

By: KEIFCA Chief Fishery Officer

To: Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
– 28 January 2022

Subject: **Update on Fisheries Management Plans and 2022 international fisheries management**

Classification Unrestricted

Summary:

This paper will provide Members with an update on the progress of the Fisheries Act 2020 and an overview of the outcomes of the EU–UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA).

Recommendations:

Members are asked to **COMMENT** and **NOTE** the report.

Background

As the UK starts to forge its own path outside the EU, there is a much greater national focus on UK/English specific fisheries priorities and the development of new plans and processes that will be developed over the next few years to meet these. The Fisheries Act 2020 outlines how Fisheries Statements and Fisheries Management Plans are the key policy vehicles as the UK moves away from the Common Fisheries Policy framework.

The Fisheries Act begins by listing eight fisheries objectives, which set out the overall aims of the Act:

1. Sustainability - Fisheries are environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable

2. Precautionary - Stocks are harvested in a way the `resources and maintains populations...above biomass levels capable of producing Maximum Sustainable Yield.

3. Ecosystem - An ecosystem-based approach to management is used and bycatch of sensitive species is minimised and where possible eliminated.

4. Scientific Evidence - Data is collected and shared between authorities, and the best scientific advice is used to develop management measures.

5. Bycatch - Bycatch of undersized fish is minimised and avoided, catches are recorded and accounted for, and bycatch of commercial species is still landed but disincentivised.

6. Equal Access - British fishing boats have access to fish in all UK waters

7. National Benefit - The fishing activities of UK boats bring economic and social benefits to UK communities.

8. Climate change - The impacts of fisheries on climate change (e.g. through emissions) is reduced and fisheries are able to adapt to the effects of climate change (e.g. shifting stocks).

The Act itself does not set out the specifics of how these objectives will be achieved. Rather, it creates a legal requirement for the UK's four national fisheries policy authorities (Marine Management Organisation (MMO), Scottish Ministers, Welsh Ministers, and the Northern Ireland department) to produce a Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) that will lay out how these objectives will be met. The Act requires these authorities to produce the JFS within two years of the Fisheries Act being passed and it is likely the JFS will be consulted on within the next few weeks.

The Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS)

There are several reasons why the Act delegates the task of fulfilling the eight objectives rather than putting legislation in place itself. Firstly, the majority of fisheries policy is devolved, and so the authority and responsibility for legislation lies with separate authorities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, rather than with the central UK government. Secondly, the framework nature of the legislation means that fisheries policy can be flexible, and responsive to changing circumstances. The Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) aims to encompass region-specific legislation that can be adapted when it needs to be.

On the 18 January the government published the draft JFS, setting out the future direction of UK fisheries management. In the consultation the government are seeking views on the policies in the JFS and the proposals for the related Fisheries Management Plans. The consultation will run for 12 weeks and will close on 12 April 2022 (Appendix 1).

Developing Fisheries Management Plans

Building on the broad outline of the different Fisheries Management Plans outlined in the JFS, the next and considerable challenge is to develop Fisheries Management Plans that meet the Fisheries Act objectives. Defra has also looked to engage both the industry and other stakeholders in species specific fisheries management groups and has created Regional Fisheries Meetings to try and engage the industry directly through quarterly web-based meetings.

Throughout the year KEIFCA has worked with DEFRA and through the AIFCA to make sure the needs of local fishermen from Kent and Essex are taken into consideration throughout the policy development process and into the subsequent implementation. Working at a national level, a project was created to work with New Economics Foundation to pull together information and ideas that could inform the FMP process and outputs (Appendix 2).

The creation of meaningful FMPs over the next few years is likely to become an ever-increasing workstream for IFCA as we look to better join regional expertise into a more focused English fisheries framework. Engagement and involvement at a local level is critical in making this new approach successful and creating long-term sustainable fisheries with management measures that fishermen can 'buy-into' and work with.

Annual international fisheries negotiations

Talks between the UK and the EU on 2022 fishing opportunities were finalised just before Christmas, and broadly followed the same pattern as the 2021 agreement, that was finally signed off in June 2021. Some key issues like the tonnage limits for EU vessels fishing shellfish in UK waters and vice versa, agreed under the TCA have not been addressed in this round of negotiations. However there has been an agreement on the priorities of the EU-UK Specialised Committee on Fisheries established under the TCA and the focus of the work of the committee for the first half of the year will be:

- Developing a permanent mechanism for in-year quota exchanges
- The development of multi-year strategies for non-quota species
- Reviewing existing measures permitting quota flexibility
- Interpretation of ICES advice on skates and rays
- Reviewing data collection and sharing

Working with ICES on a range of issues including:

- biological stock TAC management area alignment,
- stocks without ICES advice,
- how better to manage mixed fisheries making use of ICES advice
- how to improve the ICES catch allocation tool for bass).

There did not seem to be much progress on the reduction of seiner activity in UK waters in the Channel and sea bass limits for 2022 have increased slightly for commercial boats but are still broadly the same. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bass-industry-guidance-2022/bass-fishing-guidance-2021>)

Recommendations:

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