



# Fisheries 2027

a long-term vision for sustainable fisheries



**defra**

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Food and Rural Affairs

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## Foreword

'Fisheries 2027 – a long-term vision for sustainable fisheries' will guide future fisheries policy and provide direction for everyone with an interest in marine fisheries. You – our stakeholders – have helped us to prepare this vision. I hope that you will share our commitment to it.

Earlier this year we consulted you on a draft of the vision. We listened to your views at meetings around the country and have published notes of these meetings, as well as a summary of your written comments (see [www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/fish-2027/index.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/fish-2027/index.htm)). Most of you endorsed the vision, whilst urging us to propose how it could be delivered. We have considered all your comments and have made a number of changes as a result.

### 'Fisheries 2027' aims to:

- explain the changes in fisheries and fisheries management over the past thirty years and what we are now trying to achieve;
- set out the balance we will strike between economic, social and environmental priorities;
- clarify, through nine vision statements, the elements of sustainability;
- identify the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in achieving sustainability;
- summarise the economic, social and environmental benefits and costs of delivering the vision.

Our focus in 'Fisheries 2027' is on activities in England and within British Fisheries Limits adjacent to England. But Defra has a wider interest in encouraging good management of the marine environment. So it is crucial that we also work at UK and international levels if we are to stimulate real change.

With 'Fisheries 2027' we are also publishing a draft implementation plan. We look forward to working with you to develop a shared contract to deliver 'Fisheries 2027' together.



**Jonathan Shaw MP**  
Minister for Marine,  
Landscape and Rural Affairs; and  
Minister for the South East



Jonathan Shaw MP visiting fishmonger in Newhaven



## Working towards 2027

### Where we have come from

Thirty years ago, the fishing industry and Government fisheries policy focused mainly on harvesting fish as food for the country. The Government's main interest was in boosting fishing activity, because stocks were generally buoyant and there was limited understanding of, or concern about, the environmental impact of the fisheries sector. The fishing industry had a high political profile and received widespread public support as a provider of food in difficult and often dangerous conditions. But fishing was opportunistic and paid little attention to consumer demand.

This approach in European Union (EU) waters, coupled with unresponsive management and other factors, led to the over-exploitation and depletion of many commercial fish stocks. This in turn has had high economic, social and environmental costs.

### Where we are

We have come a long way over the past thirty years and change continues as we develop our management framework. The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) was reformed in 2002 to facilitate the achievement of sustainable fisheries and some fisheries are now managed sustainably. The English fleet is now much smaller, and the industry recognises the need for sustainable fisheries and a healthy marine environment. Fishermen are working with scientists to reduce the environmental impact, and improve the sustainability, of fishing. Processors are putting in place more robust traceability mechanisms; consumers are increasingly demanding sustainably-caught fish; and retailers are taking steps to ensure that their purchasing policies are sustainable. We now recognise the economic and social value of recreational fishing and the potential for conflict for access to a shared resource. These changes are encouraging, but across the EU we are still catching too many fish of some species, and the greatest negative impact on the marine environment as a whole is caused by unsustainable fishing. More needs to be done to secure a sustainable future for fisheries businesses, recreation and for the health of our seas and oceans.

### Where we are going

A sustainable fisheries sector is essential for delivering the Government's vision of *clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas*. Fish and shellfish are a valuable resource shared between communities, regions and nations: we all have a role in making sure that they are used sustainably. Government's role is to manage this asset on behalf of society and to get the most benefits for today's citizens and future generations. The few in society who catch fish are responsible for doing so efficiently. This means getting the best possible economic and social benefits from fishing for the least environmental cost – including safeguarding stocks for the future. It is the role of processors and retailers in the supply chain to act sustainably, and the consumer's role is to choose sustainably.

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## In 2027 fisheries management secures long-term benefits for the whole of society

### Where we will be in 2027

We believe that in twenty years' time the fisheries sector will look very different, because of external factors such as climate change, as well as our own actions. This is what we envisage for the future:

Climate change has altered the abundance and distribution of fish stocks in EU waters – but fish are abundant, diverse and of an appropriate age structure – and commercial and recreational fishermen share them. Fisheries management is dealing effectively with natural fluctuations in fish stocks and with the actual and likely impacts of climate change. The full global environmental impact of the whole fisheries supply chain is acceptable.

Fisheries are not managed in isolation, but as one of many uses of the marine environment within a system of marine planning, using an ecosystem-based approach. This system secures space for fishing – both commercial and recreational – and minimises conflict with other uses of the sea.

All consumers now expect fish to be caught in an environmentally responsible way, and are willing to try different types of fish. They prefer locally caught seafood that provides a direct social and economic benefit to coastal communities. Fishing businesses are responsive to local demand and market their products actively. Commercial fishing is supplying what customers want. It is fully integrated into the supply chain, and processors and retailers recognise the uncertainties of using a wild, seasonal resource. A significant amount of the fish we eat is farmed and the environmental impacts of aquaculture are acceptable.

In 2027 fisheries management secures long-term benefits for the whole of society. The overall priority of fisheries management is to get the best possible long-term economic benefits for society through effective management and moderate levels of exploitation, within the two following constraints:

- Fishing is managed according to an ecosystem-based approach, including use of the precautionary approach to make sure that we maintain healthy ecosystems and protect rare, vulnerable or valued species and habitats. This means more environmental protection than before, especially in the context of climate change and the need to increase the resilience of the marine environment.
- Access to fisheries continues to be available to small-scale fishing vessels, even if in some cases that is not the most economically efficient way of harvesting the resource. This is because the wider economic, social and environmental benefits of small-scale fishing can outweigh the comparative inefficiency in harvesting the resource and make a significant economic and social contribution to the lives of individuals and coastal communities, for example, by providing jobs, attracting tourists, providing high-quality fresh fish and maintaining the character and cultural identity of small ports throughout England.

The elements of sustainability are set out in more detail in the following vision statements:



## Vision Statements

### In 2027:

#### 1. Economic returns are optimised

- In most cases fish stocks and access to use them, either commercially or recreationally, are managed to maximise the long-term economic return to society.
- Businesses in the fisheries sector take long-term strategic decisions and manage risks effectively.
- Businesses and individuals are subject to clear and proportionate regulation which does not impose unnecessary costs.
- The costs of fisheries management and enforcement are good value for money and shared amongst those who benefit.
- The quality, and therefore price, of fish is maximised throughout the supply chain, and waste is minimised.
- Commercial and recreational fishermen are rewarded in the market by preferential sourcing and a price premium for products with minimal environmental impact and high quality product.
- The fisheries sector is internationally competitive.

#### 2. There are rights of access to fisheries coupled with clear responsibilities

- Recreational and commercial fishermen share access to fisheries. Economically efficient commercial operators have access to most of the resource; some of the resource is used to deliver wider social benefits and for recreational purposes.
- There is a cost associated with accessing fisheries and this reflects the environmental cost of the activity.
- Those who access a fishery are involved in related decision-making.
- Those who access or manage fisheries quota have clear responsibilities and are held accountable for their actions.

#### 3. Stocks are plentiful and sustainably harvested

- Catch levels optimise the long-term economic benefits including ensuring that stocks are not over-exploited.
- People who catch fish respond to changing stock levels to prevent the risk of over-exploitation.
- Fish and fish products (including those not for human consumption) are bought only from sustainably managed stocks or sustainable aquaculture operations.

#### 4. Fishing activity contributes to coastal communities

- Fisheries contribute to the local economies and culture of coastal communities.
- Fishing communities are resilient and diverse enough to withstand fluctuations in the availability of fishing opportunities.

#### 5. The environmental impact of producing and consuming fish products is acceptable

- There are clearly defined criteria for the acceptable level of environmental impact caused by the fisheries supply chain, from sea to plate.
- Only environmentally acceptable methods are used and the environmental cost of producing fish products throughout the whole supply chain is included in their price.
- Discarding is not at a level that has any significant impact on fish stocks or the marine environment and methods to improve catch selectivity and reduce the environmental impact, including greenhouse gas emissions, of the whole supply chain, are continually developed and used.



- Processors, retailers and others invest only in those fisheries operations in the UK or overseas that are environmentally acceptable.
- Management decisions take account of the global environment, rather than focusing only on environmental impact in England or English waters.

**6. A Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is delivering sustainable fisheries**

- Regulation is clear and proportionate; it is efficient, effective and clearly explained; it does not change on an annual basis but is reviewed as necessary and is responsive to changes in the natural or business environment.
- Policies do not result in unintended negative impacts such as high discarding. Planning and decision-making are for the long term, including taking into account the impacts of climate change.
- EU fisheries, environment, and development policy are coherent.
- There is a level playing field for the enforcement of rules across the EU and high levels of compliance.
- People who access fisheries support the regulation in place.

**7. Management is integrated and devolved to the most appropriate national, regional or local level**

- Fisheries are managed as one of many activities in the marine environment, using an ecosystem-based approach, and are taken into account properly in marine planning.
- Fisheries are managed within a flexible framework that allows local and regional managers to anticipate and respond quickly to changing circumstances.
- Those with a stake in the marine environment have a role in decisions that affect them.

**8. Management is responsive and based on agreed criteria for assessing impacts on stocks and the environment more widely**

- Fisheries management is informed by good data and understanding of fish, stocks, fisheries industries and ecosystems.
- Stakeholders play a part in the science and in collecting data – their input is valued by scientists and they respect science-based management.
- Fisheries, for which data or scientific understanding are insufficient, are managed adaptively and in line with a precautionary approach.
- Fisheries policy takes into account the impacts of climate change.

**9. Fish are a readily available and valued source of protein**

- Fish are an important and accessible part of people's diet.
- Consumers are informed about, and understand, the impact of their choices and choose environmentally acceptable options.
- Fish and fish products are traceable to demonstrate that they are safe and were legally and sustainably caught.
- Consumers choose locally caught fish wherever possible.
- Environmentally acceptable aquaculture is a significant supplier of fish.

## The deal

The nine vision statements on pages 8 and 9 are ambitious. To deliver them, all stakeholders will need to work together. We will only be able to enjoy the benefits of sustainable fisheries if everyone signs up to the key roles and responsibilities summarised below. To succeed, we all need to play our part.

### **European Commission and international organisations, including Regional Fisheries Management Organisations and Regional Advisory Councils**

- Setting and advising on the strategic framework and objectives for sustainable fisheries, in the context of ecosystem-based management.
- Ensuring a level playing field.
- Sharing the cost of science, fisheries management and enforcement.
- Communicating effectively with stakeholders and earning their respect.
- Providing regulatory certainty.

### **Central Government**

- Setting and advising on strategic objectives for what fisheries should deliver to the nation.
- Developing a simple policy framework to deliver its strategic objectives.
- Clarifying what it believes to be an acceptable environmental impact.
- Commissioning relevant science and using it in policy development.
- Sharing the cost of science, fisheries management and enforcement.
- Providing regulatory certainty.
- Securing sustainable long-term outcomes for UK fisheries in Europe and internationally.

### **Local government and regional and local management**

- Delivering responsive and flexible management of fisheries to meet local needs, in line with the framework set by Central Government.
- Sharing the cost of science, fisheries management and enforcement.

### **Delivery bodies and non-departmental public bodies**

- Providing an efficient, effective and affordable enforcement service to implement regulation professionally, consistently and fairly.
- Applying the principles of good regulatory practice.
- Ensuring that evidence is robust.
- Communicating objective, evidence-based and transparent specialist advice to all stakeholders.
- Taking socio-economic and environmental impacts into account.
- Contributing to policy development including by advising on potential consequences/impacts and effectiveness of policies.
- Sharing the cost of science, fisheries management and enforcement.
- Advising consumers about fish, including its role in healthy eating.
- Supporting the development, promotion and implementation of good practice.

### **Scientists, including economists and social scientists**

- Providing the best possible science under the 'Ethical Code for Science'.
- Involving stakeholders in data collection and development of science to ensure it is the best quality possible.
- Communicating effectively with stakeholders and earning their respect.
- Providing objective information and advice to fisheries managers.
- Clearly differentiating between scientific evidence and management advice.



### **Fishing communities**

- Getting involved in policy development.
- Investing in local fisheries operations and facilities.

### **Commercial fishermen, recreational anglers and fish-farmers**

- Contributing to the development of appropriate gear and techniques and using them to minimise the environmental impacts of catching fish.
- Sharing the cost of science, fisheries management and enforcement.
- Getting involved in science and policy development.
- Being responsive not only to changes in the market but also in fish stocks when deciding which species to target and how much effort to expend.
- Contributing data for scientific assessments and management measures.
- Taking good business decisions and managing risk effectively.
- Complying with the law and encouraging others to do so.
- Minimising the environmental impact of sourcing fish feed where possible.
- Taking responsibility for their reputation.

### **Processors**

- Minimising the environmental impact of sourcing, transporting and processing fish.
- Making underused species available and convenient to consumers.
- Getting involved in science.
- Sharing the cost of science, fisheries management and enforcement.
- Putting effective traceability systems in place and sourcing legally and sustainably harvested fish.
- Paying prices that reflect the long-term costs of fishing.
- Complying with the law and encouraging others to do so.
- Prioritising local sourcing where possible.
- Investing only in environmentally responsible fisheries operations.

### **Retailers and food service**

- Minimising the environmental impact of sourcing, transporting, marketing and selling fish.
- Putting effective traceability systems in place and sourcing legally and sustainably harvested fish.
- Paying prices that reflect the long-term costs of fishing.
- Providing objective and open information to consumers.
- Recognising the uncertainties both in consistency of quantity of supply and in product specification arising from a wild caught commodity.
- Complying with the law and encouraging others to do so.
- Making underused species available and convenient to consumers.
- Engaging with commercial and recreational fishermen.
- Prioritising local sourcing where possible.
- Investing only in environmentally responsible fisheries operations.

### **Consumers**

- Being informed about the fish they purchase.
- Making sustainable choices and putting pressure on suppliers to provide those choices.

### **Non-Governmental Organisations**

- Communicating accurate and objective information.
- Helping the whole supply chain to improve its performance.
- Contributing to science.
- Holding others to account.
- Promoting good practice.

### **Certification bodies and standard setters**

- Making schemes as accessible as possible.
- Considering the impacts of schemes on developing countries and small producer organisations.
- Being open about the benefits and limitations of schemes.
- Ensuring consistency with eco-labelling guidelines of the Food and Agriculture Organisation.

### **Investors**

- Investing only in sustainable and legal operations.



## Benefits and costs

We see clear benefits and costs that will be realised in achieving sustainable fisheries. We believe that the benefits will outweigh the costs.

### Economic

#### Benefits

- Good long-term economic prospects and more stability for those who access fisheries.
- Effective fisheries management, with a lighter touch from EU and Central Government, and good value for money for the taxpayer.
- Most businesses will be efficient, competitive and plan for the long term.
- Fishermen will be able to make profits over the long-term despite variations in fish stocks in the short term.
- Value of landed fish will be maximised.
- Economic return from fisheries to society.

#### Costs

- Not all fish will be harvested in the most economically efficient way.
- Environmentally damaging behaviour will incur a financial cost.
- Long-term environmental protection will be more important than short-term economic gain; there may therefore be short-term economic losses throughout the supply chain and to Government.
- Fishing techniques that cause damage to non-targeted species and habitats will carry economic cost proportionate to the damage caused.
- Some inefficient or environmentally irresponsible businesses may fail.



## Social

### Benefits

- Society will gain value from fisheries including benefits such as thriving coastal towns and villages.
- Fishing communities will continue to gain benefits from fishing.
- Communities will diversify into non-fishing activities and will therefore be more resilient to changes in the abundance of fish.
- There will be local participation in decision-making.
- There will be a supply of locally caught fish for food.
- Commercial catchers will feel more secure about their future and more confident in the way that they are regulated.
- Consumers will understand the impacts of the choices that they make.
- Consumers will eat a wider range of fish.
- Recreational sea anglers will continue to enjoy their sport and the potential for growth will be realised.
- All members of society will enjoy the non-use benefits of the marine environment, including the value that people place on a healthy marine environment, abundant fish stocks and the protection of rare, vulnerable and valued species and habitats – even if they do not use the marine environment directly themselves.

### Costs

- Access to most of the fisheries by the most economically efficient operators may mean that some benefits may be lost from traditional fishing communities.

## Environmental

### Benefits

- Fish stocks will be harvested at sustainable levels.
- Endangered stocks will not be used; and those at low levels will be harvested proportionately.
- Consumers will not endanger global fish stocks.
- Environmentally sensitive fishing methods will be promoted and supported.
- Environmental impacts, including discards, throughout the production and consumption chain will be minimised.
- Natural resources will be used efficiently.
- Fish will be farmed in an environmentally responsible way.

### Costs

- Fishing will have a modifying effect on marine ecosystems and in certain circumstances there will be some environmental damage.





## Turning the vision into reality

Delivering sustainable fisheries will require big changes to the way we all think about, manage and exploit fisheries in England, the UK, the European Union and internationally. For example, it will mean modernising the Common Fisheries Policy further. We need the commitment of the stakeholders listed on pages 10-12. We also need to work in partnership with other UK Fisheries Administrations, as well as with other EU Member States and other countries. All will have an important part to play. Without a big effort from all stakeholders it will not be possible to deliver sustainability. We all have responsibilities and can all receive benefits. Delivering this will not be quick and we cannot deliver it all immediately. There will be short-term costs throughout the supply chain and to Government and other stakeholders to achieve long-term benefits for society as a whole. But we should not wait. Action is needed now if we are to reach our long-term goal.

With this vision we have published a draft implementation plan setting out what Defra intends to do to contribute to the delivery of the vision and where we think there is a role for others. We plan to work with you to add your proposed contributions to the plan over the coming nine months, with a view to publishing a shared contract between all marine fisheries stakeholders in 2008.

### UK administration of fisheries

Managing fisheries is a devolved responsibility within the UK. This is carried out by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Scottish Executive (SE), the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland (DARDNI). Fisheries management in waters of the Isle of Man and Channel Islands is the responsibility of these Crown Dependencies' authorities under fisheries management agreements with UK Government.

This publication sets out Defra's vision and therefore relates to policy in England and within British Fisheries Limits adjacent to England. It will also affect the agreements that Defra makes with other UK Fisheries Administrations about the UK's position in EU and international negotiations for which Defra takes the lead. Other Fisheries Administrations in the UK are following routes specific to their own needs and circumstances.

### Fisheries policies

'Fisheries 2027' builds on current policies to provide a single coherent direction for marine fisheries policy. 'Securing the Benefits' published in June 2005, presents the policy framework for achieving a thriving fishing industry in a healthy marine environment. 'Charting a New Course', published in October 2005 and our subsequent business plans, set out immediate actions to deliver this in England, working with our stakeholders.

'Securing the Benefits' was the joint UK response to the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit review of the fishing industry – 'Net Benefits'.

## What we mean by:

### **Contract**

We do not use the word 'contract' in the sense of a legally binding agreement. Instead, we mean a document that sets out a shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders, including Government, businesses and individuals. We hope that this will give stakeholders the confidence to act sustainably, knowing that there is a shared commitment to achieve sustainability and that their actions will be matched by others.

### **Economically efficient**

By 'economically efficient operators' we mean those commercial operators who get the highest financial return from the smallest input. This does not necessarily reflect the quantity of fish caught; what matters is the value derived from the resource and the ability to minimise costs. The related phrase 'most of the resource' means more than half of the total resource, rather than more than half of the resource in a specific stock or area.

Economic efficiency is one element of sustainability and needs to be achieved alongside other objectives, for example those relating to environmental protection and coastal communities and in the context of a balance between commercial and recreational use of a shared, common resource.

### **Environmental cost**

By 'environmental cost' we mean damage caused to the environment.

### **Environmentally responsible/acceptable**

'Environmentally responsible' and 'environmentally acceptable' mean operations or decisions that do not have an unduly adverse effect on the environment. We will clarify this further when we publish an initial view, for further discussion, of an acceptable environmental impact for different parts of the supply chain.

### **Fisheries sector**

'Fisheries sector' means the full range of related activities including commercial and recreational catching, marine aquaculture, processing and retailing of fish and shellfish.

### **Long-term**

When we say that we want fisheries to be securing 'long-term benefits' for the whole of society by 2027, we mean that we want fisheries management to take account of the needs of future generations, as well as current users of the resource.

### **Precautionary approach**

The Food and Agricultural Organisation's (FAO) Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries defines the precautionary approach as follows: 'The absence of adequate scientific information should not be used as a reason for postponing or failing to take conservation and management measures'.

### **Sustainable**

When we say that we are aiming to achieve 'sustainable' fisheries, we mean that we intend to manage fisheries to get the best long-term benefits from the resource, while ensuring that activities are carried out in a way that does not breach environmental limits. We want everybody to make decisions and investments that take account of the long-term future of the fisheries resource.



