



# Fish Local project

Promoting a local species - Stage One Recommendation - Selecting a species

# The beginning

Forged from the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Fish Local project ([www.fishlocal.org](http://www.fishlocal.org)) looked at new ways for the local fishing industry to educate, promote and sell local fresh fish. Building on this success, and a renewed appetite from the local seafood industry to develop stronger regional and UK demand for locally caught fish, we have worked across the community to refocus the Fish Local project and look at creative ways of promoting the world class fish that is on our doorstep.

Throughout this process we have been lead by the fishing community, holding a series of focused meetings as well as speaking directly to a number of industry insiders. The twin themes of better education and promotion of fish caught by the local fishermen were consistent throughout this process and lead us down the path of focusing our efforts on selecting an undervalued local species and redefining it into a regional, desirable and sustainable species; whilst giving ownership to the community. It was important to act with a duty of care to offer a long-term outcome with opportunities across the entire chain, sea to plate.

Being lead by the regional industry and staying relevant is this project's key differentiator. The local in-shore fishing industry and its consumer is far from benefiting from current one size fits all national projects. It has limited species available in profit worthy numbers and a limited and aging fleet. Creating a regional speciality is far more than selling more fish, it is about rejuvenating and drawing interest to an industry that needs fresh thinking to survive and thrive.



## Setting up the project

By setting up a working group of regionally relevant stakeholders we hope to drive decisions that keep local industry at its heart. Building resilience into the entire supply chain requires specialist local knowledge. Not just from the fishers and distributors, but the consumers too. Once decisions are made through the working group, they are to be cross checked by a feedback group of industry stakeholders and a wider group including the consumers. We have also aimed for a group that will be able to take the project beyond the naming and into the next project which will be to release our new product into the market.

In the early stages the working group consisted of project leads, KEIFCA plus a few key project partners, including Merlin Jackson who has a wide knowledge of the Kent & Essex area from his years working on various offshore projects across the Thames Estuary as well as being an ex-fisher. With the help of Merlin we were able to expand our working group and engage with industry experts across the district. Funding from the MMO FaSS has allowed for us to install a permanent industry liaison to make sure that we are connecting efficiently throughout. Having a constant connection with the industry allows us to keep the project focused on positive and relevant outcomes.

We thought it was important to try and represent the entire local supply chain from sea to plate, from processors, distributors, fishers, the hospitality sector and regulators among others. Obviously choosing a species that fishers will catch is critical, but understanding how we create a sustainable demand is what will underpin long-term change for the industry. We have been careful to make sure that we represent and unite a region that has two clear territories either side of the Thames estuary.



# Working group

**Jesse Seaward** - Project Leader/ Band Agency, marketing and strategy

**Amy Pryor** - Project Leader/ Thames Estuary Partnership

**Merlin Jackson** - Ex Fisherman, FLO on multiple offshore projects across the estuary

**Will Wright** - Chief IFC Officer at Kent & Essex IFCA

**Dave Ferris** - Kent based fisherman

**Fran French** - Runs the West Mersey Fisherman's association, Essex based fisher

**John McGinn** - Chapmans Fish - Seafood Distributor

**Neil Auchterlonie** - Seafood 2040 campaign and technical specialist in fisheries and sustainable seafood

**Jack Clark** - Marine Conservation Society

**Shepherd Neame** - Hospitality



# Wider groups

## Feedback group examples:

**Thanet Fishermen's Association** (Members)

**John Nichols** (Ex Fisherman/ Vice- chairman of the Kent & Essex IFCA)

**East Kent Broadstairs College** (Catering Department)

**Julian Gregory** (Eastern IFCA – Chief Executive Officer)

**Ian Jones** (Southern IFCA/ waiting on confirmation)

**Esther Gilson** (Thames Estuary Fishermen's Association, Member of the Kent & Essex IFCA)

**Mathew Sanky** (Sanky's Fishmongers and restrateur)

**Emma Cowper** (Sustainability Manager DP World)

## Wider feedback group examples:

**DP world employees**

**Thanet district council employees**

**Various hospitality stakeholders**

**Fishers and industry that have responded to the survey**



# Refining our list of species

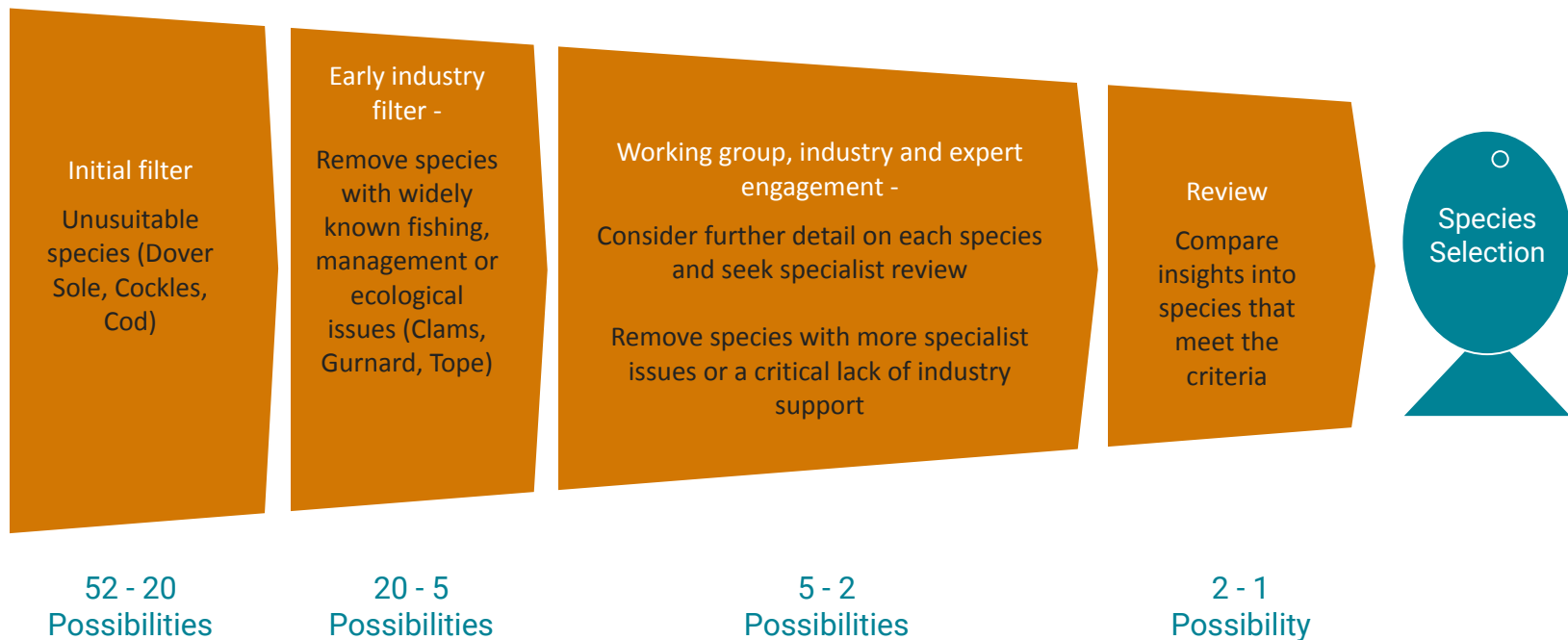
We collected a group of industry insiders and shortlisted species from the 52 species of finfish and shellfish we find in our waters that might benefit from better promotion using Fish Local. Our criteria was based simply around species that were abundant but not currently popular (this excluded species like cod and Dover sole). We also discounted species that were already widely fished around the UK with a defined market, such as Mackerel, cockles and Sea Bass. Finally, we felt that it was important to develop a species that had potential to become a local speciality, with the potential to easily improve its value and most importantly could become a long-term sustainable local fishery. We quite quickly got down to five contenders

Cockles, Sole, Bass, [Thornback Ray](#), Other Skates and Rays, Lobsters, Cod, Scallops, Plaice, Crabs, Brown Shrimps, Whelks, Turbot, Native Oysters, Pacific Oysters, Brill, Sprats, [Grey Mullet](#), [Smooth Hound](#), Pacific Oysters, Whiting, [Herring](#), Unidentified Dogfish, Manilla Clam, Spurdog, Dabs, Lesser Spotted Dog, Gurnard and Latchet, Lemon Sole, Cuttlefish, Tope, Mackerel, Clams, Flounder or Flukes, Red Mullet, Squid, Common Skate(Blue/Grey), Eels, Pouting, Pollack, Green Crab, Monks or Anglers, John Dory, Conger Eels, Ling, Shad, Black Bream, Wrasses, Garfish, Horse Mackerel, [Whiting](#),

Over the course of reviewing the species, we had many conversations with members of the working group and a selection of relevant experts to assess the viability of each species and how we could best take it forward. We wanted to understand each species' viability against a number of distinguishing factors, including, sustainability, seasonality, management potential, fishing potential, value potential, market potential, yield, and desirability.

Each stakeholder came with significant expertise regarding our choices. So much so, that it became clear that once we had measured each species against the criteria that would allow potential to deliver on the outcomes outlined by the industry, we would be able to make our recommendations confident in the robustness of the process.

# Stages of refining our options



# The five species

We asked a group of 100 industry stakeholders (28% response) and our working group to review our five contenders. We have summarised some of their thoughts on each.

Smooth Hound



Thornback Ray



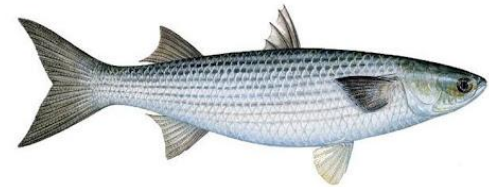
Whiting



Herring



Grey Mullet





## Smooth Hound

One of the more popular species out of the five, It has also been pointed out as one of the most underutilized fish on the list. Available in abundance for a long season, Spring into Autumn, and caught across the Estuary. General feeling is that it's a good tasty, meaty fish with a high yield content. It has the option of fish and chips which the consumers are already in tune with. One of the main concerns is that it looks like a shark and the potential smell if not processed properly.

There isn't a lot of data on this fish to suggest that we could make a significant difference on this species.



## Whiting

One of the lowest scoring species throughout this process. While it is a great tasting fish there are concerns that there isn't any good size Whiting in the area that would make it worthwhile. It doesn't offer too much in the way of versatility. A large number of people that took the survey agreed that it's not worth that hassle and one unattractive factor is that it's quite boney. It doesn't keep too well, if not eaten within 48 hours of being caught it starts to spoil visually very quickly.

There is currently a MSC certified Whiting fishery in the area. The Good Fish Guide could add a rating to cover static gear that would fair better and potentially increase the rating. But bycatch of North Sea Cod would need to be minimised and monitored in the fishery. Management would also be at the international quota level.



## Thornback Ray

It's a great local fish, broadly available across the Estuary. Currently achieves a poor price and is less popular than it used to be, but would benefit from better promotion and marketing. Creating the headroom for any extra demand is tricky as management of this particular stock is combined with other skates and rays and quota is allocated at an International level.

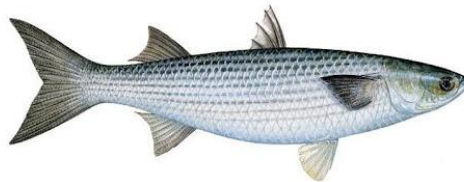
If we were able to separate Thornback Ray from the rest and create its own fishery then it would potentially be a great option. Unfortunately the difficulty of being able to redefine makes it a risk to take forward. But it does show some promise for a potential future project.



## Grey Mullet

Should achieve a better price, but there are issues around the taste of Grey Mullet, so there would be more of a concern getting consumers on board. Typically a shorter season, starting around November through to January and sometimes into February. If sold with supporting information for cooking to mitigate the taste concerns, it could have some success.

It is currently red-rated on the Good Fish Guide, but this is mainly due to the lack of a decent stock assessment. Management would need to be put in place to show it was being fished for sustainably.



## Herring

An abundant species across Kent & Essex when in season, from October through to February. It could really benefit from re-education among the public on its history in the area and at what a great tasting fish this is and the health benefits it has being full of vitamins and a rich source of Omega-3 fatty Acids. We are also hopeful that the Cefas stock assessment will aid us in having some influence on the Good Fish Guide.

There is also MSC accreditation already in place for the Herring from years ago which could be updated. The most versatile species out of the five selected in terms of ways it can be processed. However the bones are an issue for a lot of consumers and can make processing intensive.



# Refining the list of species

After engaging with the working group, fishers and some external experts, it became clear that our five species would very quickly become two. Between management, sustainability and fishing potential, Whiting, Thornback Ray and Grey Mullet were discounted from consideration. We hope to give you an idea of those conversations and considerations.

Whiting scored 0% on the working group survey with an overall consensus from the industry survey that the size of the Whiting caught in the Kent & Essex district isn't of any worth in terms of size and yield. Grey Mullet also scored 0% on the working group survey. Due to taste concerns with Grey Mullet and short season paired with the fact it's red rated on the Good Fish Guide would make taking this fish forward difficult. Thornback Ray, scored 11.1% with the working group. Crucially, being grouped with all skates and rays, which have their quota managed internationally, it is difficult to work with Thornback Ray by itself. If we were able to re-classify it and make independent fisheries management changes, then it would be a good candidate, but in reality, that is not achievable within this project.

That leaves us with, very quickly with two possibilities, Smooth Hound and Herring. These two species scored well in both surveys, the Herring with a wealth of history across the Kent & Essex district that was once a superfood that could massively benefit from better rebranding and re-education among the public. The health benefits it has give it huge marketability.

The Smooth Hound also has a very fair chance of becoming more popular through better marketing and rebranding. One of the more favourable fish among the fishermen due to its catchability and longer season. Both Herring and Smooth Hound add high value to the project.

In order to develop a case for which species to take forward we took a much closer look at how they both stack up.

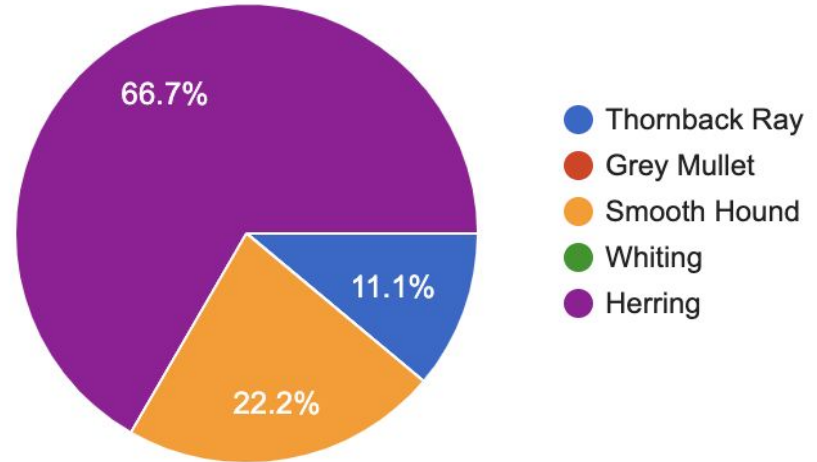


# Working group survey

We followed up with a second survey that was shared among the members of the working group where we asked them to give their own professional thoughts on each of the species and what their favoured outcome would be.

The full responses are here:

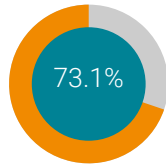
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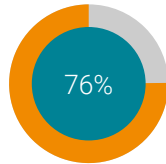
# Industry survey

From that we sent out a survey to 100 industry stakeholders with a 28% return rate. The survey compared the 5 species through a series of 14 questions and it was clear just by looking at the first 3 questions that the favourites were the Smooth Hound and the Herring, and this data was reflecting conversations we were already having with industry. You can see the full set of responses here <https://forms.gle/Y3Z7UuoVkv7dwxRf9>

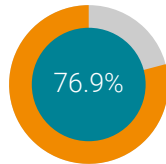
Smooth Hound



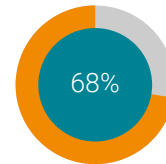
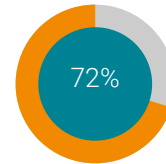
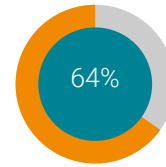
Is available across the K&E district and is available to all fishers with equipment at a reasonable cost.



Happy to catch if there was demand.



Is abundant in peak season.



Herring



# Engaging experts and fishers

## Marine Conservation Society

We engaged with the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) who are in charge of the Good Fish Guide, and asked them to review the 5 species and their recommendation was to take Thornback Ray forward as there was no current concern, however it would require management to be a long-term sustainable fishery.

For our top scoring species, Smooth Hound and Herring they said:

'The Smooth Hound is currently red-rated. The latest data would suggest there isn't much leeway in this. There's no Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for this species and the generic dogfish landing code could significantly underestimate landings.'

'Herring, In the absence of a newer stock assessment, we would not advise promoting this fish.'



### Smoothhound >

 Avoid 

Smoothhound is one of few shark species whose numbers appear to be stable at present, however there is much uncertainty about its stock status. Unlike many similar elasmobranchs, their relatively high productivity means that there is potential for this species to be harvested sustainably. However, data are lacking on their biology, and level of fishing on the species which precludes the ability to manage them effectively.



### Herring >

 Mixed Ratings! 

Herring sustainability varies a lot, depending on where it's caught. The Best Choice is from the North Irish Sea. Fish to Avoid include herring from the south Irish Sea and southwest UK. Check the product label for catch location.



# Engaging experts and fishers

## Nathan De Rozarieux

Nathan De Rozarieux has experience in inshore fishing on the west coast, the seafood supply chain and is a member of Seafish. The reason for engaging with Nathan was due to success they had on a similar project in Cornwall where they rebranded the Cornish Pilchard, which we thought would give us some valuable insight into the project. Tapping into his knowledge of what went right for them and what he thought of our 2 main species.

Nathan thought that Herring would be the best candidate to take forward with this project, due to its versatility, history, locality to the district and the potential it has for being a local speciality. He also noted the benefits of processed and sealed products. All things that Nathan thought would add huge value to the marketability of it.

From his own personal experience with Smooth Hound, he wasn't as enthusiastic about it, mentioning he sells a few every now and then but has to encourage the consumer to purchase it. Less versatile when compared to the Herring.





# Engaging experts and fishers

## Chapmans Fish

Chapmans Fish who a processor and distributor of locally sourced fresh fish caught along the Kent & Sussex coast. As we started to engage with more fishermen and members of the food sector, their name began to pop up everywhere which signified to us that they had a popular reputation among the fishing/seafood industry, highlighting the value that distribution will have to the fishery.

The fishers need to be able to sell their catch easily and at a consistent price. From visiting their depot in Seven Oaks and talking with the team, we started to see how this can be achieved. It soon became clear that they are already making strides towards getting local fish to UK markets rather than exporting abroad, reducing food miles and a keen focus on improving the traceability of the catch. They have shown us how local fish can be distributed responsibly and scaled to suit demand.

Their knowledge and efforts with packaging, processing, sustainability, traceability and trying to achieve the best price for local fishers is highly valued when taking our species forward. It gives confidence that a chain with the suitable size and dynamics is viable in the region.

Their suggestion is take Smooth Hound forward, due to its taste and that it's found locally.



# Engaging experts and fishers

## Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority

Management is an important part on ensuring the long term sustainability of a fishery.

In KEIFCA's officer's view, while there is potential to put management in place. For some of our species, it is a lot less likely to have management implemented in a way that would be influential. Their knowledge of the regional waters and their historical view of the industry and its data has been hugely influential in our process. Creating a sustainable fishery is so important to the industry.

Their viewpoint has been that Herring has the greatest possibility of achieving this goal with local management in place that stands to the measure of MSC accreditation. This would be a big head start for a species that we want to become a local speciality.



# Engaging experts and fishers

## Neil Auchterlonie

Engaging with Neil Auchterlonie who is chair of the Seafood 2040 campaign and is a Technical Specialist in Fisheries, Aquaculture and Sustainable Seafood.

He said that with Smooth Hound you need to be careful, some species are on the IUCN Red list as vulnerable, or near threatened. Probably best to exclude.

'Herring is an excellent fish for the project. Should emphasise the importance of the Herring as a very rich source of Omega-3, and the health benefits from consuming'.



# Engaging experts and fishers

## Talking to fishers about Smooth Hound

We spoke to a number of fishers across the Estuary and it was apparent that Smooth Hound was quite popular if you could find a market.

One fisher in particular that we spoke with working out of Ramsgate was actually targeting Smooth Hound over summer as one of his main fisheries, having developed a small closed market with returning customers. He said he would be happy to catch more if the demand increased and his market grew as in turn it would increase the price of Smooth Hounds. But he did warn it spoils if its not processed properly and quickly due to the ammonia in the fish.

In order to find out more about current techniques when fishing for Smooth Hound, we joined a local fisher on one of their trips.



# Comparing the species

Smooth Hound



## Positives

- Popular with the fishermen
- Easy to process
- Meaty tasty fish
- High yield content
- Long abundant Season
- Already has a small market which could be expanded on

## Negatives

- Looks like a shark
- Has the potential to smell really bad if not processed properly
- There is a lack of data on this fish in the area
- There are 3 species of Smooth Hound with overlapping ranges which could make any species specific management more complicated
- Could prove difficult to change the rating on the Good Fish Guide

Herring



## Positives

- This particular Herring, the Thames variant has two less vertebrae which give its real potential to become a regional speciality.
- Abundant when in season
- It's an extremely healthy fish to eat
- Already well established in its versatility
- It has a rich history in the area that could be tapped into
- Has management in place with MSC potential
- Cefas stock assessment available that could potentially influence the MCS to changing their rating on the Good Fish Guide.

## Negatives

- It has a lot of bones which can make it difficult to process and eat
- It doesn't have the longest season
- It could be seen as old fashioned
- Consumers may already have a long standing opinion
- Short season

# Engaging experts and fishers

## Fishing for Smooth Hound

On October 10th we went away fishing with one of the local fishermen from Ramsgate with the aim of catching Smooth Hound. We shot 4 fleets of 600 yard trammel nets in 8m of water on low tide at 4:00am and left the tide to run through them. Upon return to the nets we started hauling around 10:40am and the majority of fish caught were Pin Whiting, Spotty Dogs, 4 Cod, 5 Thornback Ray, 2 Bass and 1 Smooth Hound, 3 large Crabs.

Anecdotally, the skipper said that the lack of Smooth Hound most likely meant that the season was over for that particular species and has worked its way down further south to warmer waters. The skipper also mentioned that they had a good year of Smooth Hound and they had been abundant through summer. Unfortunately, we had just missed the end of the season.



# Engaging experts and fishers

## Talking to fishers about Herring

Over the years the demand for Herring has declined as its traditional customer base has reduced. Traditionally a bulk fishery now only caught by a handful across the Estuary. The low number of Herring being landed is thought to be affecting the current data on the species.

We reached out to a number of fishers on both sides of the Estuary that are Fishing for Herring and making a living from it. Their views were that the public awareness of the fishery and its health benefits really need to be revitalised among the public to make this once great fish, great again.

Those that are still catching it are processing it themselves into Kippers, Rollmops, smoking and pickling, and selling to the public but would love to see the market grow.

In order to find out more about current techniques when fishing for Herring, we joined a local fisher on one of their trips



# Engaging experts and fishers

## Fishing for Herring

On the 18th of November we went away fishing for Herring from Broadstairs harbour. We only shot one fleet which consisted of two nets at a length of 100 yards of Herring net in 7 meters of water. The sun was bright, the wind was blowing westerly around 10 knots. We drifted around the coastline with the net shot out over the bow of the boat for about an hour until we hit Kingsgate Bay 1 mile away.

When we started to haul you could see the shimmer of the Herring that were caught in the net beneath the water. This typically means that the water isn't quite thick enough and if it were, we would have caught a lot more Herring as their sight would have been impaired and they would have been able to make out the net, they also generally swim lower when the sun is high. By the time we had hauled and picked out the net we ended up with 4 stone of Herrings and one pin whiting as bycatch. We picked out as we hauled which kept the catch quality high, 0 weed and almost 0 bycatch.

Traditionally this drift would have used 10 or 12 nets so 5 to 6 times more, which would have amounted to 25 to 30 stone. Ultimately if we had drifted correctly, got the slack water and allowed the gear to run on there would have been a larger amount of fish.





# Recommendation



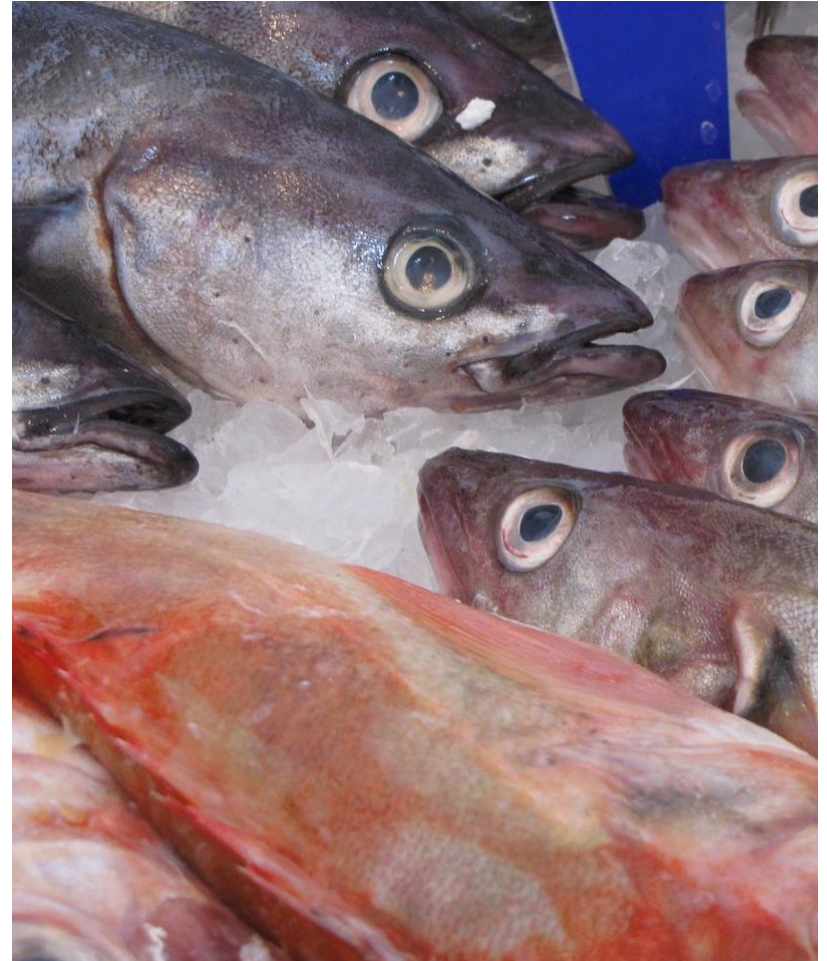
# What the evidence revealed

Between the Smooth Hound and the Herring it really is a close call. However, looking at the evidence, the recommendation of which fish to take forward would be Herring.

It is important to the project as a whole that we consider the balance of opinions across all of the input we've had. We want to ensure the project remains industry up, while appreciating there is no decision that suits all.

We hope that this project can show that improved marketing can have a positive effect on the local industry and that it will inspire work with other species, such as Smooth Hound

When we apply our criteria of sustainability, seasonality, management potential, fishing potential, value potential, market potential, yield, and desirability Herring scores most



# The Herring species

Herring offers the greatest potential to create a local speciality to the region due the specific, globally recognised, classification Thames variant Herring has. It has a legacy MSC accreditation application that could be updated and implemented, albeit with some quota issues. However, that does mean that there is already robust management in place that is specific to the area. There are fishing techniques and technology such as vessel tracking that could provide the trail of custody that a regional speciality demands, while it has a rich cultural history for us to explore in the renaming process.

Versatility, combined with a name change could ignite desirability in many different ways to consumers across new demographics as well as its current audience. It is a high source of protein containing key nutrients such as Omega-3 fatty acids.

Fishing methods used have next to no bycatch, unlike fishing for Smooth Hound, allowing a more targeted fishery. The stocks of this fishery also seem to be very healthy across Kent & Essex which can be backed up by a stock assessment.

It is worth taking into account that in order for Herring to become a valued part of the local fishery it does not need to be as popular as the big 5. With the size of fleet we have in Kent and Essex, we only need enough demand, with a good value, to maintain consistent prices for the catch fishers land. With the depth of knowledge and experience within the working group, there is potential to achieve this from sea to plate within the local industry.

Please follow this link to confirm receipt and indicate your support for the recommendation.

<https://forms.gle/XJ35JJRosPGzbyuC6>

Thank you - Fish Local

