

Government consultation on the White Paper 'Sustainable fisheries for future generations'



Sustain response

About Sustain:

Written evidence submitted by Sustain: the alliance for Better Food and Farming. Sustain advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional and local level. Amongst our influential projects and campaigns are:

- **Sustainable Fish Cities:** A campaign to encourage and support fish-serving businesses in the UK to adopt and promote a sustainable fish buying policy. So far, business serving nearly one billion meals per year have pledged to serve only fish which is considered verifiably sustainable; either certified to a recognised sustainability standard, or rated 1-3 by the Marine Conservation Society.
- **Campaign for Better Hospital Food:** Which aims to see all hospital patients and staff guaranteed access to nutritious, sustainable and enjoyable meals which benefit society.
- **Children's Food Campaign:** which notably helped push for a sugary drinks tax, for junk free checkouts in supermarkets, for improving the standard of food being served in schools, and for food education being put back on the curriculum and the introduction (and continuation) of universal infant free school meals.
- **Good Food for London:** Our annual report in its sixth year compares local authority commitments to good food measures, including improvements to food culture in schools and ranks them in a league table.
- **Food Power:** working to alleviate food poverty by calling on Governments across the four nations to tackle the root causes such as low pay, as well as to improve and protect publicly-funded nutrition programmes. We are launching a related programme to support local food poverty alliances across the UK including in London.

This submission does not represent the detailed views of all of Sustain's member organisations, some of whom we understand have put in their own submissions.

Q1. Do you agree with the proposed powers in the Fisheries Bill?
Please give reasons for your answer.

Overall aims and underpinning sustainability

The White Paper states that its overall purpose is 'to build a vibrant and sustainable marine fishing industry' and that government is 'fully committed to achieving sustainable fisheries'. This is very welcome, and in keeping with the 2017 Conservative Manifesto promised to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

However, the White Paper does not propose the necessary powers to ensure this is the case. 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 steer the direction of decisions by other agencies including the MMO and Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authorities.

Having such a clause written into the Bill would help to ensure that the UK's fishing management regime is seen as world leading. This is beneficial for fisheries wanting to achieve sustainability certification, and for UK industries wanted to command the best markets abroad.

Q2. What are your priorities for UK negotiations with the EU on fisheries?

Our priorities are simple:

1. Ensure that, regardless of the outcome of negotiations, the total allowable catch for the Europe's waters does not exceed scientific advice for achieving Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) as quickly as possible.
2. As eluded to in the White paper, any boats granted access to UK waters should be required, as a condition of access, to abide by the sustainability measures for UK boats. This must include, as a minimum, remote monitoring on all vessels, full documentation of catches and CCTV cameras for higher risk vessels. It could also include minimum mesh size regulations for certain species and a requirement to avoid sensitive habitats.

Q3. What are your priorities for controlling our waters after exit?

Our priorities are that the UK's oceans are managed in a way which restores marine life and allows our oceans to flourish, whilst providing the best possible livelihoods for fishers catching fish which is sought-after by businesses now and long into the future, by:

1. Ensuring fairness by properly monitoring fishing activity
2. Allocating quota in a way that is fairer, better for fishing communities and jobs, and rewards sustainability (see question 8)

Q4. What are your priorities for the UK's international role in fisheries (beyond the EU)?

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

The UK can have a strong and positive role in growing the demand for, and rewarding, sustainable fishing across the world by only buying sustainable fish for the public sector including schools, prisons, hospitals and the military, 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, meals on wheels, leisure centres and events, and some museums and libraries.

Q5. What are the fisheries policy areas where a legislative or non-legislative common approach (framework) across the UK is necessary?

Q6. Do you have any further comments relating to the issues addressed in this section?

Q7. Do you agree with the measures proposed to ensure fishing at sustainable levels? Please give reasons for your answer

As per our answer to Q1 – we agree with and support the overall intention to ensure sustainability. However, there is no clear definition in the White Paper of what ‘fishing at sustainable levels’ means.

The first step is to define and then adopt clear criteria for sustainable fishing. The criteria should follow an ecosystem approach (as was mentioned in the White Paper) and there are two definitions already established that can help:

- a) The Marine Stewardship Council’s standards for sustainable fishing, which are based on the UNFAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing. Project Inshore, begun in 2012, evaluated all UK inshore fishing fleets against the Marine Stewardship Council’s criteria for sustainable fishing, giving a picture of where fisheries would pass, or fail to achieve certification based on the best available data. The criteria include:
 - Status of the fish stock targeted, including assessment of the certainty of population estimates
 - Impact of fishery on the ecosystem including bycatch, impact on the seafloor and damage to other marine creatures
 - Whether management is effective, including whether adequate data is collected, sensitive habitats protected, fishing effort effectively limited.

- b) Good Environmental Status – A set of indicators to define healthy marine ecosystems

The EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008) established a goal that all European seas should achieve ‘Good Environmental Status’ by 2020. As such it is a useful set of criteria for an ecosystem approach to fishing. The criteria states that:

- Biodiversity is maintained, including commercial fish stocks at healthy levels, food webs ensure long-term abundance and the sea floor is intact
- Contamination is below certain levels, including marine litter and pollution
- Marine energy and non-indigenous species do not adversely affect ecosystem

Fishing can only be sustainable if there is sufficient understanding about the status of targeted stocks, and the impact of fishing activity on the wider ecosystem including bycatch and discarding. Sustain analysed the sustainability status of the 11 most commercially important species caught in the UK (see table 1 below). Seven of these species are marked down for sustainability by the best-recognised sustainability rating scheme because of data deficiency in relation to stock status or the impact of fishing. For five of the top eleven species, at least some stocks are considered ‘Fish to Avoid’. This means they are automatically blocked from purchase for public-sector menus as well as many caterers and

restaurants in the UK. Removing these from the Fish to Avoid list is a tremendous opportunity to access new markets.

We do not believe that the measures outlined promise clear and effective enough action on solving data deficiency. Once the indicators of sustainability have been established, it will be clear where data gaps exist, and these can then be addressed. (I urge you to browse the Project Inshore database <http://msc.solidproject.co.uk/msc-project-inshore.aspx>)

The first step to solving data deficiency is better vessel monitoring and catch recording. We do not believe that the measures proposed in the White Paper are clear and comprehensive enough on this issue. It is absolutely vital for monitoring ecosystems and understanding by-catch 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.

Q8. Do you agree that existing quota should continue to be allocated on an FQA basis? Please give reasons for your answer

No, we fundamentally disagree with continuing the FQA system for existing quota, and believe we should take the opportunity presented by this Bill to trial, develop and instigate new, innovate and sustainability-supporting ways to distribute a portion of UK quota.

One problem with the White paper's proposal is that the extra quota discussed 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. Quota allocation is the best tool that we have to reward and recognise sustainable fishing, encourage data collection and help ease the implementation of conservation measures. We believe this approach is preferable over strict enforcement and penalising bad behaviour.

Fish is 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 as well as offering better livelihoods and a genuine economic link, and would therefore be in the public interest.

We would like to see Defra 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 (currently large boats can do this but not smaller ones).

- 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

Q9. How should any additional quota that we negotiate as an independent coastal state be allocated?

As per the above, additional quota could be used to compensate vessels that could lose out from a different allocation system. This could include those that have historically been awarded quota through the FQA system, but don't fit the new system as readily, for example larger vessels, operating in a verifiably sustainable way, landing outside the UK. This will ensure that these vessels which are operating sustainably don't lose out from a new allocation system. There should still be sustainability criteria underpinning the allocation of this quota.

Q10. Do you agree that Defra should run a targeted scientific trial of an effort system in English inshore waters?

No, we believe that government should stick to the quota system, but allocate the quota to benefit the English inshore fleet in a sustainable and ecologically sound way. If quota is allocated more fairly, with allowable quota trading between boats, and community quota-sharing schemes, an effort based system is unnecessary. We don't believe that Government has made a clear enough case for the trial of an effort-based system.

The conservation community are incredibly sceptical of this approach based on evidence of similar trials [in the Faroes](#) leading to overfishing. This may mean that fish caught through an effort-based system is down-graded for sustainability. This would make catch less attractive to buyers in the UK and overseas.

Q11. Do you agree with our proposals to explore alternative management systems for certain shellfisheries in England?

Please give reasons for your answer. Please provide examples, where relevant, of specific approaches that should be prioritised/explored.

Q12. Do you agree that there is a case for further integrating recreational angling into fisheries management?

Please give reasons for your answer.

Q13. Do you agree with the proposed package of measures and initiatives to reduce wasteful discards?

Please give reasons for your answer.

We don't believe that the paper is clear and strong enough on this issue.

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.

We must implement 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

Q14. Do you agree with the proposed approach to protecting our marine environment in relation to fisheries including the powers proposed in the Fisheries Bill?
Please give reasons for your answer.

As discussed above, we support the overall aims but the White Paper is neither clear, nor strong enough.

Fishing is the greatest threat to the marine environment so the intentions of sustainable fishing are good, but, as per our answer to question 1, the intention needs legal underpinning to be effective, given how many of the most important fish stocks are currently being overfished or suffering serious habitat damage (see table 1)

To properly protect the marine environment, we need firm targets around an ecosystem-based approach. For too long, fishing has focussed narrowly on recovering target stocks, ignoring that the wider environment is crucial for the survival of these stocks, as well as for ensuring the continuation of so many of the other services that our oceans provide. This is also in contrast to the criteria used by many of the biggest fish-buying companies in the UK, which use the Sustainable Seafood Coalition Codes of Conduct, or the Marine Conservation Society’s Good Fish Guide, and/or look for Marine Stewardship Certified fish when choosing which fish to buy. As per question 7, the government should set firm targets for improving the status of the UK’s seas until all UK fisheries are verifiably sustainable.

Q15. What opportunities are there for the sector to become more involved in both the provision and direction of science and evidence development needed for fisheries management?

As per our answer to question 7, data deficiency is holding fisheries back from being considered sustainable, and therefore commanding the best markets for their produce, so there is a clear economic case for improving scientific understanding of our fisheries. The most important first step is the full documentation of fisheries, including recording catches and remote vessel monitoring. Quota allocation could be used as an incentive to take part.

Q16. Do you have any further comments relating to the issues addressed in this section?

Q17. What would be your priorities for any future funding for the sector or coastal communities?

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 a moderate investment.

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, and for recovering stocks to the level that catches and profits can greatly increase 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.

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.

Q18. Do you have any further comments relating to the issues addressed in this section?

Q19. How far do you agree with our future vision to pursue a partnership approach with industry and others for sustainably managing fisheries?

Q20. Do you have any further comments relating to the issues addressed in this section?

Table 1 – The UK’s most commercially-important fisheries: Which species offer an opportunity for increased stocks and greater catches, and what is holding them back

Species	Value of landings 2016 (£ million)	Opportunities for increasing stocks?	Is this species rated ‘Fish to Avoid’?	Data deficiency an issue?	Why this species isn’t considered sustainable	Examples of good practice
Mackerel	188.3	limited All at healthy levels		no	n/a	Nearly all UK Mackerel stocks are MSC certified. Mackerel prices have steadily increased over 10 yrs thanks to consumer demand for sustainable ‘underloved’ fish.
Nephrops	103.7	Lots Some stocks well below healthy levels or unknown. East Scotland and North Sea severely depleted.	YES- parts of North Sea	Yes – stock status in some areas unknown. Not all boats monitored and recorded	-Trawling for scampi associated with high bycatch (creel pots are better) -Overfishing depleted stocks	-Some areas now in Fishery Improvement Projects (some with EU funding).
Scallops	74.8	Lots Stocks in North West Scotland increasing, but elsewhere populations are poorly understood, heavily depleted or decreasing, including round Isle of Man and English Channel	YES – from Isle of Man	Yes. No reference points in some areas, stocks in the channel are poorly understood.	-Stocks depleted -Dredging damages environment	-Hand-diving or using creels minimises impact on environment and produce sold for a premium.
Monkfish or Anglerfish	60.0	Some Monkfish thought to be increasing, but uncertainty over size of stock Anglerfish in good shape		Some deficiency for South West Monkfish stock, anglerfish better understood	-Some discards can be high -Some caught by beam trawl which impacts sea bed -Slow-growing species, vulnerable to overfishing so better understanding is essential	
Herring	56.3	some Some stocks in very good shape, some severely depleted (eg western Baltic and Celtic Seam)	YES – West of Scotland and West of Ireland	No	Fishing pressure too high in some areas and stocks too low. Other areas excellent	-A large amount of herring is MSC certified, needs to be achieved for all stocks
Cod	53.2	lots In some areas stocks are below safe biological limits and fishing should be stopped completely.	YES – some stocks, in Celtic Sea, Norwegian Coast	Generally well understood but some data needed in Baltic and Faroes	-Bycatch high in some areas -Overfishing	-The cod recovery plan for the North Sea proves that stocks can recover, could be extended to all stocks
Crabs	52.7	Small amount Velvet crab depleted, possibly other species too		Yes, for velvet crabs and spider crabs	-Uncertainty -Some concerns over bycatch	
Haddock	44.7	some Generally good, Faroes area the only depleted stock		Info good	-Needs better selectivity in Celtic Sea – bycatch an issue -Overfishing in Faroes	
Lobsters	39.7	some Stocks are moderate/stable or low but could be much higher		Data deficiency for about half stocks	-Generally overfished in Scotland -Some areas data deficient -Need to ban landing of egg-bearing lobsters to help improve populations	-Jersey Lobsters are managed through a joint arrangement with France to control effort. Minimum landing size and five closed areas. MSC Certified fishery. This model could be extended.
Hake	33.9	limited Stocks in good shape		no	n/a	Cornish hake is certified to MSC standards. Following pronounced stock decline in the 1980s, recovery plan introduced in 2004. Biomass (SSB) now significantly above historical estimates.

Plaice	28.3	lots	Some stocks have severely declined and for some there is no data – (esp round Ireland)	YES – West and SW Ireland, and pulse-trawled fish in North Sea	Yes – Ireland, Bristol Channel, Baltic Sea,	-Overfishing in some areas -Discarding needs to be tackled	In the North Sea there is a plan to reduce fishing effort to allow stocks to recover. Population has increased over the last 10 years and since 2009 catches have been at MSY
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