

# What are we responding to?

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Last month the government released a [White Paper](#) outlining their proposals for managing fisheries and marine life after Brexit, and the public have the opportunity to give feedback until 12th September.

We would like to encourage organisations like you to respond. Hopefully the following will help break down the white paper into issues relevant to your work and suggest simple responses in blue – please do use as much or as little of this document as you see fit. Sustain has [published its own response](#) to the white paper which may also be of interest.

To respond, organisations can either [complete an online survey](#) – it’s about 30 questions in total or email an open response to [FisheriesEngagement@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:FisheriesEngagement@defra.gsi.gov.uk). The text below is intended for either option, but probably suits submitting an open response best.

## General comments – to weave into all responses:

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The language of the white paper is vague and there are few clear targets for improvement. The Paper is peppered with commitments to ‘consider’ and ‘seek to’, which leaves a concerning amount open to watering down later.

**Please call for the following:** Overall the plans and commitments should be clarified and confirmed with robust language and time-bound targets, otherwise it isn’t possible to properly measure the success of the policy.

## Environment/Nature/Conservation

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The Bill states that its overall purpose is ‘to build a vibrant and sustainable marine fishing industry’ and is ‘fully committed to achieving sustainable fisheries’ which is very welcome - but so it should: The [2017 Conservative Manifesto](#) promised to leave the environment in a better state than we found it. Both Michael Gove and Theresa May have promised, [on a number of occasions](#), that Brexit will not mean a weakening of environmental protections and Michael Gove has [promised that conservation would be at the heart of his policies](#).

## *Sustainable Fish Stocks*

1. The paper says 'the UK will continue to respect Maximum Sustainable Yield' when deciding how much should be caught, but there is a lack of clarity about *when* this will happen. Anything later than *all quotas respecting MSY by 2020* would be a step backwards for the UK and therefore a weakening of environmental standards - (MSY by 2020 is clearly set out in EU policy). We are concerned that at best, this lack of clarity leaves room to fudge and at worst it could be an opportunity to weaken the fundamental time-bound commitment to MSY.

**Please call for:** The aim of sustainable fishing, the precautionary principle, fairness, and public money for public good must be enshrined in the Bill as a specific clause, to ensure the stated ambitions of this white paper have a legal underpinning. These principles will then steer the direction of decisions by other agencies including the MMO and Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authorities.

There must be clear, time-bound targets for the recovery of UK fish stocks (which includes a comprehensive assessment of all stocks), specifically all total allowable catches must be set at Maximum Sustainable Yield *by 2020*

## *Ecosystem-based Management*

Ecosystem-based management means considering and protecting functioning marine ecosystems as a whole, not just focussing on recovering the fish stocks that we eat (more information in this Greener UK briefing.)

The paper promises to 'pursue an ecosystem approach' but with a lack of detail and clarity about how this will be measured or achieved. We have a few ideas about what could be done better. Please call for:

- A commitment to increasing, year on year, the number of fisheries in the UK that are certified sustainable (eg by the Marine Stewardship Council) or considered 'fish to eat' by the Marine Conservation Society. Ultimately, our target should be that *all* fisheries in the UK are verifiably sustainable; otherwise fishers will continue to miss out on markets for their goods. The MSC assessment and MCS ratings do consider the impact of fishing on the wider environment so would be a good indicator of the success of an ecosystem approach.

- Government must be clearer about the plans for vessel monitoring – it is absolutely vital for monitoring ecosystems and understanding bycatch that we have fully documented fisheries – all catches recorded, and the location of fishing recorded by remote GPS or CCTV or other monitoring systems. Defra need to confirm that they will require vessel monitoring systems on *all* vessels, with the data reviewed on a risk-based system. The wording in the paper is unclear.
- We must see support and funding for certification and/or Fishery Improvement Projects to help struggling fisheries improve to be considered sustainable. This funding should be available for both wild-capture and farmed fishing.

### *An opportunity*

The paper promises an ‘annual statement on our assessment of the state of stocks of interest to the UK...and our approach to setting fishing rates and other management measures for the year ahead. If particular stocks are in trouble...the government will...draw up and implement recovery plans, to ensure they are restored to a healthy condition’. At face value this is fantastic but lacks clarity in some key areas.

Please call for better clarity. This is a great opportunity but we need some confirmation:

- The annual assessment must cover all commercially- fished stocks in the UK, (It isn’t clear what stocks ‘of interest’ means).
- The ‘other management measures’ must include *all* the issues relevant to sustainable fishing, including the impact of boats on the wider environment. (Such an assessment was produced for all English inshore stocks through [Project Inshore](#). The project has greatly helped to show where fisheries are doing well, identify gaps in management and data and pinpoint areas requiring improvement projects. Rather than reinventing the wheel, Project Inshore could be the model for this new annual statement)
- It is welcome to see the promise to restore stocks, but there needs to be firm targets to do this and ways to measure progress against them. There also needs to be incentives to meet these targets and sanctions for failure.
- Data gaps must be plugged. At the moment, lots of fish caught in the UK is considered ‘Fish to avoid’ because there is a lack of full data about the status of the stock and the impact of fishing on the marine habitat. Where these gaps exist in the annual statement, there must be a commitment to plug them as soon as practicable.

### *Avoiding catching unwanted species*

On bycatch, the White Paper says (emphasis added) ‘We are also working...with the aim of identifying and implementing practical and effective *risk-based mitigation*.’ This is actually a weakening of EU law. The EU Seabird action plan requires nations to reduce bycatch to the lowest levels practically possible.

Please call for: a detailed and properly resourced strategy to eliminate bycatch, as a minimum:

- Vessel monitoring and recording on all boats to help identify the highest-bycatch fisheries
- Implementation of proven by-catch mitigation measures such as increased mesh sizes

- Research into the development of practical and efficient mitigation
- Rapid implementation and enforcement of marine protected areas

## Democracy / Accountability

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The Fisheries Bill will make some major changes to the 'retained law' transferred over when we leave the EU. The white paper proposes that some of these changes will be through secondary legislation, to allow government to 'respond to scientific advice, protect the marine environment and meet our international commitments'. It is proposed that these powers will be in the hands of the devolved administrations or, for England, the Secretary of State, and these powers will be 'as tightly constrained as possible'.

Please call for much better clarification on these powers, particularly:

- There must be a specific definition of what can be changed by secondary legislation. Any substantive policy changes must have parliamentary scrutiny.
- Decision making on all aspects of policy must be transparent and accompanied by a formal public consultation process, and scrutiny by a cross-bench committee.
- The proposed Environmental Watchdog should have a role in new policy, ensuring that the principles of sustainability, public money for public good and fairness established in the Bill (see above) are followed. This would provide reassurance to the public that new secondary legislation powers are used appropriately and always for the stated benefit of protecting the marine environment or responding quickly to scientific advice.

## Health and healthy diets

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Abundant fish stocks are vital for the health of the UK population. Fish is recommended in a healthy diet as part of the Eatwell Plate, Seafish recommend that two portions should be eaten per week, and fish is required to be served once per week in schools and hospitals. There is a growing body of evidence of the benefit of omega 3 oils found in oily fish for the brain and heart and improving survival for certain types of cancer. Swapping processed and red meat for fish is advised for preventing cancer and diabetes.

Over the last two decades, fish has increased in price as stocks have steadily declined. Since 2007 fish has increased in price by 31%, faster than other meat and nearly twice as fast as cheese and dairy<sup>1</sup>. This price increase is affecting poorer households most, with an 18% drop in fish-buying in the poorest households between 2007 and 2015. There is a risk that, if we don't restore fish stocks and the marine environment, fish will continue to become scarcer, and could become the luxurious preserve of the wealthy. This could have profound societal impacts on health.

To ensure that fish is an affordable part of our menus in years to come it is vital that stocks are allowed to recover, and the ecosystem which supports them is protected.

**Please call for:** the environment/nature/conservation actions listed above to restore fish stocks and the marine environment.

## Good food for all through public procurement

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Unfortunately, there's nothing about sustainable fish for the public sector in the White Paper.

**Please call for:** government to act as a leader through its public-sector buying, linking fishing policy with public health and boosting incomes for the UK fishing industry by:

- Confirming the public sector commitment to verifiably sustainable fish and look to buy from the UK wherever possible. Selling domestically-landed within the UK would avoid tariffs resulting from new trade deals
- Updating school food standards to require sustainability
- Making healthy and sustainable food standards legally binding for hospitals, prisons and the British armed forces, and for all public sector contracts, which would include schools, health centres, leisure centres and events, and some museums and libraries.

## Jobs/Worker welfare

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/food-statistics-pocketbook-2017/food-statistics-in-your-pocket-2017-prices-and-expenditure#uk-retail-price-changes-by-food-group-2007-to-2016>

### *Increasing and securing jobs*

Livelihoods are created and sustained from thriving fish stocks – the [New Economics Foundation calculated](#) that rebuilding most commercial EU fish stocks in North Atlantic waters to their Maximum Sustainable Yield would deliver 2,052,639 tonnes of additional fish per year, €1,565 million additional gross revenues per year; and €824 million additional net profits per year which could support up to 64,092 new jobs across the EU. Oceana’s recent ‘[recipe for fish recovery](#)’ report analyses the six most economically important species and estimates that if these were well- managed they could yield a 27% increase in catches and a £244 million increase in the value of landings, and over 5000 new full time jobs.

**Please call for:** the environmental/conservation actions above to support the recovery of fish stocks and boost jobs in the shortest time possible

### *Better access to markets for UK fishers*

Supply chain businesses, retailers, and foodservice companies in the UK serving nearly a billion meals per year have committed to buying only demonstrably sustainable fish (see examples of these below). At present, much of the fish caught in the UK *does not meet these standards*, and therefore cannot be sold legally in the public sector in the UK. Sustainable Fish Cities recently found that [UK fisheries are losing out on millions of pounds of business as UK buyers look abroad for sustainable fish](#). The growth of the market for sustainable fish is 10 times faster than the market for conventional seafood.

### *It would help our exports to be able to market fish as sustainable*

The white paper says: ‘Equipped with a new fisheries policy, the UK fisheries sector will be in a strong position to trade seafood with export markets around the world.’ The market for sustainable fish is growing rapidly worldwide. Sustainability could and should be a point of difference for UK produce, and an opportunity to garner top prices and the best markets for exports.

To help the fishing industry, the Government needs to go further than focusing on the recovery of fish stocks. Fishing has a wider impact on the environment, and fishing activities can only be considered sustainable if they are well enough understood and managed, and the impact on the wider ecosystem considered. This more inclusive ‘ecosystem based’ definition of sustainability is accepted and used by all the major certification schemes, the [fishing industry body](#) itself, and by the major retailers and foodservice companies in their buying policies.

**Please call for the following:** The White Paper must support, promote and set targets for achieving the accepted wider definition of sustainable fishing by:

- Setting strong targets to increase the number of UK fisheries that are considered ‘fish to eat’ or certified – i.e. demonstrably sustainable year on year, so ultimately all UK fisheries will be verifiably sustainable.
- Start by ensuring that the replacement for the European Fisheries and Maritime fund is channelled into, among other things, collecting data on fish stocks and impacts, which would make it possible for a chunk of fisheries to be certified rapidly, and a fundamental first step for those that need to improve management. One of the main reasons for UK species getting a low sustainability rating at the moment is data deficiency (see Table 1 below). The data can then be shared with the public through the annual statement on fish stocks, as per the above.

### *We can create and protect jobs by allocating quota differently*

With all the talk about taking back control of fishing waters after Brexit, it is astonishing that the White Paper does not propose to reform how England allocates its share of the quota. Nothing about guaranteeing that smaller and low-impact boats will be better off after Brexit, just that Defra will 'examine' ways to distribute any new quota that *may* be won after Brexit. This extra quota allocation is far from certain – the EU have stated already that any free trade agreement with the UK would be contingent on continuing “existing reciprocal access to fishing waters and resources.”

This means that, under some Brexit scenarios, *no sustainability criteria would be used when allocating UK quota*. This completely contradicts and undermines the purported ambition of the white paper.

This is also a backwards step - The EU Common Fisheries Policy includes a clear obligation on states to allocate fishing rights on social and ecological criteria to benefit smaller, lower-impact and artisan fishers. Unfortunately, successive UK Governments haven't done well at implementing this; In 2016 for example, three companies controlled 61% of the quota for England and Wales, and in fact Greenpeace took the UK Government to court for failing to follow the EU rules.

The paper proposes to develop and consider a set of new criteria for allocating newly-acquired quota. There is therefore no reason why these criteria can't be applied to – at least some of - the UK's existing quota allocation to make the system fairer and act as a mechanism to encourage sustainable fishing.

Fisheries are a precious public asset – the rights to use them should be allocated according to transparent, openly consulted criteria in the interests of the public now and for future generations. The small-scale fleet are facing issues from the implementation of the discard ban, as well as not seeing enough direct reward for fishing sustainably. A fairer quota allocation system, which saw more quota going to small-scale fleets, would go some way to addressing these issues.

**Please call for:** A rethink of the quota allocation system to better benefit small-scale boats and sustainability. We would like to see boats that are smaller, using low-impact gear and fishing sustainably rewarded with a greater proportion of the quota. Boats could also be rewarded with more quotas for gathering data, fitting vessel monitoring and safety gear, improving gear selectivity and avoiding protected areas.

- Create new criteria for allocating quota through broad consultation with the fishing community, scientists and environmental organisations, designed to encourage environmental and socio economic benefits. We should also consider new ways to manage quota, including:
- Allowing some quota trading between boats, so a boat could 'buy' quota to allow their quota to align with catches.
- Community quota-sharing schemes in which boats in an area could 'pool' quota, then allocate amongst community members according to individual preferences and opportunities, giving communities greater control.

- A plan to switch over to the new system over time, to avoid shocks, for example allocating an increasing percentage year on year according to the new criteria, as well as a plan to review criteria and respond to scientific data

## For Businesses

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The trends in the seafood market at the moment are clearly towards an increasing concern for sustainability and a growth in the market for fish which is verifiably sustainable. Catering companies are now [assessed and ranked](#) on whether they are serving fish which meets the industry's accepted definition of sustainable (see box 2 below), they must also serve sustainable fish as part of the [Food for Life Served Here Awards](#), and if they wish to sell into the public sector.

All the major retailers in the UK have signed up to the [Sustainable Seafood Coalition buying codes](#), which means that supermarkets must have evidence that the fish is from sustainable sources. We believe that the strong market signals point to increasing markets for sustainable seafood, and the benefits of heading in that direction.

### Please call for:

- We support a commitment to increasing, year on year, the number of fisheries in the UK that are either certified sustainable (eg by the Marine Stewardship Council) or considered 'fish to eat' by the Marine Conservation Society. Ultimately, our target should be that *all* fisheries in the UK are verifiably sustainable.
- It is vital that the future for funding improvement projects and sustainability initiatives is secure, so the Bill must commit to increasing, not decreasing the fund available to fishing. A number of businesses are supporting the rollout of projects as part of the [Seafish-led Project UK Fishery Improvements](#). These are partnerships to improve specific aspects of fishing in an area, ultimately to improve fisheries, using the Marine Stewardship Council standards as the model for best practice. Businesses chip in, but a significant chunk of the funding for improvements has been from the EU, and it would significantly stall this great work if funding for fisheries were to be lost.
- We would like to see ongoing support and help for businesses to switch to sustainable fish buying, including chef training and access to advice and support to aid understanding about sustainable seafood.

## Funding

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## *Public money for public good*

The White Paper sets out the laudable principle that “the fish in our seas, like our wider marine assets, are a public resource and therefore the rights to catch them are a public asset.”

It is right that public money is used to protect and improve rights and opportunities for citizens. We have an obligation to invest money to protect our marine life for the public now and for future generations. This means directing funding to conservation, and ensuring that financial rewards, subsidies and grants support sustainable fishing and reducing harm to the marine environment.

The EU has, for decades, supported coastal communities and fishing through a patchwork of funding streams including the Coastal Communities Fund, Regional Development Fund, and European Fisheries and Maritime Fund. The latter has made €243.1m available between 2014 and 2020 (about 40million averaged out per year.)

The White Paper promises that future funding arrangements will be consistent with the 'thrust' of the plan, ie sustainable fishing as a priority, but - worryingly - it does not rule out a drop in the cash available. In the run-up to the referendum, Michael Gove (amongst others) [promised in an open letter](#) that coastal communities would not suffer a loss in funding through Brexit so now government must, in good faith, be stronger on funding promises. [Oceana estimates](#) that if UK fisheries were managed sustainably the economic value of fish landings could increase by £244 million per year – a very significant return on investment.

**Please call for:** Much more clarity is needed on the level of, and priorities for funding after Brexit, including a statement of commitment that fishing communities will not lose out. In fact funding for data collection, sustainability improvements including certification (this could be for both wild-caught and farmed fish), and promoting and marketing sustainable fish should increase. It is difficult to see how the ambitions for improved monitoring and data collection in this plan will be achieved otherwise. This investment would reap rewards for the sustainability of livelihoods for fishing communities, as well as delivering long-term benefits for the environment.

**Please call for:** The Public Money for Public Good principle should underpin all funding decisions. A natural capital approach was discussed in the [25 year Food and Environment Plan](#) (p19) but is missing in this paper. According to the natural capital approach, funding should be directed towards protecting the environment as a whole, in recognition of the benefits of the oceans beyond seafood; including wildlife, carbon capture, recreation and tourism, species diversity and resilience to climate change.

**Box 1: A snapshot of UK commitments to buying verifiably sustainable seafood**

Supply chain businesses, retailers, and foodservice companies in the UK serving over 700 million meals per year have committed to buying only demonstrably sustainable fish (see definition in Box 2. These include):

- Sustainable fish standards now apply for all central government procurement, Whitehall, prisons and defence spending, the NHS in England and Wales, and are recommended for schools in England and Wales.
- Six of the largest contract catering companies in the UK, covering a third of the sector, now use demonstrably sustainable fish as standard across all their dining services in universities, workplaces, stadia and public-sector food.
- Brakes - the largest foodservice wholesaler with roughly 20% market share have switched all their own-brand fish products to demonstrably sustainable options.

**Box 2: Definition of demonstrably sustainable fish**

This definition has now been adopted by UK Government as part of the Government Buying Standards, as well as caterers, restaurants and fish-supplying companies that have signed up to the Sustainable Fish Cities pledge, (these serve well over 700 million meals per year).

All wild-caught fish meeting the UN FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. This includes:

- Marine Stewardship Council Certified
- Marine Conservation Society 'fish to eat'

More recently, a definition of sustainable farmed fish has been developed and accepted by the Marine Conservation Society rating scheme:

- Aquaculture Stewardship Council Certified
- Organic
- Global Aquaculture Alliance Best Aquaculture Practices 4\* or above
- GlobalGAP certified

At present, much of the fish caught in the UK does not meet this standard, and some key reasons are outlined in Table 1. A key priority for the Bill must be to increase the proportion of UK fish meeting this definition.