

# Fisheries and Brexit briefing for MPs: March 2019

## What is wrong with our fishing policy?

1. **Over decades UK fish stocks have become depleted and now only [one third are in a healthy state](#)**, significantly worse than the global average. This means that we are catching much less fish than we could. If all stocks were allowed to recover, our fishing industry could yield [45% higher landings and 2,400 additional jobs](#).
2. **Fish stocks can recover quickly, successfully, and to the benefit of the economy:**
  - **North Sea Cod** – considered close to collapse in the early 2000s, is now a certified sustainable fishery.
  - **Seabass on the South Coast** – in 2015, scientists recommended [no fishing at all](#) and this drastic action is [slowly helping stocks to recover](#).
  - **UK Hake** – Following stock decline in the 1980s, a recovery plan was introduced based on scientific advice. The data has informed management ever since, and [all stocks are now considered sustainable](#).

We must establish a legally-binding requirement to fish at sustainable levels (Maximum Sustainable Yield) as soon as possible. Without intentions set out in law, there's no guarantee that short term interests won't overtake sustainability aims.

3. **There is missing data for about one third of UK fish stocks [Defra] so it isn't possible to adequately understand the impact of fishing.** Poor data may also give the fishery an 'unsustainable' rating by default.

Data deficiency is worse for stocks targeted by the small-scale English fleet; only 12% record and collate the necessary information to set an effective management regime, according to [a 2013 study](#).

**Full assessments for data deficient fisheries would cost an estimated £30 million annually [1].** To put this cost in context, the UK could catch fish worth an additional £1.4bn to the UK economy if all stocks were recovered ([Natural Capital Committee data](#)).

We must we must invest in better understanding of our fisheries to be able to manage them properly We must make it a requirement to *gather adequate data to manage fisheries sustainably*. As a minimum, we must fully record all catches, add CCTV and GPS to all boats and carry out stock assessments for all commercial species. There is broad support for this from fishers, who feel like they can be unduly branded 'unsustainable' without the data to prove otherwise

4. **Much UK fish can't be marketed as sustainable and this is harming access to markets.** The market for sustainable seafood is growing [10 times faster](#) than for conventional seafood. Fish that isn't verifiably sustainable can't be served in UK public sector catering including prisons, defence catering, and [the NHS](#) in England and Wales. All must serve fish which is either certified sustainable or rated 1-3 in the [Good Fish Guide](#) produced by the [Marine Conservation Society](#)). Public sector institutions account for [19% of out-of-home foodservice outlets](#) in the UK

Eight of the ten major retailers in the UK have signed up to the [Sustainable Seafood Coalition](#) Codes of Conduct, which means they must have evidence that their fish is sourced responsibly.

Sustainable Fish Cities recently found that UK fisheries are losing out on millions of pounds of business from the catering sector because [UK buyers must look abroad for sustainable fish](#) (see table below).

## A new system for allocating fishing quota?

**The current quota system is unfair on the small-scale fishing fleet.** They make up 79% of British fishers, but [have access to only 2% of the quota](#) thanks to the 'Fixed Quota Allocation' system which has, progressively, over time, allowed quota to be bought-up by large businesses – some of which don't own boats - and leased for profit. More than a third of UK quota is owned by [just five businesses](#).











Small scale fleets employ [more people](#) per tonne and land much more [into UK ports](#), benefiting local transport, processing and storage industries.

**We must decide to allocate some quota on transparent social and ecological criteria. These criteria must be developed through wide consultation, based on scientific advice.** Quota could be used to incentivise sustainability and scientific data gathering. It could also reward boats for meeting legal requirements – preferable to costly enforcement. A more flexible system could help to achieve the discard ban by allowing communities to pool, share or exchange quota.

## Cross-party support for sustainability measures in UK fishing policy.

- The [House of Commons EFRA Committee report](#) on the Fishing Bill recommended a number of amendments, stating that the Bill in its current form doesn't meet its objectives. They include strengthening the Bill to ensure international commitments are met, and re-allocating quota to ensure fairness.
- [EU Energy and Environment Sub-Committee](#) found little evidence of the EU's discard ban ('landing obligation') being followed, and recommended introducing a new system of quota allocation, as well as improving data collection on boats, to help improve this.

**Summary of sustainability issues for the 11 most commercially-important UK fish species.** Ratings from [mcsuk.org/goodfishguide](http://mcsuk.org/goodfishguide): Green = Fish to Eat Amber = OK to eat occasionally Red = Fish to Avoid

Species, landings value (2016) and ranking for value to UK industry	Sustainability rating for UK stocks	Why is it not all sustainable?
1 Mackerel £188 million		Management generally good but some sign of stocks declining. Most UK catch has Marine Stewardship Council certification at present.
2 Nephrops (Scampi) £104 million		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trawling for scampi associated with high bycatch and sea bed impacts (creel pots are better)</li> <li>- Some stocks depleted through overfishing, stock status in some areas unknown</li> <li>- Not all boats are monitored and catches recorded, so it isn't possible to determine the extent of overfishing</li> <li>- Scampi caught in parts of North Sea is red-rated</li> </ul>
3 Scallops £75 million		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stocks depleted</li> <li>- Dredging damages environment</li> <li>- Stock status is unknown across most of the UK, and without this data, it isn't possible to set effective catch limits.</li> <li>- Scallops from Isle of Man &amp; dredged from Scottish inshore areas are red-rated</li> </ul>
4 Monkfish £60 million		Data deficiency an issue for south west Monkfish stocks and some caught by beam trawl which impacts sea bed and can have high bycatch. Monkfish is a slow-growing species, vulnerable to overfishing
5 Herring £56 million		Stock data generally good. In some areas though (Celtic Sea, Irish Sea, Western Baltic, West of Scotland and West of Ireland) fishing pressure exceeds scientific advice and stocks are depleted, and therefore considered 'Fish to Avoid' Herring caught in west of Scotland & West of Ireland are red-rated
6 Cod £53 million		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In most areas cod populations well understood and this has led to very positive stock recovery in some areas.</li> <li>- Low sustainability ratings for some stocks are a result of long-term overfishing</li> <li>- Cod caught in the Celtic Sea, areas of the English Channel, west of Scotland &amp; Cornwall is red-rated.</li> </ul>
7 Crabs £53 million		Velvet and spider crab stocks poorly understood so it isn't possible to be sure at what level fishing becomes unsustainable
8 Haddock £45 million		Most haddock populations well understood and fisheries in Scotland have Marine Stewardship Council certification. The low sustainability ratings for some stocks are a result of overfishing
9 Lobsters £40 million		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overfishing thought to be occurring for most stocks</li> <li>- Data deficiency is a serious problem – not possible to set catch limits effectively</li> </ul>
10 Hake £33 million		Following stock decline in the 1980s, a recovery plan was introduced based on scientific advice. The data has informed management ever since, and all stocks now considered sustainable

[1] This estimate is based on similar costs in the USA, where NOAA carry out stock assessments [costing \\$215million](#) for about 121 assessments, \$1.7million per assessment. Initial assessment cost is high but to update and maintain assessment much less expensive. ICES carry out this work and provide advice on catch limits on behalf of the EU on 194 stocks with a [budget for this work of around £3.75 million](#), or £19,360 per stock.

To assess 113 UK stocks is therefore estimated to be around £2.2million. Data from the [ICES annual report 2017](#). Their income from the EU is 10.4m, and from national contributions other than the USA is 20.7m = 31.1 m. All figures in Danish Krone, converted to £ Sterling on 10<sup>th</sup> Jan 2019.