

AIFCA OFFICERS' REPORT

The UK and EU have agreed a new post-Brexit reset trade deal

The EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) sets out the terms under which the EU and the United Kingdom (UK) can determine their individual rights to catch fish in each other's waters. Under the agreement, 25% of the EU's fishing rights in UK waters are to be transferred progressively to the UK's fleets between 2021 and 2026.

The two parties to the agreement have also agreed to ensure that fishing activities for shared stocks in their waters should be environmentally sustainable in the long term and contribute to the livelihoods of fishers.

The agreement includes a licensing system for fishing vessels through which mutual access to each other's waters is granted.

Annex 35 of the agreement identifies the list of fish stocks which are considered a shared resource. This amounts to approximately 100 fish stocks in the Atlantic and the North Sea.

The agreement determines the percentage allocated to the EU and UK respectively for each shared fish stock. Under the terms of the agreement, the two parties are to hold annual consultations to determine the total allowed catch limit for each fish species and their respective fishing rights, while respecting the percentages indicated in the agreement.

On 19 May 2025, the European Commission and the UK agreed to full reciprocal access to waters until 30 June 2038. The "reset" document notes "political agreements leading to full reciprocal access to waters to fish until 30 June 2038" - a 12-year extension to the current deal negotiated by Boris Johnson's Conservative government - and much longer than expected.

Many inshore fishers are bitterly disappointed with the agreement and the lack of exclusive access to the 6-12nm. and the length of the agreement. Although a £360 million support package was announced at the same time, so far there is little detail on the scope of the funding. However the deal should mean that there is retained access for fisheries products and there is hope that the bivalve mollusc trade can return to some form of normality.

Recognising and Protecting the National Benefit of Sustainable Fisheries in the UK

The AIFCA alongside a number of other institutions and experts, led by Sarah Coulthard at Newcastle University has published a paper which explores the multifaceted contributions of sustainable fisheries in the UK, going beyond simple economic measures to highlight their crucial societal benefits to coastal communities and the broader public. The research published in Fish and Fisheries argues that fully realizing these advantages requires recognizing the diverse benefits, acknowledging the unequal decline in the fishing fleet (particularly affecting the small-scale sector), and implementing governance that ensures fisheries are diverse, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable to "leave no one behind." The paper proposes a framework of eight "National Benefits" to help operationalize these goals within the legal context of the UK Fisheries Act 2020.

The report is open access and available online here: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/faf.12898>

Delivering economic growth and nature recovery: an independent review of Defra's regulatory landscape

Dan Corry's review examines whether Defra's regulatory landscape (the regulators and regulations) is fit for purpose in driving both economic growth and nature recovery. The Corry Review was set up by Defra Secretary of State Steve Reed, in October 2024 to examine whether the inherited regulatory landscape is fit for purpose and to develop recommendations to ensure that regulation across the Department is driving economic growth while protecting the environment.

The report puts forward the following 5 strategic themes, supported by 29 recommendations:

- focus on outcomes, scale and proportionality, with constrained discretion
- untangle and tidy 'green tape' to ensure process-light and adaptive regulation
- deploy a fair and consistent 'thin green line' on regulatory compliance, with trusted partners earning autonomy
- unlock the flow of private sector green finance to support nature restoration whilst better targeting public sector finance
- shift regulators to be more digital, more real-time and more innovative with partners.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-economic-growth-and-nature-recovery-an-independent-review-of-defras-regulatory-landscape>

OEP launches investigation into a suspected failure by Defra to take the necessary measures to achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) of marine waters.

The Office for Environmental Protection (The OEP) is a public body that protects and improves the environment by holding government and other public authorities to account. The OEP has launched an investigation into Defra in relation to a suspected failure to take the necessary measures to achieve or maintain Good Environmental Status (GES) of marine waters by the statutory deadline.

Under the Marine Strategy Regulations 2010, the statutory deadline for GES to be achieved was 31 December 2020. The OEP believes that the available evidence indicates that this key target was not met. The investigation seeks to ensure accountability for the suspected failure to take the necessary measures to achieve GES of marine waters by 31 December 2020, and if that failure has occurred, ensure that it is addressed as soon as possible through the introduction and implementation of an evidenced, resourced and timebound delivery plan.

The Office for Environmental Protection Reports and Publications

The AIFCA has been engaged with the OEP and its consultants. The purpose of this update is to provide details of the work and the ongoing marine investigations regarding the OEP priority area "Improving nature at sea"

Review and Evaluation of the Marine Protected Area networks in England and Northern Ireland

The UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive have identified the Marine Protected Area (MPA) network as a key tool for achieving domestic and international targets and commitments. However, while the MPA networks in England and Northern Ireland are well established, and continue to expand, there are questions over how effectively they are being managed and monitored.

Howell Marine Consulting (HMC) were commissioned by the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) to conduct an evaluation of the status of the MPA network in England and Northern Ireland. The project looked at how the network is managed, monitored, and to what extent they contribute towards key statutory targets and commitments, through an extensive literature review, and interviews and a workshop with key stakeholders. This project builds on our foundational work under the OEP's marine programme, including the call for evidence on Good Environmental Status.

Management:

- MPA networks are well established but many MPAs are without management measures (Stages 3 and 4).
- Disjointed approach to developing and managing MPA network in England. Single body approach in Northern Ireland enables greater oversight and coherence.
- Opportunities for use of a Whole Site Approach should be identified.

Monitoring:

- Limited and inconsistent monitoring of MPAs leading to a reliance on vulnerability assessments.
- Lack of monitoring outside MPAs.
- Lack of strategic oversight across the multiple bodies who conduct monitoring.
- Contribution to targets:
- Lack of coherence between MPA monitoring and GES reporting creates challenges in assessing MPAs contribution to GES.

Overarching:

- Pressures are increasing from climate change and spatial squeeze, which will impact ecosystem baselines and
- effectiveness of MPAs and pose challenges to management.
- Resourcing pressures contribute to management and monitoring challenges

[Review and Evaluation of the Monitoring and Regulatory Landscape for Bycatch in UK Marine Waters](#)

Through the Fisheries Act 2020 and the Joint Fisheries Statement, the UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive have recognised the need to minimise and, where possible, eliminate bycatch of non-target and sensitive marine species. Efforts to address bycatch have an important role to play in achieving key statutory targets, such as Good Environmental Status (GES), and in delivering Government's Environmental Improvement Plan 2023.

MarFishEco Fisheries Consultants Ltd (MarFishEco) were commissioned by the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) to provide a critical appraisal of the current regulatory and policy frameworks for monitoring and managing bycatch in UK marine waters. This project builds on our foundational work under the OEP's marine programme, including our call for evidence on GES.

Achieving GES in UK marine waters requires clear, enforceable bycatch reduction targets with binding timelines. These targets should address monitoring, enforcement, compliance, and measurable reductions across all fisheries, not just megafauna, but also fish species, given

their widespread bycatch impact. This would benefit food web dynamics, benthic habitats, and ecosystem-based fisheries management. Aligning national policies with international frameworks, and the UK's post-Brexit marine strategy will streamline governance, improve accountability, and ensure consistency with global best practices. Key recommendations for improving bycatch management include strengthening regulatory frameworks with enforceable metrics, scaling up REM and observer coverage, standardising data collection and sharing, and promoting industry-driven monitoring. Cost-sharing models, flexible technical measures, and funding for innovative gear testing will assist fishers while enhancing mitigation efforts. Adaptive management, responsive to climate change and industrial expansion, will ensure resilience against future pressures. Bycatch remains a significant challenge for sustainable marine ecosystem use and requires dynamic, data-driven solutions and collaborative governance. Addressing it holistically will not only support biodiversity but also strengthen the resilience of fisheries and coastal communities

Baseline Evidence Review of the Effects of Aquaculture on the Achievement of Good Environmental Status.

In November 2023, the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) launched a call for evidence on the drivers and pressures affecting the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES) in the marine environment. The impact arising from the aquaculture sector was a key theme that emerged from the evidence we received in response to the call.

MarFishEco Fisheries Consultants Ltd (MarFishEco) and Fishwise Ltd were commissioned by the OEP to develop an independent view of the challenges to achieving GES that are associated with aquaculture in England and Northern Ireland. This project will help to inform the future direction of the OEP's marine programme.

Aquaculture in England and Northern Ireland does not represent a significant obstacle to achieving GES, targeted improvements in regulation, monitoring, and innovation will be essential to ensuring its long-term sustainability and environmental compatibility.

Rapid Evaluation of Front-Runner Fisheries Management Plans

Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) are action plans intended to set out the policies to secure the long-term sustainability of fish stocks, required under the Fisheries Act 2020. They also have an important role to play in achieving key statutory targets, such as Good Environmental Status (GES), and in delivering Government's Environmental Improvement Plan 2023.

MarFishEco Fisheries Consultants Ltd (MarFishEco) were commissioned by the OEP to undertake an appraisal of the first six FMPs. The aim of this project was to provide the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) with an evidence-based assessment of the suitability and quality of the first six FMPs, to support the consideration of how best to provide future advice in relation to further FMPs. This project is part of a multi-year work programme with a focus on the achievement and deliverability of GES under the UK Marine Strategy.

The evaluation employed a mixed-method approach, including benchmarking against the JFS objectives and Section 5. The report details the primary challenges and constraints faced by these FMPs, particularly a significant lack of evidence and data. It also highlights deficiencies and areas for improvement, noting a general lack of practical, tangible management measures and clear, time-bound actions across the plans, despite outlining many desired goals.

Octopus Bloom

There has been an octopus bloom in South Wes of England. Area 7e has the highest landings, primarily into Brixham. This indicates it has continued to be a localised fishery despite the increased volume. CIFCA noted reports of sightings from Plymouth to Falmouth.

Fishers in Plymouth are concerned about declining crab and lobster catches due to octopus. Sightings are limited to the Southern IFCA district. North Devon Fishermen's Association confirmed no more octopus sightings in their area. Rising octopus' numbers are also reported in Jersey. Octopus numbers increased around Guernsey about 5 years ago.

The AIFCA, along with D&S IFCA and Cornwall IFCA have been in dialogue with Defra and the MMO. There have been two meetings which have brought together various government and research bodies to share data on rising octopus landings and their negative impact on other fisheries, particularly crab and lobster. Key discussion points revolved around determining if this is a temporary bloom or a long-term "regime shift," exploring potential management solutions like managing octopus as a viable fishery or implementing measures to minimise impacts on other species, and agreeing on next steps for research, data collection, and communication with affected fishers.

CHLE Completion!

In the Quarter the AIFCA completed its engagement with the CHLE project. The project has resulted in good awareness and support across IFCA community for programme, good engagement with CEFAS programme managers. The actions undertaken to develop/deliver agreed workstreams included IFCA participation in pathology sampling technique training. The AIFCA, Kent and Essex IFCA, Northumberland IFCA, North Eastern IFCA and Eastern IFCA attended a desk top exercise to review the methodology to respond to an incident or unknown origin. Going forward we have expressed an interest in forming part of a consortium to continue this work.

WWF report: Not in the Net: Innovation to Safeguard Sensitive Species within UK Seafood Supply Chains – available to read [here](#).

WWF have released a report which explores where endangered, threatened, and protected (ETP) species bycatch poses a significant risk across UK seafood supply chains. It also assesses a range of bycatch mitigation methods—highlighting their effectiveness, cost, benefits, and challenges through a series of case studies.

IVMS licence condition in effect: Marine Management Organisation (MMO) confirms I-VMS licence condition is in effect.

After a long wait with many twists and turns, IVMS is a step closer. On 12 May 2025, a new licence condition came into force requiring English licensed vessels under-12m to have a functioning type-approved I-VMS device installed and transmitting data during any trip to sea.

I-VMS devices capture and transmit positional data (latitude, longitude, speed, and course) and report device ID, date, time and changes in events such as battery status and data stored.

The I-VMS hotline remains open for enquiries on 01900 508618, Monday to Friday (9am to 5pm) and emails can be sent to ivms@marinemanagement.org.uk. Updated guidance can be found online at: gov.uk/mmo/i-vms-england.

Fisheries APPG celebrates value of UK fishing and reflects on key industry issues.

A member of the All Party Parliamentary Groups Expert Panel on Wednesday 30 April the AIFCA attended an evening of celebration, discussion and connection at One Birdcage Walk, Westminster, in support of a sustainable and thriving UK fishing industry.

Chaired by APPG Co-Chairs, Melanie Onn MP and Alistair Carmichael MP, the event showcased the value and diversity of the industry, alongside the work of the APPG on Fisheries within Parliament in support of UK fisheries and seafood.

Alongside members of the APPG's Expert Panel, the wider UK fishing and seafood community and their representatives; the event was also attended by APPG Vice-Chair Seamus Logan MP, APPG Members Alison Hume MP and Angus Macdonald MP, and Harriet Cross MP.

The event heard from industry chiefs who highlighted the true social value of fishing to coastal communities around the UK, noted the failure of more than five decades of UK Governments to recognise and safeguard that value, and called for action in support of UK fishing.