 2026, the survey sought views on stock status, trends in landings, species identification, voluntary conservation measures, and priorities for future management.

This report summarises feedback from the roadshow and analyses survey responses using both quantitative and qualitative thematic approaches, with the aim of:

- Characterising stakeholder perceptions of the cuttlefish fishery
- Identifying common concerns and areas of disagreement

- Assessing stakeholder support for existing and potential management measures
- Informing future review and iteration of the Cuttlefish Fishery Action Plan.

Roadshow outputs summary

Overview and Attendance

The MMO cuttlefish roadshow was delivered between 2 and 6 March 2026 across ten locations along the south coast of England: Newlyn, Plymouth, Brixham, Lyme Regis, Weymouth, Poole, Portsmouth, Shoreham-by-Sea, Eastbourne and Hastings. Attendance varied by location, with a total of 38 stakeholders engaging across eight of the ten events; Plymouth and Weymouth sessions were not attended. Attendance ranged from single participants at Poole, Portsmouth and Eastbourne to larger groups at Shoreham-by-Sea (13 attendees) and Hastings (9 attendees).

Participants represented a broad range of stakeholders. These included:

- Commercial fishers operating a range of vessel sizes (primarily under-12 m, but with representation up to 15 m)
- Producer Organisations (Cornish Fish Producers Organisation & Southwestern Fish Producers Organisation)
- Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA) officers

Engagement levels and familiarity with the Cuttlefish Fishery Action Plan varied, with some attendees already aware of the Action Plan, species ID cards and voluntary measures, while others reported limited prior knowledge. This highlighted regional variation in awareness and underscored the value of in-person engagement to support understanding and participation.

Key Discussion Themes: Cuttlefish Fishery

Fishery status and variability

Stakeholders reported marked spatial and temporal variability in cuttlefish occurrence, abundance and landings across the Channel. Stakeholders in the West of the Channel reported high abundance and landings. Hastings and parts of East Sussex described the cuttlefish fishery as remaining productive and economically important with many citing cuttlefish to be one of the last viable fisheries. While others (Shoreham) reported localised declines or absence of cuttlefish in recent years. Several stakeholders noted that landings appeared to peak approximately three years ago, with subsequent tail-offs, although views on overall stock condition

differed by location and reflected local operating conditions. Environmental factors such as wind/weather conditions, swell, seabed type and current strength were consistently identified as influencing catchability and fishing opportunities.

Data quality and species identification

Several stakeholders were unaware of differing species of cuttlefish in the Channel. Stakeholders highlighted practical challenges in distinguishing cuttlefish species, particularly once individuals are damaged caused by rough sea conditions, tipping cuttlefish into bulk containers, type of gear use (e.g. trawls) and historic limitations in market-level knowledge. Several stakeholders stated that identification would be better placed at the markets.

There was strong support for improved guidance and materials, including wider availability of species identification cards and clearer communication of distinguishing features. Several fishers reported increased confidence in distinguishing common and elegant cuttlefish following roadshow discussions, indicating that targeted engagement can directly improve data quality. Continued use of generic landing codes and difficult to locate specific species codes was identified as a barrier to improved evidence and assessment.

Cuttlefish Eggs, Gear Interaction and Voluntary Measures

Egg deposition on static gears (pots and ropes) was widely reported from early spring onwards. Stakeholders observed both black and white eggs, with uncertainty remaining about viability, particularly where eggs are white or are exposed to air or disturbed during hauling and cleaning. In high-silt areas, rapid pot fouling was reported to limit the practicality of complying with voluntary codes of practice. There were concerns raised about interactions with mobile fishing gears, gear loss and pressure-washing of gear removing eggs from pots, potentially impacting recruitment. Overall, there was broad support for voluntary measures, alongside recognition that practical limitations and regional seabed conditions influence feasibility.

Habitat and Environmental Pressures

Habitat condition was frequently highlighted as a key factor influencing cuttlefish spawning and distribution. Declines in kelp habitat, increased siltation, and seabed disturbance were identified as potential risks to egg attachment and survival. Stakeholders expressed interest in habitat restoration and artificial structures, citing examples such as the use of stacked pots in Selsey to act as artificial reefs to provide spawning substrates and kelp regeneration. Aggregate dredging and longer-term environmental change, for example strong winds and changing seabed conditions were also raised as localised pressures.

Effort displacement and changing fisheries

Stakeholders noted that reduced opportunities in other fisheries (e.g. quota-limited species, octopus blooms), regulatory pressures and the non-quota status of cuttlefish may be contributing to increased effort and interest within the cuttlefish fishery. Stakeholders highlighted the need for improved evidence and monitoring to understand effort trends and support proportionate future management.

Key Risks Identified

- Ongoing uncertainty in stock status due to limited species-level and effort data
- Continued use of generic landing codes reducing analytical confidence
- Potential loss of eggs through unavoidable handling, cleaning and gear interactions
- Limited incentives for uptake of voluntary measures or species ID without financial or operational support.
- Habitat degradation affecting spawning and recruitment
- Increasing effort driven by displacement from other fisheries

These findings align with the priorities set out in the Cuttlefish Fishery Action Plan and provide spatially specific context to inform future review, evidence development and stakeholder engagement activity.

Wider Issues Raised: Other Species and General Industry Concerns

Although cuttlefish was the primary focus, stakeholders frequently raised wider concerns. These included:

- Gear conflict with mobile gears
- Difficulties using the Catch App at sea and the software not working
- Regulatory complexity
- Rising operational costs (including safety compliance and gear replacement)
- The cumulative impact of multiple regulatory and environmental pressures on the viability of small-scale fleets.

Cuttlefish Survey Analysis

Overview

This section presents a summary of key evidence gathered through the MMO Cuttlefish Roadshow Survey undertaken in March 2026. A more in-depth analysis is detailed in Annex 1. The survey aimed to capture stakeholder knowledge, perceptions, and operational experience relating to the English Channel cuttlefish fishery, with a particular focus on stock health, fishing pressure, environmental impacts, identification and reporting, and the effectiveness of voluntary management measures. The dataset comprises 82 survey submissions, of which 76 contained usable responses, representing a broad cross-section of stakeholders including commercial fishermen, vessel owners, producer organisations, auction representatives, eNGOs and government bodies.

Key survey results

Fishery Characteristics and Respondent Profile

The survey largely reflects the views of the inshore fleet, particularly the under-10m sector, which accounted for approximately 62% of respondents (figure 3 Annex), with traps and pots reported as the most common primary gear type, approximately 36% (figure 4 Annex).

Only 17% of respondents identified cuttlefish as their main target fishery (figure 5 Annex), reinforcing that for many vessels cuttlefish represent a seasonal or supplementary component of a mixed fishery.

This is reflected in responses such as:

“Given that I target cuttlefish in the spring it is generally governed by favourable weather… the inshore U10 fleet are and always been governed by the weather so we can only target them when they come inshore.”

Fishing activity was strongly seasonal, with spring (March–May) the dominant period reported for catches (figure 6 Annex), consistent with spawning migrations into inshore waters.

Perceptions of Stock Health

Perceptions of stock health were divided (figure 9 Annex), with respondents variously describing the fishery as:

- Healthy or stable (29 mentions),
- Declining (20 mentions),
- Under pressure from overfishing (18 mentions),
- Environmentally Changes (12 mentions)
- Cyclical variability (8 responses),
- Or characterised by uncertainty due to insufficient data (4 responses).

This divergence indicates sector-specific experiences and impacts, rather than a single, uniform narrative.

Cyclical and Environmental Perspective

A significant subset of respondents, particularly larger mobile-gear operators, framed cuttlefish as a short-lived species whose abundance is primarily governed by environmental drivers rather than fishing pressure (figure 9 annex).

Typical comments included:

“Cuttle catches are stable although cyclic in nature. We believe that the cuttle stocks revolve in a 7-year cycle where stocks fluctuate around an average level.”

Similarly, several respondents emphasised environmental variability:

“Very healthy… effectively a crop as the life cycle is so short and so the size of the fishery is due to environmental factors rather than fishing activity.”

These views were often supported by historic auction landings data indicating long-term stability in aggregate volumes, despite inter-annual variation.

Recruitment and Size-Structure Concerns

In contrast, many inshore operators, eNGOs and IFCA respondents expressed concern regarding declining availability of mature cuttlefish, particularly in inshore areas, and a shift towards smaller individuals in the catch (figure 9 Annex).

For example:

“Every year we catch fewer… not enough cuttlefish make it back to shallow waters to lay their eggs and regenerate the next year’s stock.”

“The larger male cuttlefish have largely been missing from the catches with traps since around 2017.”

Several respondents explicitly linked these changes to the removal of juveniles and maturing cuttlefish before spawning:

“Many more juveniles are being landed… potentially the interception between the mid-channel and 6nm means that immature cuttlefish are being caught that might not have had a chance to spawn.”

Trends in Landings and Fishing Pressure

Analysis of responses to trends in landings indicates four dominant themes: declining catches or size, weather variability, increased fishing effort, and cyclical/ variable landings (figure 10 Annex).

Respondents frequently described increased winter fishing pressure, often associated with effort displacement from quota-constrained fisheries:

“With reduced quota elsewhere, area 7e becomes a dumping ground of effort… we’re seeing increased pressure from larger beam trawlers.”

Size-related concerns were recurrent:

“I think quantity wise the fishery is healthy, but we now have a much smaller average size than years ago.”

Weather was widely acknowledged as a confounding factor:

“After a windy winter catches are better as bigger boats aren’t able to get out as much.”

This reinforces the need to consider both fishing mortality and environmental drivers when interpreting catch trends.

Local and Spatial Impacts

Respondents identified several localised pressures affecting the fishery (figure 11 Annex), most notably:

- Juvenile capture and winter trawling pressure (13 mentions),
- Gear conflict and spatial squeeze (7 mentions),
- Dredging and seabed siltation (7 mentions),
- Windfarm impacts, particularly in Sussex and the central Channel (6 mentions).

The impact of seabed disturbance was strongly articulated:

“The Rampion wind farm has materially changed the seabed… the cuttles are not coming in any more here.”

Others noted that artificial structures can also have unintended positive roles:

“One local impact is the amount of silt covering the seabed… the traps have provided a clean structure for eggs to attach to.”

Species Identification and Data Limitations

Only ~16% of respondents stated they could confidently distinguish all cuttlefish species, while ~33% found identification difficult (figure 12 Annex), and 41% reported not using identification cards because they had never received them (figure 14 Annex).

Operational constraints were frequently raised (figures 15 and 16 Annex):

“Very difficult to manage the separation of different species on a small vessel with limited crew.”

“You can’t distinguish when they’re covered in ink.”

There was notable support for simplifying reporting systems:

“Should this not be done ashore at the processor where it’s safer and more practical?”

These responses highlight data quality risks associated with species-level reporting under current operational conditions.

Voluntary Codes of Practice

Approximately 34% of respondents reported using voluntary codes of practice to protect cuttlefish eggs (figure 17 Annex), while perceptions of effectiveness were mixed (figure 18 Annex).

Many respondents acknowledged the intention of the codes but questioned feasibility (figure 19 Annex):

“Leaving traps out until eggs hatch risks losing gear – I lost £10,000 worth.”

Others raised concerns about unequal regulatory burden:

“These codes only apply to potting – the trawl fishery is not addressed at all.”

Some respondents suggested that voluntary measures alone are insufficient:

“Voluntary codes have limited success… mandatory size limits should be imposed.”

Management Signals and Stakeholder Expectations

Across questions on future actions (figure 20 and figure 21 Annex), respondents consistently prioritised:

- Reduced trawl effort and juvenile protection, particularly in winter,
- Increased mesh sizes or codend regulations,
- Targeted spatial or seasonal controls, and
- Improved science and monitoring, including REM and enhanced sampling.

Representative comments include:

“Only by restricting trawlers targeting cuttlefish will the population grow – it’s the elephant in the room.”

“Management is urgently needed… spatial management of winter trawl grounds could work.”

Conversely, some stakeholders cautioned against premature regulation:
“It’s a difficult fishery – rushing management could have unintended consequences.”

Summary of Survey

The Roadshow survey provides a qualitative evidence base demonstrating:

- Strong stakeholder concern regarding juvenile capture and spawning potential,
- Marked differences in perception between static and mobile gear sectors,
- Limitations of voluntary-only management frameworks, and
- Clear appetite for proportionate, gear-balanced management interventions.

These findings support further evaluation of targeted management measures focused on effort distribution, selectivity, and spawning stock protection, alongside improvements in data collection and stakeholder engagement.

Conclusion

The roadshow and survey showed that the cuttlefish fishery is very important to many fishing communities but can vary a lot by area and from year to year. Fishers do not all see the fishery in the same way. Some, particularly inshore and static-gear fishers, are worried about fewer large cuttlefish and reduced spawning, while others believe changes are mainly driven by natural cycles and environmental conditions. Across all areas, people agreed that gaps in data, difficulties identifying species, and current reporting systems make it hard to clearly understand what is happening in the fishery.

There was strong support for better and more practical data collection, clearer species identification, and management that is fair, proportionate and reflects local conditions and different gear types. Voluntary measures are generally supported, but many feel they are hard to apply in practice without wider uptake, incentives, or stronger evidence. Overall, the findings support the direction of the Cuttlefish Fishery Action Plan and provide clear input to help shape the next steps, including better monitoring, continued engagement with fishers, and careful consideration of future measures to protect the long-term sustainability and value of the fishery.

Annex

Annex 1

Cuttlefish Survey Analysis

The survey (Annex 2) contained multiple choice and open text questions, below are the quantitfied results to each question, where questions were open text, answers were grouped into themes and the number of themes mentioned were recorded.

Methods

Two analytical approaches were used:

1. Quantitative thematic analysis, summarising:
    - Frequencies of responses by category (e.g. stock health perception, gear type).
    - Broad proportional trends across stakeholder groups.
2. Qualitative thematic analysis, involving:
    - Coding of free-text responses into recurrent themes.
    - Examination of narrative patterns by gear type, region and stakeholder role.
    - Identification of areas of convergence and divergence among stakeholders.

Results and Analysis

Fishermen dominated the survey participation (figure 1), accounting for 54% of respondent. Vessel owners form the second-largest group at 29%, highlighting strong representation from those who invest in and manage fishing operations. A smaller group of responses were from eNGOs (6%), Producer Organisations (4%), Other stakeholders (4%), and government bodies (3%).

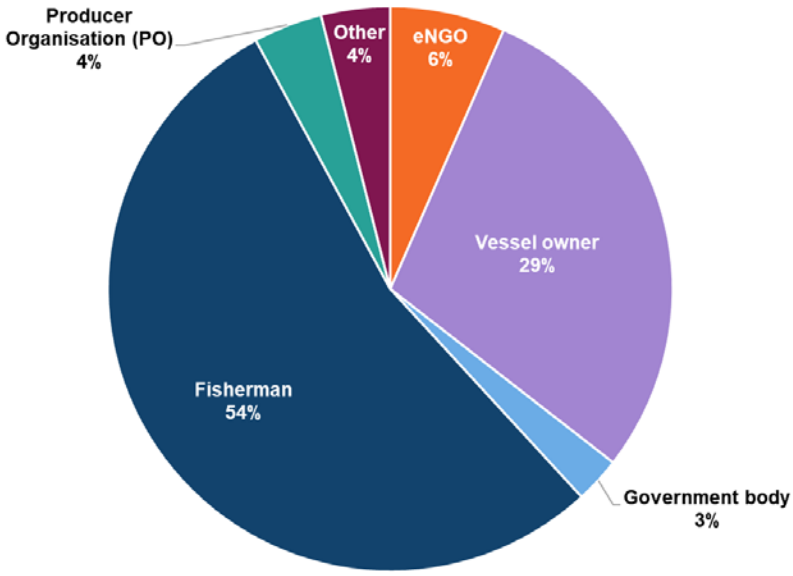


Figure 1. Stakeholder responses to Question 1: What is your role or organisation type? Other stakeholder roles stated by respondents: Auctioneer and Rep non – Producer Organisation.

In response to question 2, the majority of respondents (64%) are not members of a Producer Organisation (PO) (figure 2). Only 20% report being PO members. A further 16% provided no response.

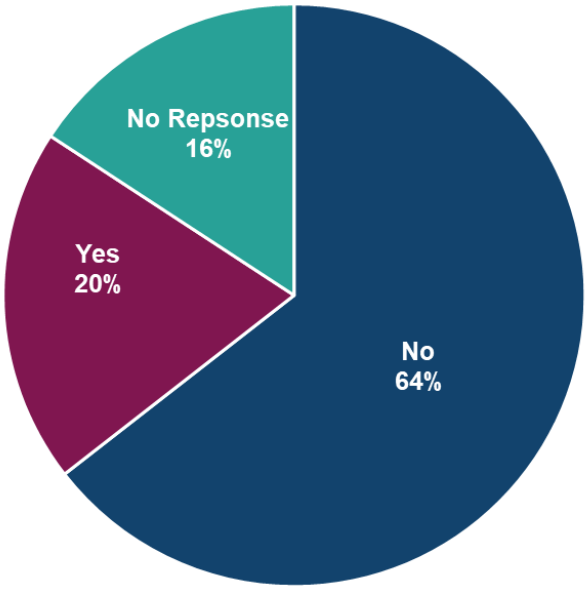


Figure 2. Stakeholder responses to Question 2: Are you a member of a Producer Organisation (PO)?

In response to question 3 (figure 3), the respondent group is dominated by small-scale vessels, with 62% reporting a vessel length under 10 metres. This highlights a strong representation of the inshore fishing fleet. Much smaller

proportions of responsents operated larger vessels: 8% were in the 10.01–12 m category, 4% fall between 12.01–15 m, and 5% are over 15 m. 21% provided no response. Overall, the results suggest that the survey largely reflects the perspectives of smaller vessel operators, with larger vessels under-represented.

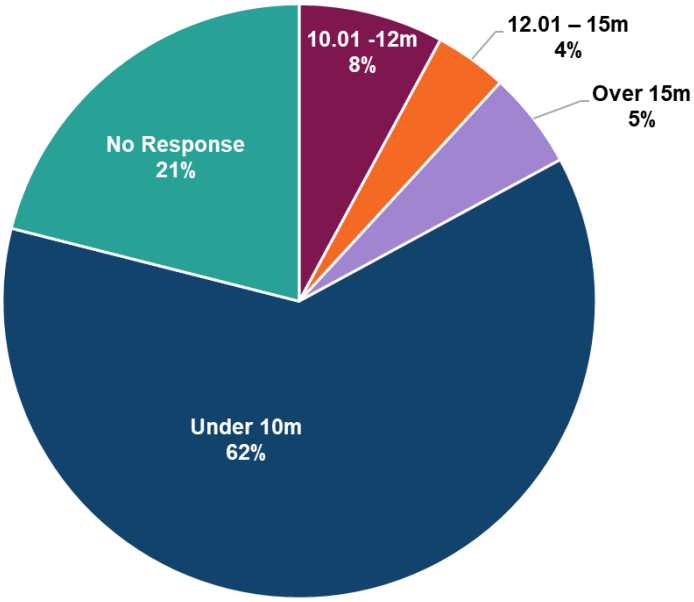


Figure 3. Stakeholder responses to Question 3: What is your vessel length?

In response to question 4 (figure 4), traps and pots were the most commonly reported primary gear, accounting for 36% of responses, indicating a strong presence of static-gear fisheries within the sample. Bottom otter trawls make up the next largest category at 17%, followed by other gear types at 13%, suggesting a degree of operational diversity beyond the main gear categories. Beam trawls represent a smaller share at 9%. There was a 25% no-response rate, which may include non-fishing stakeholders, mixed-gear operators, or respondents who did not identify a single primary gear.

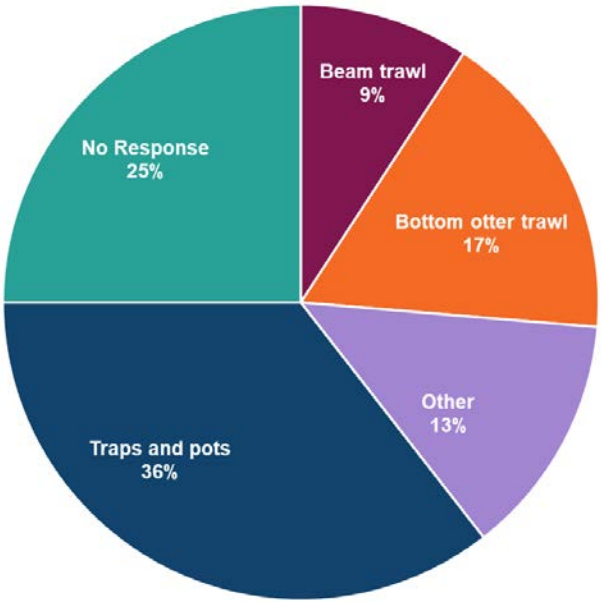


Figure 4: Stakeholder responses to Question 4: What is your primary gear?
Other gear stated by respondents: Bottom otter trawl & Traps and Pots, Dredging/longlining/potting, Gill nets, Nets, Scallop / trawling and Trammel nets.

Responses to question 5 (figure 5), indicated that cuttlefish is not the main target fishery for the majority of respondents, with 55% answering No. A smaller proportion (17%) identified cuttlefish as their main target. An additional 2% reported targeting cuttlefish seasonally, highlighting its role as a supplementary or opportunistic fishery. A no-response rate of 26% may reflect non-fishing stakeholders or mixed-target operations.

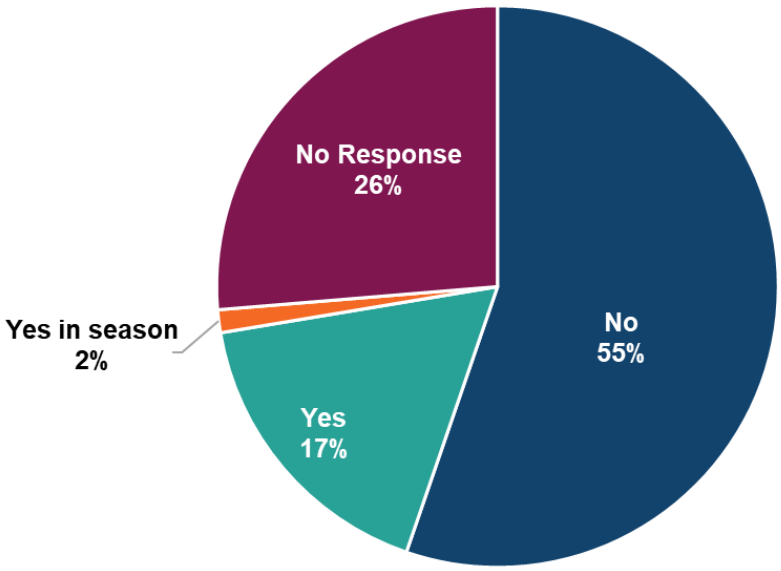


Figure 5. Stakeholder responses to Question 5: Is cuttlefish your main target fishery?

In response to question 6, figure 6 indicates that spring is the dominant period for catching cuttlefish, with 32 respondents identifying this season alone. When combined responses are considered, spring features prominently across many fishing patterns, including spring & summer (8) and autumn, spring and summer (4), reinforcing its importance in the cuttlefish fishery. Far fewer respondents reported catching cuttlefish exclusively or primarily outside this period, with limited mentions of autumn, summer, or winter alone, each accounting for only one response. A small number of respondents (5) identified autumn and winter, suggesting some regional or gear-specific variation. Overall, the results highlight a strong seasonal concentration in spring, consistent with the dominant primary gear of respondents, pots and traps (figure 4).

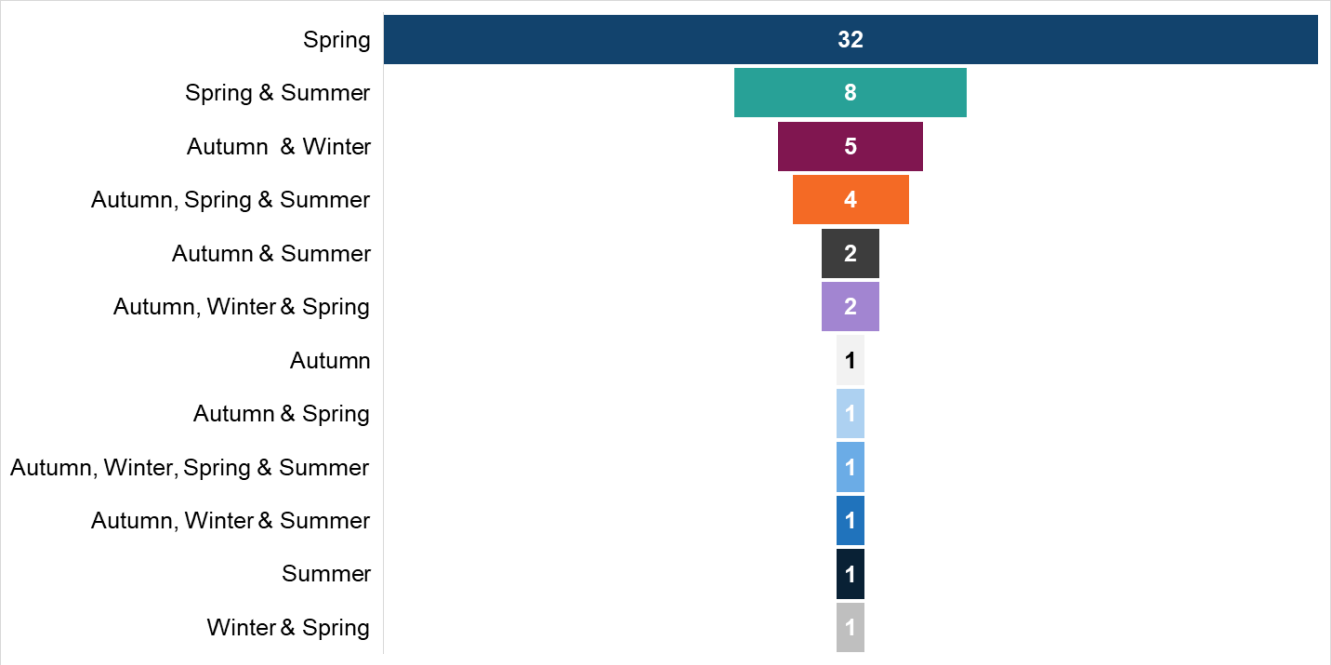


Figure 6. Stakeholder responses to Question 6: When do you usually catch cuttlefish? Absolute number of respondents detailing varying combinations of seasonality, 17 stakeholders left no response.

In response to question 7, ICES area 7d is the primary location for catching cuttlefish, cited by 42% of respondents. ICES area 7e is the second most common. A smaller proportion (6%) reported fishing in both 7d and 7e. Only 3% identified other ICES areas (7f). A 21% no-response rate may reflect non-fishing stakeholders.

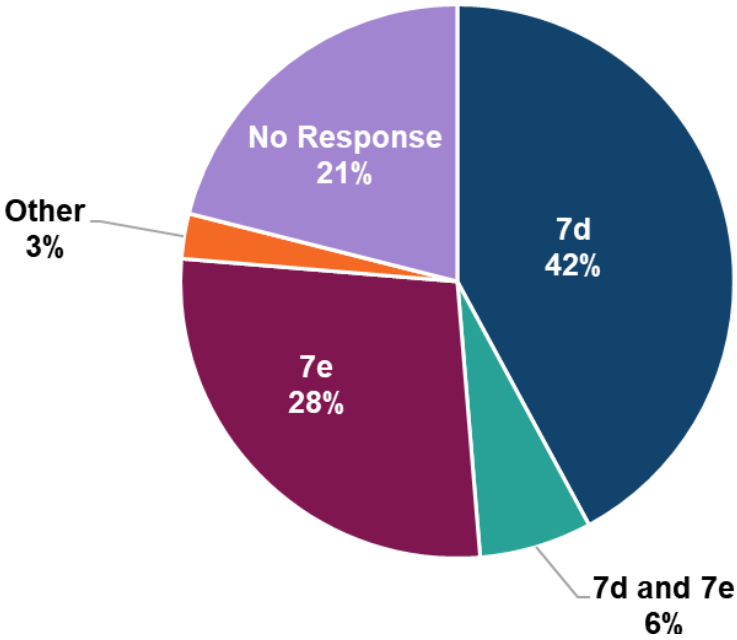


Figure 7. Stakeholder responses to Question 7: Which ICES areas do you catch cuttlefish in? Other ICES divisions stated was 7f.

Responses to question 8 (figure 8) indicate that the inshore fleet operates a highly diverse, mixed-species fishery characteristic of UK small-scale, multi-gear operations. Fishers reported targeting a broad range of demersal finfish (e.g. bass, bream, monkfish, rays and skates), with many describing their activity in general terms such as “mixed demersal”. Flatfish, particularly Dover sole and plaice, alongside brill, turbot and lemon sole were the most consistently mentioned species group. Shellfish (notably lobster, brown crab, whelk and scallop) formed another key component, frequently targeted using dedicated gear but commonly integrated with finfish fishing. Cephalopods, squid, were also important for some fishers, while pelagic species such as mackerel, herring and sprat were typically described as seasonal or opportunistic catches.

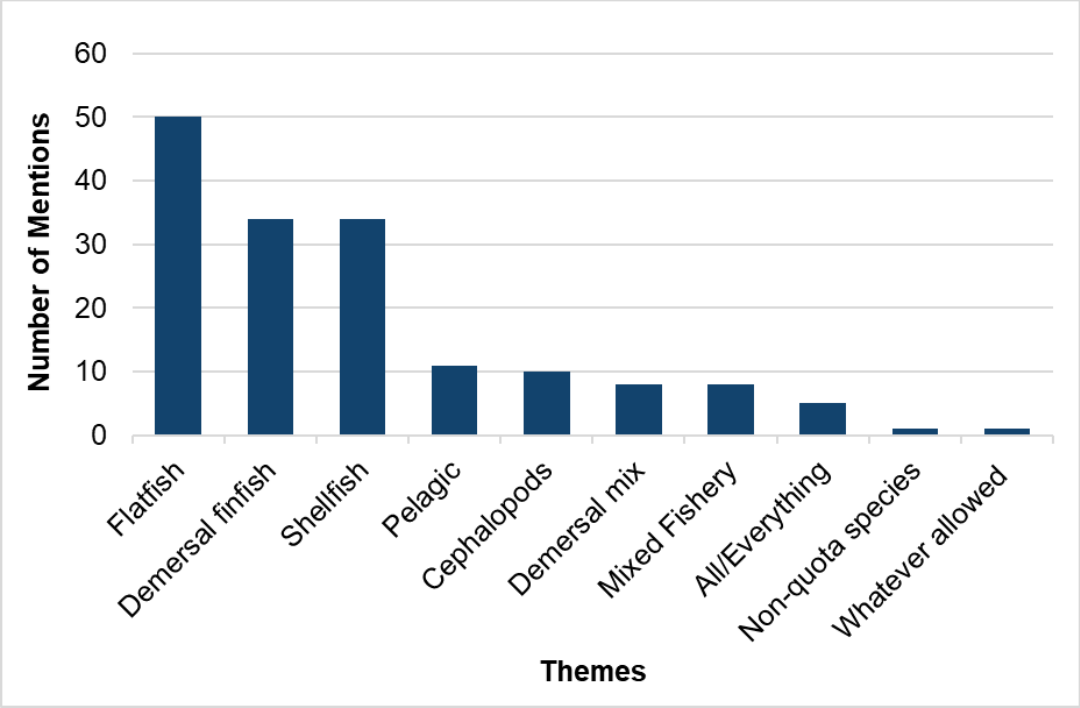


Figure 8. Stakeholder responses to Question 8: What other species do you target? Stakeholder listed multiple species, answers were categorised into themes, 26 stakeholders left no response.

Stakeholder responses to question 9 (figure 9) describe a mixed and regionally variable picture of cuttlefish stock health, ranging from perceptions of stability to significant concern about decline. Many respondents attributed negative trends to increasing winter fishing pressure from offshore trawl and beam-trawl fleets in the English Channel, which were reported to remove both juveniles and pre-spawning adults, potentially disrupting recruitment in a short-lived species. Additional concerns included egg mortality associated with the removal of egg-covered pots and traps, as well as the absence of quotas or effective effort controls in the winter fishery.

In contrast, some fishers reported stable or consistent catches in specific areas, interpreting interannual variability as natural cyclicity driven by environmental conditions. Several responses highlighted strong regional differences, including reduced abundance near the Rampion wind farm, possibly linked to habitat disturbance, alongside environmental influences such as temperature, weather, and water clarity affecting recruitment and spawning behaviour.

Overall, while the fishery remains productive in some areas, stakeholders expressed widespread concern about cumulative pressures, data gaps, and the need for improved monitoring and spatially sensitive management.

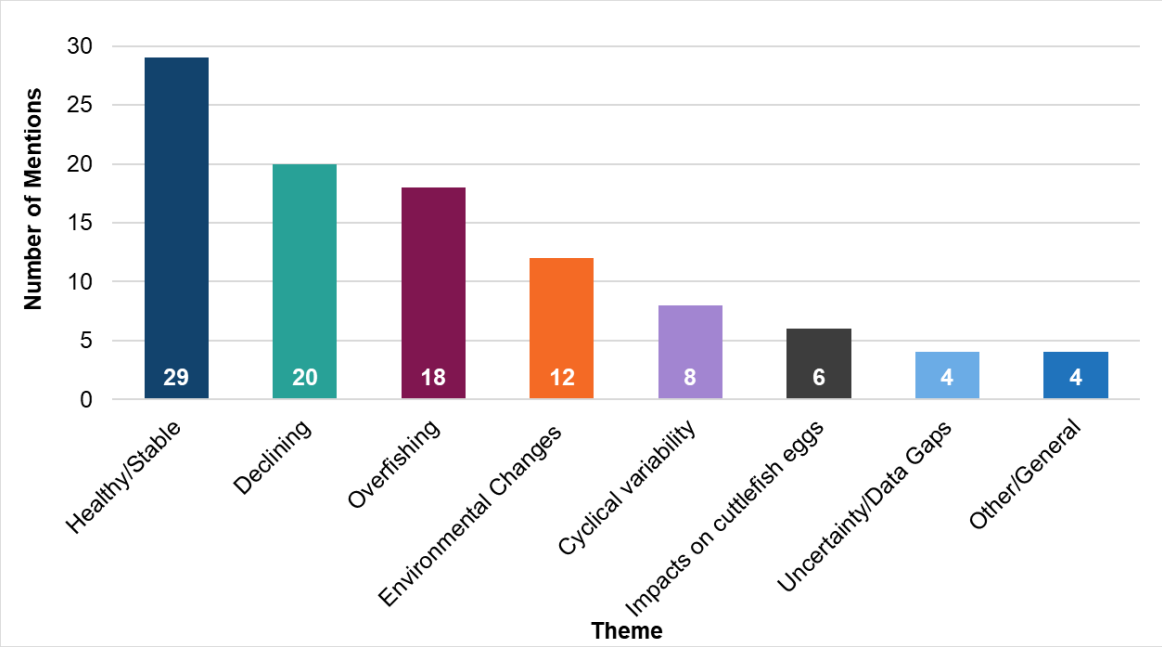


Figure 9. Stakeholder responses to Question 9: How healthy do you think the cuttlefish fishery is? Please explain why. Stakeholder responses were open text which were coded into multiple themes and then quantified by number of mentions, 15 stakeholders left no response.

Stakeholder responses to question 10 (figure 10) indicate a largely negative perception of recent cuttlefish landing trends, with many fishers reporting declining catches, smaller average sizes, and increasing proportions of juveniles. These patterns were most commonly attributed to rising fishing effort, particularly from mobile gear in the western Channel and during winter months, alongside concerns about over-exploitation of juveniles in the absence of size or catch limits.

However, respondents also emphasised that strong interannual variability is inherent to the fishery, frequently citing short population cycles and environmentally driven fluctuations that make it difficult to distinguish between natural variation and longer-term decline. Environmental conditions were consistently highlighted as key drivers of landings, with weather, sea state, temperature, and water clarity strongly influencing catch rates, especially in pot fisheries.

Participants also raised concerns about effort displacement from other restricted fisheries, spatial shifts in cuttlefish distribution, and potential localised impacts from offshore infrastructure such as the Rampion wind farm.

While a minority of respondents reported stable or improving landings, overall, the data describe a fishery that is highly environmentally sensitive and subject to growing fishing pressure.

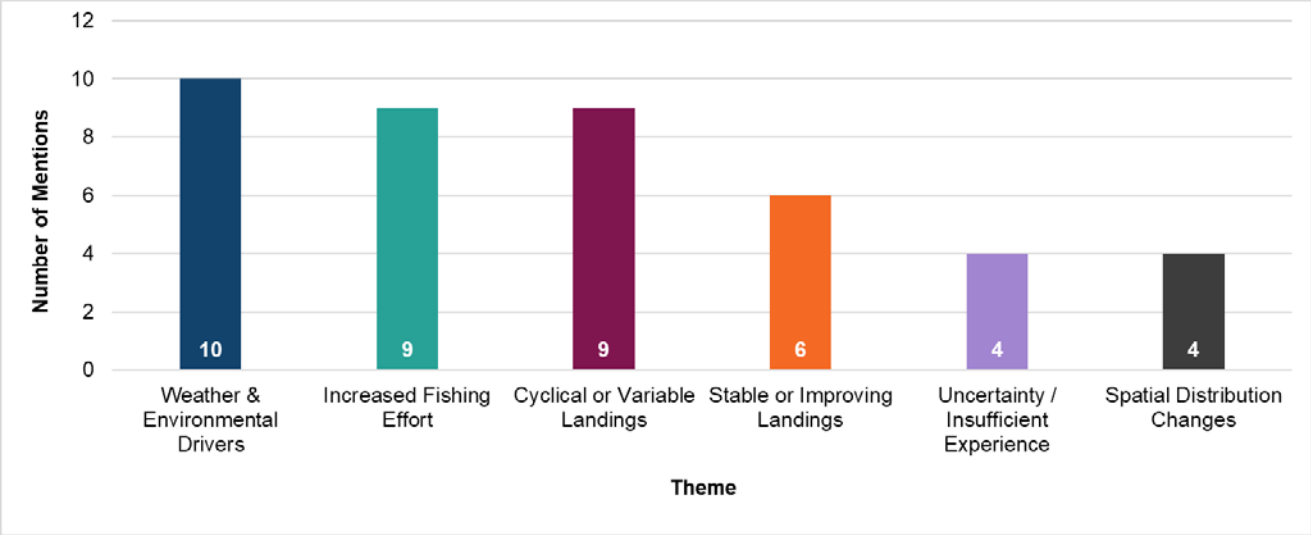


Figure 10. Stakeholder responses to Question 10: Have you noticed any trends in landings over the last few years? Stakeholder responses were open text which were coded into multiple themes and then quantified by number of mentions, 27 stakeholders left no response.

Stakeholder responses to question 11 (figure 11) indicate a diverse set of perceived pressures affecting the local cuttlefish fishery. A prominent concern relates to juvenile capture and winter trawling, which stakeholders widely associate with declining inshore recruitment. Several note that increased landings of small cuttlefish in ICES 7e may be driving stock instability.

A second strong theme relates to physical pressures on the seabed, particularly from dredging operations and aggregate extraction. Fishers reported increased siltation, altered seabed character, and reduced suitability of egg-laying habitat, particularly in shallow bays, which are known cuttlefish spawning grounds.

Marine infrastructure development, particularly the Rampion offshore wind farm, was another frequently cited influence. Respondents reported that post-construction substrate changes and spatial displacement may have altered local cuttlefish behaviour or availability.

Gear conflict and spatial squeeze from fly shooters and beam trawlers emerged as a notable operational issue. Smaller inshore vessels expressed concern regarding competition for grounds and the perceived inequity of differing mesh sizes. Finally, a subset of respondents reported no noticeable impacts or attributed changes to natural variability, illustrating the diversity of experience across the fleet.

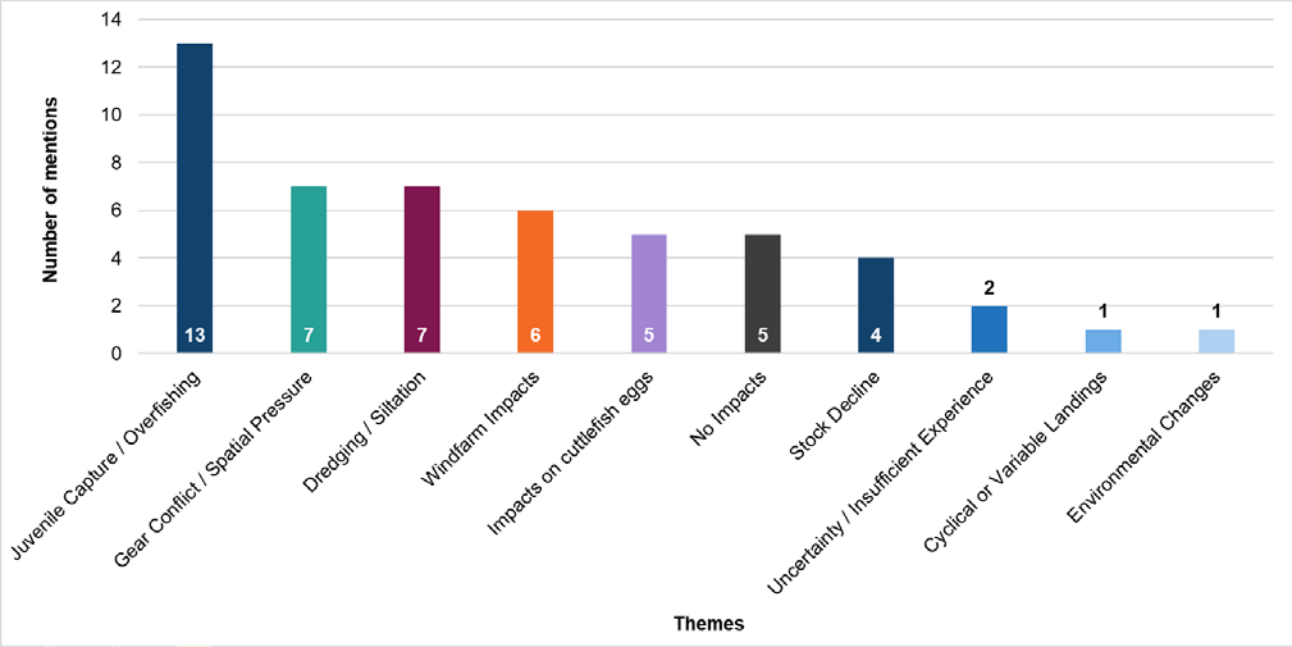


Figure 11. Stakeholder responses to Question 11: Have you noticed any impacts on the local fishery? Stakeholder responses were open text which were coded into multiple themes and then quantified by number of mentions, 37 stakeholders left no response.

Question 12 responses suggests that species identification is a challenge for many respondents (figure12). The largest proportion (33%) report that they find it difficult to tell different cuttlefish species apart, indicating limited confidence in species-level identification. A further 29% state that they can identify common species but not rarer ones. Only 16% feel they can confidently distinguish between species, highlighting that strong identification skills are relatively uncommon within the group. 22% provided no response, which may reflect non-fishing participants or uncertainty about identification ability. Overall, the results point to a gap in confidence and capacity for accurate cuttlefish species identification, with potential implications for data quality, monitoring, and management.

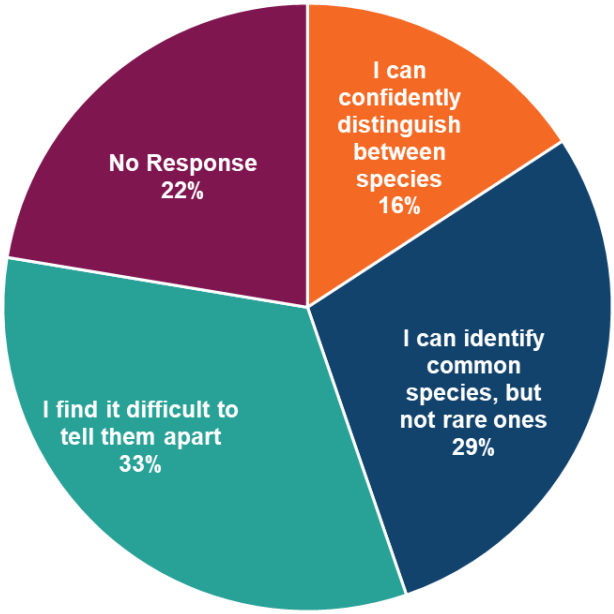


Figure 12. Stakeholder responses to Question 12: How easy do you find it to identify different species of cuttlefish?

Question 13 (figure 13) indicated that most respondents (55%) do not use the cuttlefish ID cards. Only 23% report using them, while 22% gave no response. Overall, this suggests low uptake of the ID cards, indicating clear potential to improve awareness and usage.

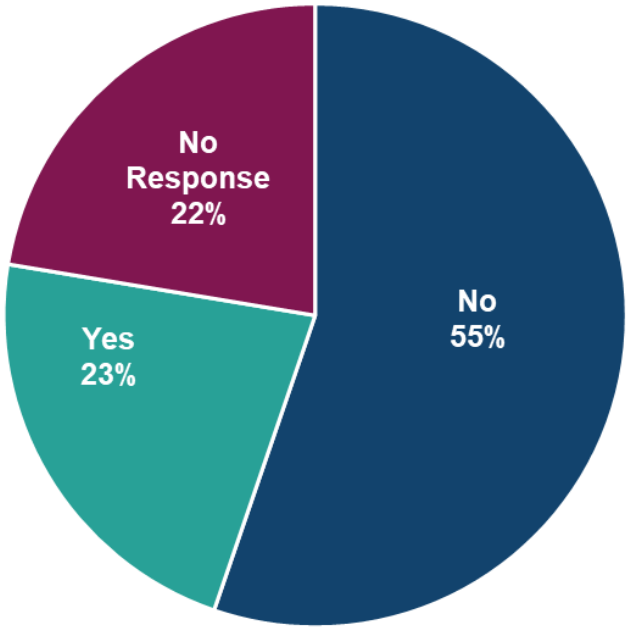


Figure 13. Stakeholder responses to Question 13: Do you use our cuttlefish ID cards to help identify different species?

Question 14, indicated the main reason for not using the cuttlefish ID cards is lack of access, with 41% stating they do not have or never received them (figure 14). Only 8% felt they already know the species well, while 8% cited other reasons. A large 43% no-response rate limits interpretation.

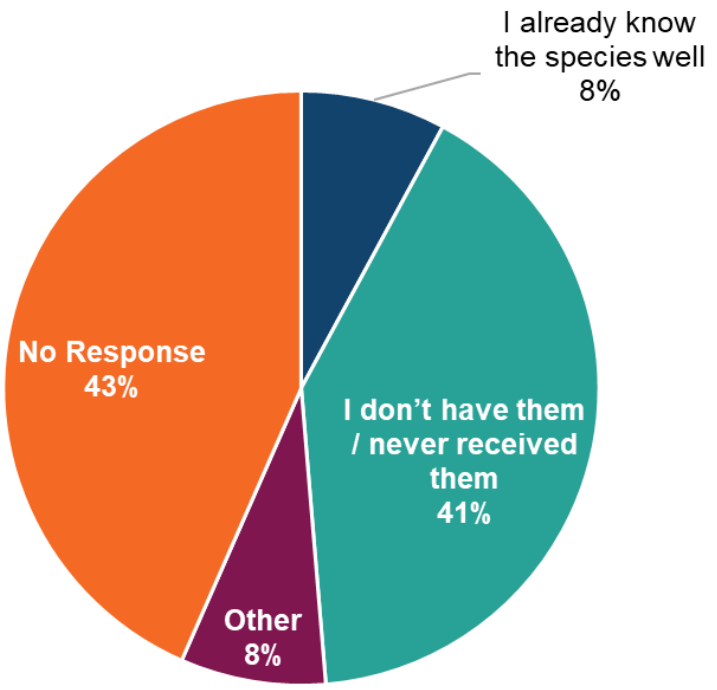


Figure 14. Stakeholder responses to Question 14: Why don't you use the cuttlefish ID cards? Other reasons stated by respondents: Didn't know they existed, Fish always covered in ink, and They are a waste of time and time consuming, need better ideas for egg survivability like floaty ropes.

Stakeholder feedback to question 15 (figure 15) on the cuttlefish species identification cards suggested barriers to effective species-level reporting were primarily due to issues of distribution, physical usability, and perceived benefits. A dominant theme across responses was limited or absent access to the identification cards, with many fishers indicating they had never received or seen the materials. Where cards were known or used, concerns centred on durability and operational practicality. Respondents consistently recommended laminated or plastic-coated cards suitable for wheelhouse or deck use.

A smaller but significant subset of respondents proposed alternative solutions, including barcode-based identification tools aligned with existing reporting systems for other species groups. Some respondents questioned the scientific or management rationale for onboard species separation, particularly on small vessels, instead suggesting that processors may be better placed to provide species composition data.

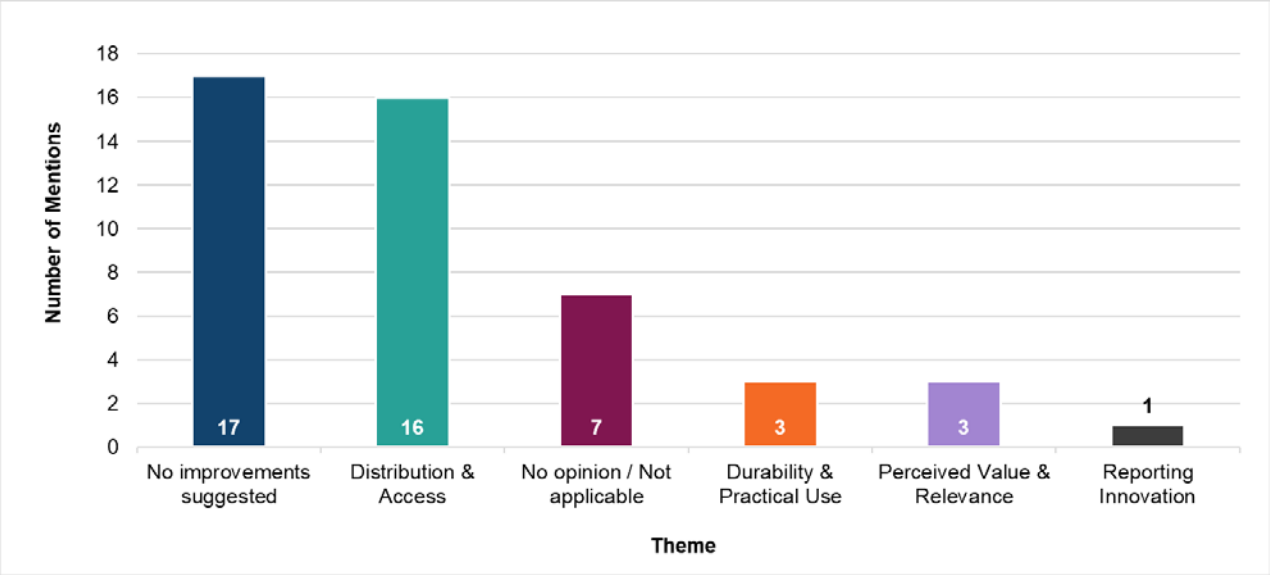


Figure 15. Stakeholder responses to Question 15: Question 15 What improvements can you suggest to the cuttlefish ID cards to improve how you report different species? Stakeholder responses were open text which were coded into multiple themes and then quantified by number of mentions, 29 stakeholders left no response.

Stakeholder responses to question 16 (Figure16) indicated that the ease of reporting species is strongly influenced by the usability of digital systems, the clarity of species identification tools, and practical constraints at sea. While reporting is generally recognised as important, many respondents felt that current requirements do not always align with the operational realities of small vessels with limited time, crew, and space.

The Catch App and electronic reporting tools were the most frequently discussed issue. Views were mixed, some stakeholders supported digital reporting but called for simpler navigation, clearer species lists, improved reliability, and better visibility of less common species. Others reported frustration with app instability, duplicated reporting across paper and electronic systems, and increasing administrative burden. Overall, respondents favoured simplification and consolidation rather than additional or more digital tools.

Many stakeholders highlighted species identification as a key challenge, rather than unwillingness to report. Calls were made for clearer, more accessible identification aids, such as laminated ID cards and simplified or more visible species codes particularly where specimens are difficult to identify onboard. Operational constraints, including limited crew, vessel motion, time pressure, and restricted storage, led some respondents to question whether fine-scale species separation is always realistic at sea.

Several respondents suggested that more detailed species differentiation could be undertaken ashore by processors, where conditions are better suited to accurate identification. In person training was seen as helpful when provided at the roadshow. A sizeable group reported no major issues with current arrangements, highlighting variability in experience across fleet segments.

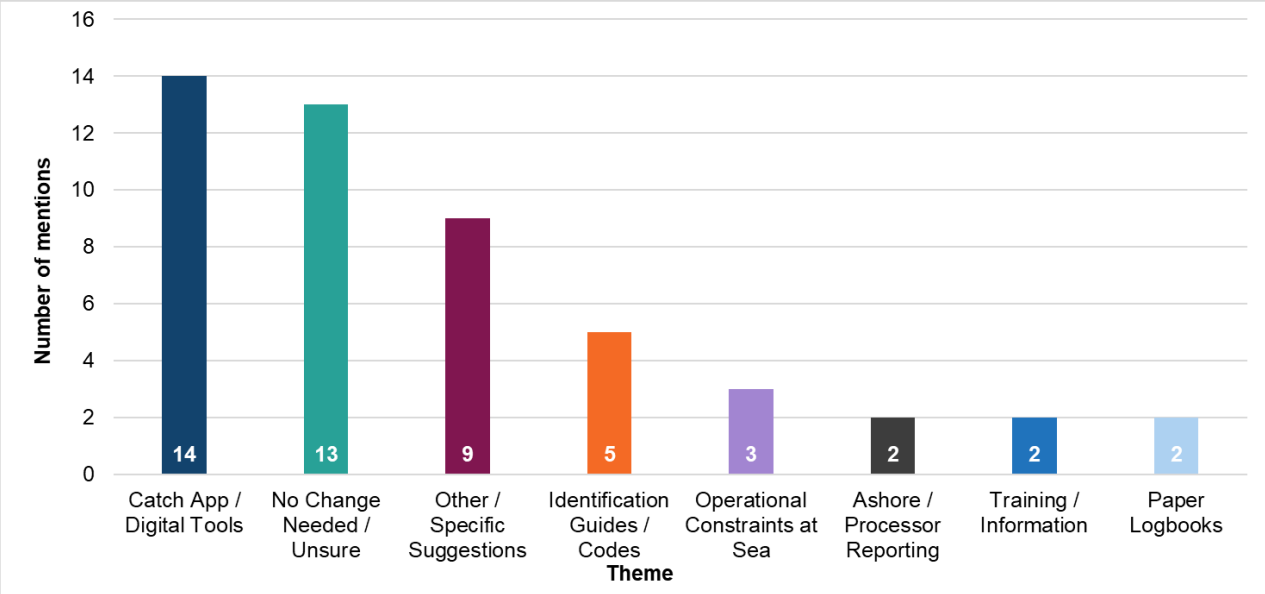


Figure 16. Stakeholder responses to Question 16: What would make it easier for you to report different species correctly? Stakeholder responses were open text which were coded into multiple themes and then quantified by number of mentions, 26 stakeholders left no response.

Question 17 (figure 17) indicated 34% of respondents report using the voluntary codes of practice to protect cuttlefish eggs, indicating moderate uptake. A smaller proportion (12%) say they do not use them, while 17% consider them not applicable to their activities. A relatively high no-response rate (37%) limits interpretation, but overall the results suggest partial adoption, with scope to improve awareness and relevance of the codes.

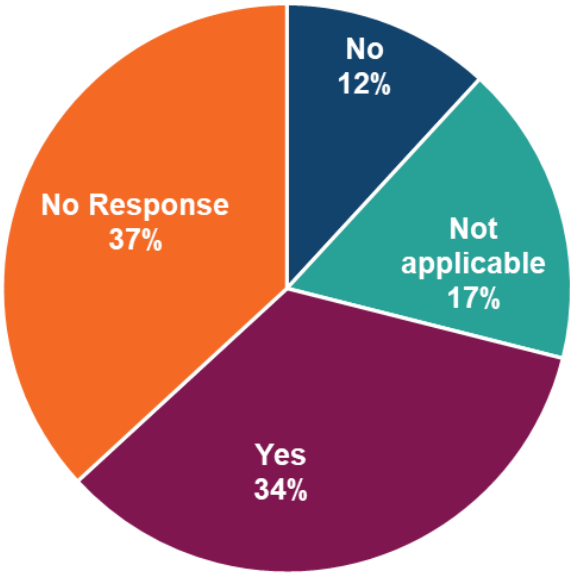


Figure 17. Stakeholder response to Question 17: Are you using the voluntary codes of practice to protect cuttlefish eggs?

For Question 18, views on the effectiveness of the voluntary codes of practice are mixed (figure 18). While 26% feel they help sometimes and 14% believe they influence how most fishermen work, a notable 17% think they do not really make a difference. A 32% no-response rate limits firm conclusions, but overall the results suggest the codes are seen as beneficial by some, though not consistently influential across the wider fishing community.

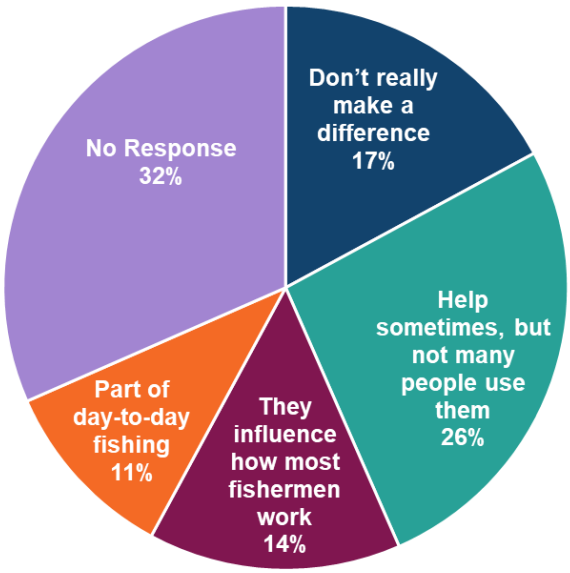


Figure 18. Stakeholder responses to Question 18: Do you think the voluntary codes of practice help fishermen behave responsibly?

Overall, stakeholder responses to question 19 (figure 19) suggest limited confidence in voluntary codes of practice as a standalone management tool. While there is broad support for the conservation intent underpinning the codes, their effectiveness is widely perceived to be constrained by economic risk, safety concerns, and inconsistent application across fishing métiers.

Fishers emphasised that biological benefits must be balanced against operational realities, particularly gear loss, storm exposure, and short seasonal windows. The voluntary nature of the codes was frequently cited as a barrier, with multiple respondents advocating for mandatory, fleet-wide measures to ensure fairness and avoid competitive disadvantage.

Respondents suggested ideas to improving uptake such as co-development of measures, targeted incentives, financial compensation for demonstrated costs, and verifiable feedback on ecological outcomes.

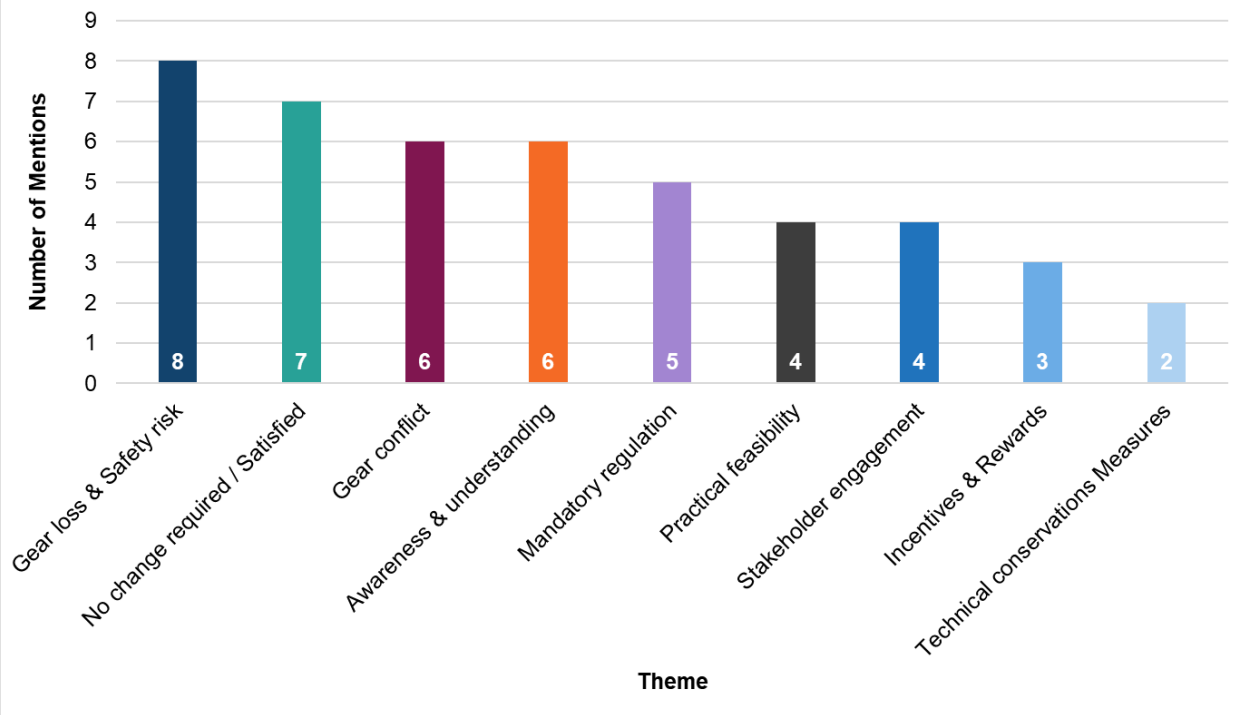


Figure 19. Stakeholder responses to Question 19: What changes or improvements do you think would make the voluntary codes of practice more appealing and encourage fishermen to use them? Stakeholder responses were open text which were coded into multiple themes and then quantified by number of mentions, 34 stakeholders left no response and 4 stated not applicable.

Stakeholder responses to question 20 (figure 20) demonstrate a strong consensus that further management considerations are required to ensure the long-term sustainability of the English Channel cuttlefish fishery. Responses consistently highlight concerns over the capture of juvenile and pre-spawning individuals,

particularly within the trawl fleet, and the perceived imbalance between impacts across different gear sectors.

The most frequently identified management priorities relate to technical conservation measures, including increased codend mesh sizes and the introduction of minimum size limits. Effort and spatial management of trawl fisheries, especially during winter and inward migration periods, emerged as a second dominant theme. Stakeholders emphasised that without meaningful controls on trawl activity, particularly beam trawling, population recovery is unlikely. These concerns were often framed in contrast to the comparatively low environmental footprint of the pot and trap sector. Several respondents also advocated for spatial or temporal closures to protect breeding aggregations and improve stock resilience.

Evidence gaps were raised which included the need for improved scientific understanding of stock structure, climate sensitivity, and the use of REM data to support compliance and adaptive management. A smaller number of responses raised ecosystem-level concerns, including seabed disturbance from offshore developments. While a minority of stakeholders expressed the view that no further management is necessary, citing natural stock variability and short life cycles, the overall balance of evidence indicates strong stakeholder support for a precautionary and evidence-led package of measures, particularly focused on trawl effort, juvenile protection, and technical selectivity improvements.

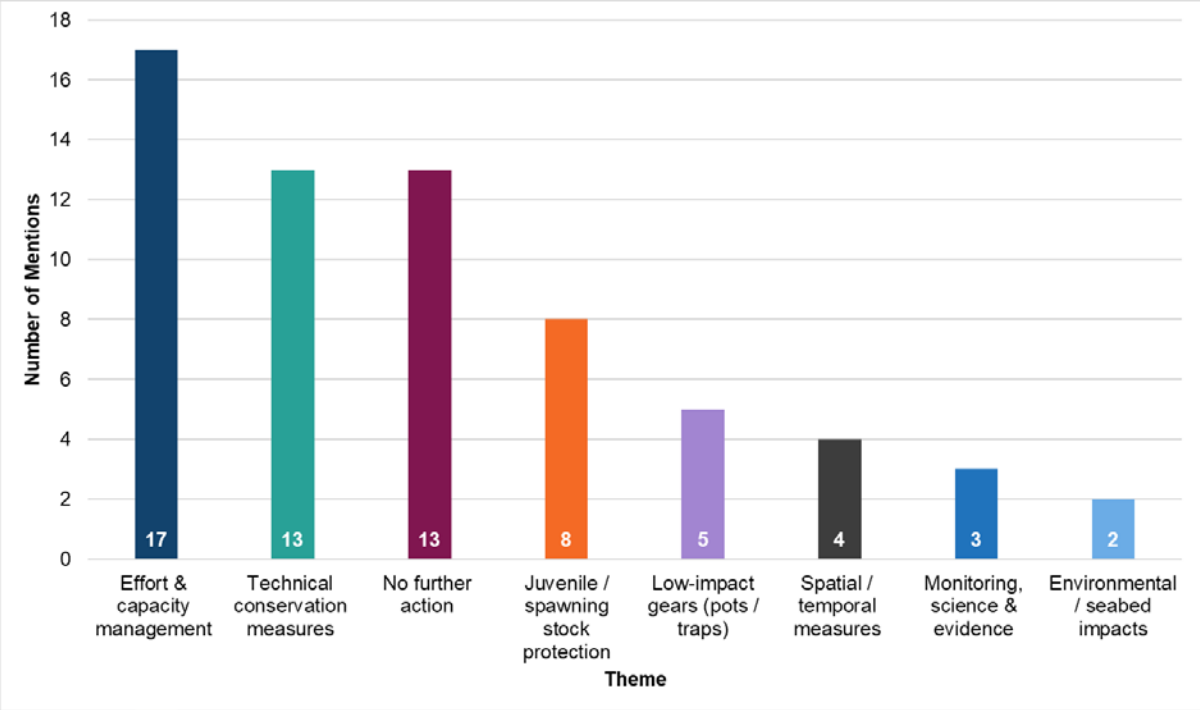


Figure 20. Stakeholder responses to Question 20: Are there any further actions that you think need to be considered as part of the Cuttlefish Fishery Action Plan? Stakeholder responses were open text which were coded into multiple themes and then quantified by number of mentions, 34 stakeholders left no response.

Stakeholder responses to question 21 (Figure 21) identified a consistent set of management priorities spanning technical, spatial, biological, and governance considerations. Views reflected both shared concerns across the fleet and clear differences in experience by gear type, region, and scale of operation.

Many stakeholders strongly supported technical measures to improve selectivity, particularly increased cod-end mesh sizes (≥100 mm), which were viewed as simple, low-risk, and effective in reducing unwanted catch and increasing recruitment. There were frequent requests for effort controls, including quotas and limits on large mobile gears, framed not only as conservation measures but also as a means of addressing perceived inequalities between static and mobile sectors.

Several respondents requested seasonal and spatial management, such as winter closures and nearshore exclusions, aligned to spawning behaviour and periods of biological vulnerability. Views on stock status varied, some stakeholders emphasised resilience associated with the cuttlefish's short life cycle, while others reported reduced sizes and localised depletion, highlighting uncertainty and spatial differences in stock condition.

Environmental change featured prominently, with respondents citing warming waters, habitat availability, and offshore wind farms as influencing distribution and spawning. Concerns about governance were widespread, including delayed management responses, regulatory fatigue, and low trust in trawl regulation. Stakeholders stressed that any new measures must fairly distribute risk, address economic vulnerability, and include mitigation or compensation where possible.

Finally, respondents highlighted significant data gaps, particularly around egg-laying ecology, spatial dynamics, and cumulative impacts. There was broad support for precautionary but adaptive management, underpinned by improved monitoring, better spatial data, and clearer integration of scientific evidence with stakeholder knowledge.

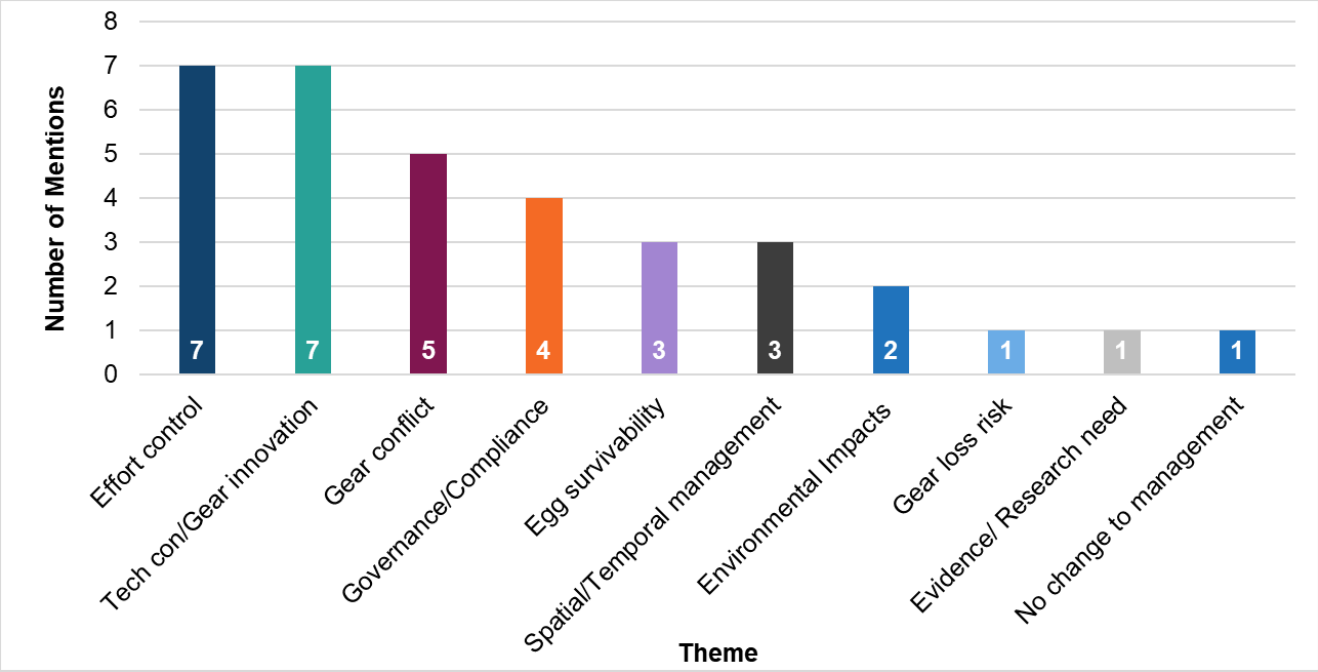


Figure 21. Stakeholder responses to Question 21: If you have further thoughts or feelings about the cuttlefish fishery please share them here. Stakeholder responses were open text which were coded into multiple themes and then quantified by number of mentions, 56 stakeholders left no response.

Concluding Remarks

This survey presented stakeholder views shaped primarily by the perspectives of the inshore, small-scale fleet. While the fishery remains productive in places, there is widespread concern about rising pressure. Stakeholders consistently raised concerns about winter trawl activity, juvenile capture, and declining size and abundance, while also recognising strong interannual and regional variability driven by environmental conditions. Non-fishing pressures, including seabed disturbance and offshore infrastructure, were frequently identified, highlighting the cumulative nature of impacts on a short-lived and biologically sensitive species.

The survey identified practical barriers to effective monitoring and management, particularly around species identification, reporting systems, and the limited uptake of voluntary codes of practice. While there was broad support for conservation goals, respondents emphasised that measures must be practical, equitable across gear types, and aligned with operational realities.

Overall, stakeholders expressed strong support for precautionary, evidence-led management approach, focused on improving selectivity, protecting juveniles, addressing trawl effort, and strengthening data and monitoring. The findings provide a robust basis for future action, highlighting the importance of co-developed, adaptive management that balances ecological sustainability with social and economic viability.

Annex 2

The survey used on the roadshow and sent out to stakeholders to complete online.

Cuttlefish roadshow survey

Introduction
The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) invites you to take part in this voluntary online survey supporting the development of the Cuttlefish Fishery Action Plan, a key component of the Channel demersal non-quota species fisheries management plan (FMP).

You have been selected to complete this survey because you are a stakeholder involved in, or connected to, the cuttlefish fishery - whether through commercial or recreational fishing, producer organisations, environmental work, or wider marine sector activity.

Your insight and experience are essential in helping us understand current practices, challenges, and opportunities within the fishery.

The survey will gather information on fishing activity, species identification, trends, local impacts, and views on voluntary measures. The findings will directly support the further development, refinement, and implementation of the Cuttlefish Fishery Action Plan, helping ensure sustainable, well-informed management of the fishery.

Participation is voluntary and should take approximately **5 to 10 minutes**.

Thank you for taking the time to share your views.

Data Protection:
This survey is anonymous. Please don't include any personal information (like your name, contact details or anything that could identify you) in your answers.

All information collected will be used internally only and deleted following publication of the Cuttlefish Roadshow report.

If you accidentally do include personal data, details are held in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, the UK's implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and handled in line with our Privacy Notice.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/661e5d8b7469198185bd3d77/MMO_FMP_-_Privacy_Notice_.pdf

Contact details: If you need support with this survey, please contact FMP@marinemanagement.org.uk

Cuttlefish Roadshow Questionnaire

Q1. What is your role or organisation type?

- O Fisherman
- O Vessel owner
- O Producer Organisation (PO) **SKIP TO Q3.**
- O Government body **SKIP TO Q9.**
- O eNGO **SKIP TO Q9.**
- O Other (please specify)

Q2. Are you a member of a Producer Organisation (PO)?

- O Yes
- O No

Q3. What is your vessel length?

- O Under 10m
- O 10.01 -12m
- O 12.01 – 15m
- O Over 15m
- O Not applicable

Q4. What is your primary gear?

- O Bottom otter trawl
- O Beam trawl
- O Traps and pots
- O Other (please specify)
- O Not applicable

Q5. Is cuttlefish your main target fishery?

- O Yes
- O No

Q6. When do you usually catch cuttlefish? (Select all that apply)

- O Autumn (September, October, November)
- O Winter (December, January, February)
- O Spring (March, April. May)
- O Summer (June, July, August)

Q7. Which ICES areas do you catch cuttlefish in?

- O 7d
- O 7e
- O 7d and 7e
- O Other (please specify)

Q8. What other species do you target?
(open text box)

Q9. How healthy do you think the cuttlefish fishery is? Please tell us why.
(open text box)
Q10. Have you noticed any trends in landings over the last few years?
E.g. declining catches, catches lower after a cold year / higher after a warm year, cuttlefish generally smaller or bigger increased fleet pressure?
(open text box)

Q11. Have you noticed any impacts on the local fishery?
E.g. windfarms, Spatial squeeze, large quantities of juveniles being caught?
(open text box)

Q12. How easy do you find it to identify different species of cuttlefish?

- O I can confidently distinguish between species
- O I can identify common species, but not rare ones
- O I find it difficult to tell them apart

Q13. Do you use our cuttlefish ID cards to help identify different species?

- O Yes **SKIP TO Q15.**
- O No

Q14. Why don’t you use the cuttlefish ID cards?

- O I already know the species well
- O I don’t find the cards useful
- O I don’t have them / never received them
- O They’re not easy to access when I need them
- O They’re not clear enough
- O Other (please specify)

Q15. What improvements can you suggest to the cuttlefish ID cards to improve how you report different species?
(open text box)

Q16. What would make it easier for you to report different species correctly?

Such as on Catch app, paper log, eLogs.
(open text box)

Q17. Are you using the voluntary codes of practice to protect cuttlefish eggs?

- O Yes
- O No
- O Not applicable – do not use traps/pots

Q18. Do you think the voluntary codes of practice help fishermen behave responsibly?

- O They don't really make a difference
- O They help sometimes, but not many people use them
- O They influence how most fishermen work
- O They're a normal part of day-to-day fishing

Q19. What do you think would make the voluntary codes of practice more appealing and encourage fishermen to use them?
(open text box)

Q20. Are there any further actions that you think need to be considered as part of the Cuttlefish Fishery Action Plan?
(open text box)

Q21. If you have further thoughts or feelings about the cuttlefish fishery please share them here.
(open text box)