



Our big idea: Let's make all the UK's fish – wild-caught or farmed – verifiably sustainable

Our vision is that everyone buying UK fish knows that it is sustainably fished. We are not just aiming to restore and enhance our marine environment but create 10,000 jobs in the fishing industry¹ and plough at least £240 million into fishing communities like West Cornwall, Milford Haven and Grimsby – some of the poorest areas in the UK.

Our idea would increase the UK's production of safe, affordable, nutritious fish like cod, plaice, trout and prawns, which we are advised to eat twice per week² but most of us don't³, and crucially ensure our producers can take advantage of the market for sustainable seafood which is growing ten times faster⁴ than for conventional fish.

Why do we need this intervention?

As a whole the last few decades have seen UK fish populations decline, and with them jobs in fishing and fish processing⁵. Half of all commercial fisheries in the UK are overexploited – more than the global average. But this environmental challenge is a great opportunity because if recovered and fished sustainably they could yield – at a conservative estimate - 45% higher landings⁶ and an additional 2,400 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs⁷.

UK fishers are missing out on the best markets:

Most fish caught in the UK at present is *not* verifiably sustainable. This is defined as rated 1-3 by the Marine Conservation Society, or certified sustainable e.g. by Marine Stewardship Council or Aquaculture Stewardship Council. Some is considered '*Fish to Avoid*' including some cod, scampi (Nephrops), scallops, herring and plaice. This is a problem because businesses that serve nearly a billion meals per year⁸ have adopted policies to remove '*Fish to Avoid*' and serve verifiably sustainable fish instead, including:

- All central government procurement, Whitehall, prisons and defence catering⁹, and the NHS in England and Wales¹⁰. More than 10,000 schools¹¹ in England (over 40%)

¹ Jobs lost at sea - Overfishing and the jobs that never were – New Economics Foundation: https://b.3cdn.net/nefoundation/e966d4ce355b7485c1_a7m6brn5t.pdf

² The Eatwell Guide – Public Health England 2016 : https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/528193/Eatwell_guide_colour.pdf

³ ITV News - Majority of Britons not eating enough fish, survey finds - 4 October 2018 <https://www.itv.com/news/2018-10-04/majority-of-britons-not-eating-enough-fish-survey-finds/>

⁴ The SSI Review: Standards and the Blue Economy - <https://www.iisd.org/ssi/standards-and-the-blue-economy/>

⁵ House of Commons Briefing Paper - UK Sea Fisheries Statistics By Elise Uberoi - Number 2788, 5 December 2017 <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN02788/SN02788.pdf>

⁶ TURNING BACK TO THE SEA - A BLUE NEW DEAL TO REVITALISE COASTAL COMMUNITIES – New Economics Foundation - Fernanda Balata, Olivier Vardakoulias: <https://neweconomics.org/uploads/images/2017/08/NEF-Blue-New-Deal-AP-LowRes.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Sustainable Fish Cities Website – listing the businesses that have adopted a sustainable fish buying policy: https://www.sustainweb.org/sustainablefishcity/whos_working_on_it/

⁹ Press release from gov.uk - 16 June 2011 - Let them eat hake, Government takes lead in buying sustainable fish <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/let-them-eat-hake-government-takes-lead-in-buying-sustainable-fish>

¹⁰ The Hospital Food Standards Panel's report on standards for food and drink in NHS hospitals – Department of Health, 2014

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/523049/Hospital_Food_Panel_May_2016.pdf

¹¹ STATE OF THE NATION: Children's food in England, 2018 – Soil Association - <https://www.foodforlife.org.uk/~media/files/policyreports/state-of-the-nation-soil-association-report.pdf>

- Eight of the largest contract catering companies in the UK

This is excluding UK producers from good markets; we recently estimated that they are losing out on business worth £62 million per year from the catering sector alone because they can't satisfy company sustainability policies¹², with businesses buying sustainable fish from overseas instead. There's also likely to be an impact on exports, with the global market for sustainable seafood increasing ten times faster than for conventional fish¹³.

Supporting other government policy:

The Government has promised to be the 'Greenest government yet' and set a 'gold standard for sustainable fishing around the world'¹⁴. A new Fisheries Bill was announced in the Queen's Speech¹⁵ and its main purpose is to set out licensing and quota management for when we leave the EU, with overall sustainable-catch ambitions. But it doesn't look wider to respond to what the market is calling for. We know that buyers want fish that meets a more holistic approach to sustainability; tackling issues like bycatch and avoiding sensitive habitats – and this is also the only way to ensure thriving ecosystems which can deliver diverse and lasting jobs (more about this below). The National Food Strategy and the fishing bill can work together to ensure that after Brexit the UK's coastal communities will grow and thrive.

How would it work?

- The Food Strategy would set a target for all commercial fisheries to be verifiably sustainable by a fixed date (we suggest five years - this is enough time for all fish stocks to improve enough¹⁶).
- Conduct a gap-analysis to determine why each fishery isn't operating at best-practice (for example is fishing pressure too high? Bycatch an issue? – some gap analysis has been done already¹⁷).
- Action plans and improvement projects would then be devised, and progress against action plans published annually. There are some excellent improvement projects happening in individual fisheries already (see Project UK Fishery Improvements¹⁸) and they are a great blueprint for how this could work across the UK.
- After the 5-year deadline, fisheries that haven't met the prescribed improvements would be penalised, to ensure there is a clear incentive to improve. For example, withdrawing fishing licenses or quota, or financial penalties imposed.

What impact would it have?

For fishers – This idea would be a huge benefit to fishers. Rebuilt stocks would deliver jobs and boost income remarkably quickly but at the moment there is too much incentive to forgo long-term benefits for short-term

¹² News release – Sustain – Ruth Westcott https://www.sustainweb.org/news/jun18_fishers_losing_out/

¹³ The SSI Review: Standards and the Blue Economy - <https://www.iisd.org/ssi/standards-and-the-blue-economy/>

¹⁴ The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP – Forward on the publication of the White Paper on future fisheries policy, October 2018 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/fisheries-white-paper-sustainable-fisheries-for-future-generations/sustainable-fisheries-for-future-generations-consultation-document>

¹⁵ Queen's Speech 2019 - Delivered to both Houses of Parliament on 14 October 2019. Transcript here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/queens-speech-2019>

¹⁶ A [report](#) by the New Economics Foundation estimates that the majority of UK fish stocks could be recovered within 5 years. The MCS ratings [take into account](#) the efforts of a fishery to improve, so a fishery which is on the right track can achieve a sustainability rating which would fit with our definition.

¹⁷ Project Inshore MSC Pre-Assessment online Database – Seafish, 2013 - <http://msc.solidproject.co.uk/msc-project-inshore.aspx>

¹⁸ Project UK Fisheries Improvements: Website detailing a number of local improvement projects, with their gap-analysis and action plans – Seafish and the Marine Stewardship Council: <https://www.seafish.org/article/project-uk-fisheries-improvements>

gain. It is absurd that at the moment some UK-caught fish can't be sold in our own prisons and hospitals because it isn't sustainable. The market is changing and the industry must do the same, or overseas suppliers will fill the demand.

UK Seafood Industry – Increasing stocks will deliver auxiliary jobs - fishing supports supplies, fishing gear, fuel, maintenance and services. The Scottish Nephrops fleet, for example, employs 1,266 directly onboard, and another 1,744 in supporting roles and at least 300 in processing¹⁹.

Coastal Communities – Thriving marine ecosystems can bring a host of benefits to coastal communities. Recreational fishing employs over 20,000 people – (more than fishing itself) and contributes well over £2bn each year to UK GDP²⁰. Wildlife tourism is on the up; visitors to the Moray Firth who make their trip primarily to view coastal wildlife spend £163 million per year²¹.

Costs:

Financial support will be required, just as farmers receive funding to protect habitats on land. This could come from whatever replaces the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (the government has committed to replacing this after Brexit) with a transitional contribution by industry once the economic benefits have been demonstrated. This should be seen as an investment; a conservative estimate suggests an extra £244 million worth of landings if UK stocks recover²².

We would also like to see government use its purchasing power by guaranteeing that it will buy UK-landed sustainable fish like coley, hake and pollock for the public sector.

Have any other countries done similar?

Yes - many countries. Some notable ones:

- Denmark has gone further - recognising growing retailer demand, they have a goal of making all catches MSC certified. They have achieved over 90%²³
- Australia has action plans for sustainable recovery of all fisheries – progress is published online annually²⁴.

¹⁹ Analysis of nephrops industry in Scotland - Jennifer Russell, Anderson Solutions (Consulting) Ltd
Simon Mardle, Fishor Consulting Ltd - October 2017 <https://www.sff.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AS-nephrops-FINAL-report-171017-ISSUED.pdf>

²⁰ Written evidence submitted by the Angling Trust - EFRA Committee's inquiry and to the Fisheries Bill Committee - November 2018 - <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmpublic/Fisheries/memo/FISH01.htm>

²¹ TURNING BACK TO THE SEA - A BLUE NEW DEAL TO REVITALISE COASTAL COMMUNITIES – New Economics Foundation - Fernanda Balata, Olivier Vardakoulias: <https://neweconomics.org/uploads/images/2017/08/NEF-Blue-New-Deal-AP-LowRes.pdf>

²² Oceana's Recipe for Fish Recovery - APRIL 2018 - https://eu.oceana.org/sites/default/files/more_food_more_jobs_and_more_jobs_in_the_uk.pdf

²³ Denmark Takes the Lead within Sustainable Fishery – news item – Food Nation Denmark - <https://foodnationdenmark.com/news/denmark-takes-the-lead-within-sustainable-fishery/>

²⁴ Fishery status reports 2018 - 28 September 2018 - Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences http://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/publications/display?url=http://143.188.17.20/anrd/DAFFService/display.php?fid=pb_fsr18d9abm_2_0180928.xml