



PRIORITIES FOR THE UK JOINT FISHERIES STATEMENT

The sustainability of our living marine resources is a central and critical theme of the Fisheries Act 2020¹ and will need to form the foundation of the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS). Oceana firmly believes that wild capture fisheries and aquaculture must be managed sustainably, in a way that minimises the impact on our seas and enables fish populations and marine ecosystems to recover. Social and economic benefits will stem from sustainable and healthy marine ecosystems through sustainably managed fisheries resources and aquaculture practices.

The JFS is required to set out the policies of the fisheries policy authorities (Marine Management Organisation (MMO), Scottish Ministers, Welsh Ministers, and the Northern Ireland department) for achieving the eight fisheries objectives contained within the Fisheries Act 2020 (listed below²). As the UK's primary fisheries policy, the JFS should also include actions to ensure the UK achieves its domestic and international legal commitments, including contributing to the net-zero emission targets³, to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)⁴, Good Environmental Status (GES) under the Marine Strategy Regulations⁵; and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)⁶. It should further detail how fishing will be managed to meet requirements for nature conservation under the Marine Acts^{7,8,9} and the Habitats Regulations¹⁰ and contribute to the commitments made by the UK government under the Convention on Biological Diversity¹¹ and the OSPAR Convention¹², as well as policy commitments such as those included in the Leaders' pledge for nature¹³.

The JFS should outline policies that result in an end to overfishing, recover already depleted stocks, help combat climate change, and significantly reduce the impacts of fishing and aquaculture activities on the overall health of marine environments. To end overfishing there must be a clear commitment to restore and maintain exploited stocks above levels capable of sustaining Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY).

This briefing provides Oceana's priority recommendations for the JFS to implement the eight fisheries objectives within the Fisheries Act 2020¹⁴.

1. The Sustainability Objective

The "sustainability objective" is that

- a) *fish and aquaculture activities are—*
 - (i) *environmentally sustainable in the long term, and*
 - (ii) *managed so as to achieve economic, social and employment benefits and contribute to the availability of food supplies, and*
- b) *the fishing capacity of fleets is such that fleets are economically viable but do not overexploit marine stocks.'*

Fisheries Act 2020

In Oceana's view, to meet this objective the JFS must ensure that:

1. Environmental sustainability is the basis of fisheries management, with the environmental pillar of sustainability underpinning any socio-economic benefits.
2. Explicit references to environmental policies and international commitments are included, with clear explanations provided on how fisheries management measures will contribute to achieving them.
3. Fishing opportunities are precautionary and ecosystem-based, ensuring long-term sustainability and allow marine biodiversity to rebuild.
4. All stocks are subject to a Fisheries Management Plan (FMP), having prioritised development of recovery plans for depleted stocks.
5. Overcapacity in the fleet and harmful subsidies (e.g., fuel subsidies) are eliminated.

The UK Government and Devolved Administrations have a responsibility to ensure that anthropogenic activities are not environmentally damaging. This includes ensuring habitats are not damaged or permanently lost because of fishing or aquaculture practices, either directly or in combination with other activities. In relation to fishing, it also requires the fishing pressure exerted on all stocks to be precautionary to ensure long-term sustainability. For stocks outside safe biological limits, this means a reduction in fishing is needed to allow stocks to recover in the shortest time possible. As a minimum, stocks need to be maintained at a biomass above Maximum Sustainable Yield to safeguard their long-term future, especially in the face of climate change. Accountability for the long-term sustainability of stocks needs to be written into the JFS and linked to environmental protection (e.g., Ministers to parliament, the public, and to the Office for Environmental Protection under the proposed Environment Bill¹⁵).

Fishing activity within UK waters needs to be managed within regional, ecosystem-based FMPs to ensure sustainability of all stocks and of the wider ecosystem. The JFS should prioritise regions where stocks are currently outside safe biological limits and require recovery plans to rapidly rebuild biomass to sustainable levels. The sustainability objective within the Fisheries Act 2020 must apply not only to domestic fisheries policy, but also to international negotiations for stocks that straddle the limit of UK waters. The UK shares over 100 stocks with the EU, Norway, and other third-party countries. It is critical that the UK insists on sustainable management of shared stocks and ensures scenarios where, either through negotiation with the UK or unilaterally, catch limits are set within scientifically recommended levels.

Overcapacity within the UK fleet has been an issue for a number of years. The JFS should integrate a reform of the fishing quota allocation (FQA) system based on environmental and socio-economic criteria to favour low impact fishers and help reduce overcapacity within the fleet. At the very least, any additional quota, acquired because of exiting the EU, should be reallocated to low impact fishing practices. The reform should include the ability to regularly review and update the system to account for changes and developments within the fishing industry, such as gear and vessel sustainability developments.

Overcapacity has been compounded by subsidies from the Government, which artificially prop up or invest in economically or environmentally unsustainable practices. Eliminating harmful subsidies is a major target to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 14¹⁶ on the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources, and the missed deadline of 2020 adds urgency to the need to eliminate such subsidies. Ending overcapacity and using financial assistance to improve the sustainability of fisheries, including investment in less damaging gear and diversification, is essential moving forward. Banning huge trawlers, vessels over 61 m (200 ft) in length, which can capture hundreds of tonnes of fish every day from UK waters will reduce the pressures on UK stocks and create more favourable opportunities for a greater number of smaller, lower impact vessels. We were recently shocked to learn that Government has permitted fly shooter fishing¹⁷ without undertaking an EIA. These permits must be revoked

immediately, until the necessary assessments have been conducted and conditional on the result of such assessments. Government must guide the industry to diversify to more sustainable catching methods where available (e.g., using creels for *Nephrops* rather than bottom towed fishing gear) to reduce catching capacity as well as preserve fisheries habitat. Not only will this aid sustainability of UK stocks by reducing overall fishing pressure, but it will also aid the long-term economic future of the remaining fleet, thus protecting the availability of food supplies for future generations.

2. The Precautionary Objective

The “precautionary objective” is that

- (a) *‘the precautionary approach to fisheries management is applied, and*
- (b) *exploitation of marine stocks restores and maintains populations of harvested species above biomass levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield.’*

Fisheries Act 2020

In Oceana’s view, to meet this objective the JFS must ensure that:

1. Firm, time-bound commitments are included so that the exploitation of marine stocks is carried out at levels below F_{MSY} to ensure populations are maintained, or restored, above biomass levels capable of sustaining MSY.
2. The precautionary approach, as defined by the United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (UNFSA¹⁸), is implemented for stocks which do not have defined MSY or precautionary reference points (B_{msy} or B_{pa}). Monitoring and data collection is enhanced for these stocks to enable the definition of biomass and mortality reference points.
3. Fishing opportunities are set in line with the sustainable exploitation of the most vulnerable stock within a mixed fishery.
4. The scientific advice of ICES is adhered to in setting fishing opportunities.

The UK has agreed to follow and apply the precautionary approach to fisheries management under UNFSA Article 6. Nevertheless, the UK has missed previous targets to not exceed the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) exploitation rate by 2015 and 2020 at the latest under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), the ending overfishing target by 2020 under the SDG, or reaching Good Environmental Status by 2020. These are major failings and conflict with the UK’s ambition to be a global advocate for sustainability.

Given this failing, the JFS should include tangible commitments and timelines to bring both UK and shared stocks to above levels capable of sustaining MSY. Where MSY reference points have not been defined, a higher level of precaution must be applied, whereby fishing pressure is reduced to the lowest possible levels and does not exceed defined precautionary fishing mortality reference points (F_{pa}). Where reference points have not been defined, fishing pressure must be reduced to lowest possible levels until such time that values can be defined and adopted. For exclusive UK stocks these may be defined by UK scientific centres and for shared stocks in collaboration with third parties. All reference points must still be evaluated by international review from ICES before adoption.

Fisheries management should shift from single species considerations to those of mixed fisheries. Rarely does fishing activity result in the capture of a single species. The wider

composition of species caught in individual fishing operations must be therefore considered to protect the most vulnerable stock(s). Fishing opportunities must be set and allocated to ensure that no stocks in the fishery are fished above scientific advice. This would aid faster recovery and reduce the levels of unwanted catch. At present ICES mixed fisheries advice is instead being used to justify the increase of fishing opportunities for the most vulnerable species and allow the continuation of the fishing activity. For stocks caught within a mixed fishery, mixed fisheries considerations must be factored into the setting of fishing opportunities, to ensure that all stocks are restored and/ or maintained above biomass levels capable of producing MSY. Where the mixed fisheries approach requires a greater reduction in total allowable catch (TAC) than single species advice, this should be followed to safeguard more vulnerable stocks.

3. The Ecosystem Objective

The “ecosystem objective” is that

- (a) *‘fish and aquaculture activities are managed using an ecosystem-based approach so as to ensure that their negative impacts on marine ecosystems are minimised and, where possible, reversed, and*
- (b) *‘incidental catches of sensitive species are minimised and, where possible, eliminated.’*

Fisheries Act 2020

In Oceana’s view, to meet this objective the JFS must ensure that:

1. Bottom towed fishing gear is spatially managed to significantly reduce the area of seabed destroyed and enable ecosystem recovery. It should be banned from the inshore zone (0-3 nautical miles) and within all Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Outside of these areas it should be managed spatially and only permitted in trawling and dredging zones.
2. Essential Fish Habitats (EFHs) are designated to protect important spawning grounds and nursery areas (e.g., gravel beds for herring to spawn).
3. The fishing intensity for specific key components of the marine ecosystem is minimised, such as small pelagic fish and/ or forage fish (e.g., herring, sardine, anchovy, sandeel, Norway pout etc.).
4. Regional Fisheries Management Plans containing stock, fishery, and ecosystem considerations are developed for each regional sea.

In the current climate and ecological crisis every moment and action matters. We must not postpone protecting and restoring marine biodiversity and blue carbon habitats any longer. An international study on global biodiversity loss has confirmed that fishing is the biggest driver of marine biodiversity loss¹⁹. The UK must therefore commit to manage fisheries to account for the wider ecosystem functions upon which fishing impacts. The ecosystem approach to fisheries management (EAFM) has been developing for decades²⁰, but it is rarely applied in UK and European fisheries. The UK's exit from the EU and the development of the JFS heralds the perfect opportunity to change fisheries management from a primarily single species TAC system to a more holistic ecosystem-based approach, whereby multiple species and wider aspects of the ecosystem are accounted for. This should include reducing the impacts of fishing on benthic habitats, non-commercial, and PET (protected, endangered, and threatened) species. From an ecosystem level this would incorporate protection of vulnerable habitats such as EFHs, particularly spawning and juvenile aggregation areas, as well as making provision for the dietary requirements of higher predators, such as sea birds and marine mammals feeding on forage fish (e.g., sandeels). This should be achieved through a combination of tools within

EAFM based multi-species management plans. These plans include detailed decision-making frameworks and timebound commitments for how non-commercial and by-catch species will be managed to ensure full ecosystem function.

The JFS should include explicit provisions for the protection of benthic habitats, particularly those within MPAs and the inshore coastal area of the UK. Oceana recommends a ban on all bottom towed fishing gear within 3 nautical miles of the coastline, or within the 50 m isobath where that depth is reached at a greater distance from the coast. This is important to protect fish spawning and nursery habitats, sensitive inshore biodiverse habitats and habitats known for their importance in carbon storage, such as seagrass beds and kelp forests²¹ as well as make this zone the preserve of low impact fishers. Such a ban was previously in place until the 1980's in Scotland and is being campaigned for by a coalition of NGOs (including Oceana), fishers and others through the OurSeas campaign²². A reintroduction of the ban in Scotland and a new ban around the remainder of the UK would enable the recovery of the coastal seabed ecosystem. This "landscape approach"²³ to the restoration of biodiversity will positively influence commercially important species such as scallops²⁴ and have wider environmental and economic benefits, especially for local potters, netters, and wildlife operators.²⁵

Oceana also recommends the establishment of a network of EFHs. Such habitats can be protected through restricted areas and/ or seasons protecting areas/ periods where these habitats are used for specific, sensitive life history stages (such as spawning or feeding). These areas should be designated based on the biological needs of the relevant species, with regard to sensitive and exploited species like cod, herring, and elasmobranchs²⁶.

4. The Scientific Evidence Objective

The "scientific evidence objective" is that

- (a) *'scientific data relevant to the management of fish and aquaculture activities is collected,*
- (b) *where appropriate, the fisheries policy authorities work together on the collection of, and share, such scientific data, and*
- (c) *the management of fish and aquaculture activities is based on the best available scientific advice.'*

Fisheries Act 2020

In Oceana's view, to meet this objective the JFS must:

1. Ensure all commercially fished species have adequate stock assessments.
2. Implement fully documented fisheries across the board, including the mandatory use of Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) of catches (including discards and by-catch species).
3. Require the inclusion of climate change adaptation and mitigation considerations in scientific advice on fishing opportunities.

The scientific information available to aid the understanding of the state of our ecosystems and the species supported by them is, in many instances, insufficient to allow informed decision making on the sustainability of commercial fishing. Data collection is woefully insufficient, and the deficiency in effective monitoring has contributed to large information gaps relating to stock status, bycatch, and habitat impacts. This makes it extremely difficult to evaluate and manage fisheries impacts with confidence and to recover the health of our seas and fisheries resources. Data limitations mean the sustainability status of 44.2% of the 104 stocks audited

by Oceana²⁷ could not be determined or is unknown, leaving them at risk of uninformed and unsuitable management decisions. It is not only exploited stocks that are at undue risk because of a lack of scientific information, our understanding of the connections between the various aspects of the ecosystem are also hindered.

The JFS must make firm time-bound commitments to end overfishing in UK waters and exploitation must only occur if sufficient scientific information can be provided on its long-term sustainability, not only under current conditions from an ecosystem perspective, but also in the face of climate change. To facilitate this, the JFS must commit to enhanced data collection within fisheries, aquaculture, and the wider ecosystem to support the required stock, mixed fisheries, multispecies and ecosystem-based assessments to determine whether activities are sustainable. This commitment to scientific basis must include greater collection of fishery and aquaculture dependent data, specifically through full documentation of activities²⁸. In fisheries, this would include the use of REM, and electronic reporting of all catch. To support research into and development of sustainable, low impact exploitation practices, additional data collection commitments are required. Clear commitments, timelines, and objectives should be outlined within the JFS, which state how the devolved administrations intend to collect and utilise this much-needed data to better inform the management of fishing activities.

To ensure the quality of scientific information used within decision making, peer review must be carried out at the international level by ICES, to ensure accuracy and reliability of data collection and that analysis is in line with international standards.

5. The Bycatch Objective

The “bycatch objective” is that

- (a) *‘the catching of fish that are below minimum conservation reference size, and other bycatch, is avoided or reduced,*
- (b) *catches are recorded and accounted for, and*
- (c) *bycatch that is fish is landed, but only where this is appropriate and (in particular) does not create an incentive to catch fish that are below minimum conservation reference size.’*

Fisheries Act 2020

In Oceana’s view, to meet this objective the JFS must ensure that:

1. Urgent action is taken to prevent bycatch of marine wildlife including emergency measures where needed, especially in relation to PET species.
2. Destructive and unselective fishing practices are banned, including bottom towed fishing gear from MPAs, inshore 0-3 nm and other areas with high instances of sensitive bycatch.
3. Best available technologies and practices (e.g., bans, spatial-temporal restrictions, gear modifications, acoustic devices, etc.) are made compulsory to minimise the impact of fishing activities on the environment including unwanted catches (e.g., juveniles), accidental catches of sensitive species (e.g., marine mammals, seabirds, etc.) or physical disturbance of the seabed.
4. The Landing Obligation is fully implemented for all vessels, all fish sizes and non-quota species as well as all quota species.

5. Fully documented fisheries are implemented across the board, including the mandatory use of Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM).

Bycatch includes the catching of undersized commercially targeted species, capture of those species with no commercial value and PET species, as well as the unintentional capture of other wildlife such as sea birds, marine mammals, or benthic fauna and flora. The UK must account for and reduce bycatch of both fish and non-fish species through the management or banning of fishing practices that result in significant bycatch, such as bottom trawling and fly shooting, and by the implementation of robust bycatch strategies. These strategies include the UK Cetacean Bycatch Strategy²⁹, and UK Plan of Action (POA) on Seabird Bycatch (in development³⁰), and a Shark, Skate, and Ray Conservation Plan³¹ (although not specifically focused on bycatch). Regulatory bodies need to develop and implement, with urgency, strategies for the continued reduction of bycatch of vulnerable species, particularly PET species, ultimately to zero. Action is also needed to ensure their primary habitats and food sources are properly protected, and where commercially exploited, appropriately managed through precautionary management plans.

The volume and vulnerability of bycatch needs to be considered when setting catch limits and assessing fleet capacity. As these are not the primary target of fishing operations this can be done through the application of mixed fisheries, multi-species, or ecosystem-based approaches. In other instances, where vulnerable species are only susceptible to certain fishing operations, these activities could be excluded, permitting alternate operations which have not shown interactions or disturbance to continue (such as potting). Real time closures and move-on rules when catch compositions exceed stipulated bycatch limits should be incorporated into FMPs to reduce the pressure on specific species and can be applied in a similar fashion to those used by Scotland for cod avoidance³².

Policy must be in place to allow fast implementation of additional measures when fished stocks are shown to have strong year-classes entering a fishery (e.g., haddock), thus ensuring juveniles of such year classes survive to maturity.

To increase our understanding of the vulnerability of bycatch species to fishing practices, there needs to be an increase in monitoring and reporting. To achieve this, fully documented fisheries are required across all fleet sectors through the mandatory use of REM and cameras. This will not only aid data collection for use in scientific understanding, but also allow examination of compliance onboard UK vessels. It is widely acknowledged that the wasteful practice of discarding has continued despite the landing obligation of data.^{33,34}

6. The Equal Access Objective

The “equal access objective” is that the access of UK fishing boats to any area within British fishery limits is not affected by

- (a) the location of the fishing boat’s home port, or*
- (b) any other connection of the fishing boat, or any of its owners, to any place in the United Kingdom.*

Fisheries Act 2020

In Oceana’s view, to meet this objective the JFS must:

1. Incentivise use of low impact fishing gear, including reallocation of quota.

Setting fishing limits and distributing quota should be carried out in such a way that does not discriminate between UK vessels on the basis of geography. It should, however, incentivise low impact fishing practices to ensure that fisheries are economically and environmentally sustainable in the long term. Reform of the quota allocation system is required to redistribute UK quota allocations based on environmental impact of the fishing practice, favouring, for example, gears which have a low impact on the seabed, proven by-catch mitigation measures, or avoiding sensitive areas, and a good record of compliance. The inshore fleet, which constitutes most of the UK fleet, should have a fairer share of access to quota.

7. The National Benefit Objective

The “national benefit objective” is that

‘Fishing activities of UK fishing boats bring social or economic benefits to the United Kingdom or any part of the United Kingdom.’

Fisheries Act 2020

In Oceana’s view, to meet this objective the JFS must:

1. Ensure that any proposals for co-management of the UK’s public fisheries resource have majority representation from civil society, including the general public as well as eNGOs and not be dominated by the industrial fishing sector.
2. Reallocate fishing opportunities (quota) among the UK fleet using transparent environmental and social criteria to provide additional quota to low impact fishers.
3. Require a publicly available web-based database of catch information, to include the electronic exchange of seafood traceability information along the full supply chain from capture to sale.

Wild fish are a publicly owned resource, as such there needs to be consideration of all stakeholders within the management of the resource, including eNGOs, the full spectrum of fishing industry to include the variety of operators and the general public. It was very encouraging to see the UK government extending the invitation to NGOs to observe international plenary negotiation sessions for the setting of 2021 fishing opportunities. We hope this level of engagement remains in place and NGOs and other stakeholders are given the ability to feed into future fisheries management processes. Inclusive management forums and stakeholder platforms (including data sharing) would provide much needed transparency in government decision making processes and allow stakeholders to contribute to the timely introduction of future policies and management strategies. A commitment by FPAs to produce an annual statement detailing government performance against requirements of legislation and wider policy would also provide a good level of transparency around wild capture and aquaculture fisheries management successes and priorities and allow for public accountability.

A complete overhaul of quota allocation across the UK is needed to refocus ways of fishing to incentivise low impact and environmentally sensitive practices, providing equality between inshore and offshore vessels, and reducing the dominance of a few companies in this industry³⁵. Upon exit of the EU, the UK has gained additional quota for those stocks primarily within UK waters. Oceana would like to see the allocation of this quota prioritised to vessels that can demonstrate best practice low-impact fishing, full catch documentation and compliance. Setting fishing limits and distributing quota in line with transparent criteria in a way that incentivises low impact fishing could help to ensure that fisheries are economically and environmentally sustainable in the long term. Technological innovation which leads to

mitigation of negative ecological impacts should be encouraged through the allocation of extra quota. We would like to see a shift towards support which incentivises the long-term sustainability of our stocks, low impact fishing, and which supports local communities. During the quota allocation overhaul, the UK must be mindful of mixed fisheries and ecosystem considerations and distribute quota in such a way as to reduce by-catch and over quota catches of particularly sensitive and overexploited species. The UK must manage fleet size to ensure any activity from domestic, or international, exploitation within UK waters does not exceed the status and size of the target stock. Oceana would recommend banning of super trawlers within UK waters which are able to remove vast quantities within a single fishing operation which creates the risk of over exploitation in an unmanageable short time frame.

8. The Climate Change Objective

The “climate change objective” is that

- (a) *‘the adverse effect of fish and aquaculture activities on climate change is minimised, and*
- (b) *‘fish and aquaculture activities adapt to climate change.’*

Fisheries Act 2020

In Oceana’s view, to meet this objective the JFS must:

1. Ban bottom towed fishing gear from the inshore zone 0-3 nautical miles and within all Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Outside of these areas it should be managed spatially and only permitted in trawling zones leaving 50% of UK seas free of this activity.
2. End Marine Voyages Relief for fishing boats (previously red diesel).
3. Require the inclusion of climate change adaptation and mitigation considerations in scientific advice on fishing opportunities.

In the climate crisis we are in every moment and action matters. We must not postpone cutting our carbon emissions and protecting carbon habitat stores any longer. A study published earlier this year found bottom trawling releases the same quantities of carbon to the water column as the aviation industry does to the atmosphere³⁶. During 2021, a “super year” for the marine environment and with COP 26 in Glasgow, we call on the UK and devolved governments to commit to the radical action needed to drastically cut the emissions resulting from fishing, especially high emission use of bottom towed fishing gear.

Fuel subsidies promote overcapacity and over quota fishing within the fleet. In line with the UK’s commitment to become a net-zero nation by 2050³, the UK must end tax breaks for fuel, specifically the Marine Voyages Relief³⁷ scheme subsidising of fossil fuels used by the fishing industry and reduce the overall footprint of bottom towed gear. The UK must incentivise and invest in rapid development of alternative fuel sources for vessels and production techniques, including supporting energy efficient shipping design.

Reducing the overall footprint of bottom towed gear is extremely important to protect blue carbon habitats such as inshore habitats including kelp, seagrass, biogenic reefs, mudflats, and sandflats; and offshore habitats such as deep-sea corals and muddy sediments; and low or no trawl areas³⁸. These habitats play an important part in carbon sequestration and carbon storage, with these benefits often far exceeding terrestrial environments³⁹. Preventing the disturbance of low or no trawl areas as identified by ICES⁴⁰ and limiting bottom towed gear to

within specific zones will reduce the risk of damaging carbon storage habitats and the subsequent release of carbon into the water column.

As the waters around the UK change in response to climate change, the species and ecosystems they can support will also change. There are likely to be warmer waters, leading some of our colder water species currently living at the edge of their geographical range to retreat north (such as cod) while new warmer water species migrate further north (such as anchovy)⁴¹. It is important that those living within their furthest extents (be it warm or cold) are not fished to a level where they are no longer able to demonstrate resilience to climate change, like cod in the Celtic Sea. It is necessary that the JFS account for these possibilities, limiting the development of new fisheries until impact assessments can be carried out and the risks of fishing pressure to emerging species are reviewed with appropriate limitations put in place. To aid and support changes in species distribution, assessments from international bodies must include climate adaptation and mitigation considerations, going forward the UK must request this additional information as standard.

9. Fisheries management plans

Although Fisheries Management Plans (FMP) were not listed as an explicit objective within the Fisheries Act 2020, they will need to form an integral part of the JFS and how fisheries are managed going forward. Oceana will provide a separate briefing on our views of the FMP. In the meantime, we highlight the following priorities for all UK management plans:

1. Develop and implement regional FMPs containing stock, fishery, and ecosystem considerations for each regional sea, to implement the ecosystem approach and ensure ecosystem-based objectives are met.
2. Implement FMPs for all exploited stocks, giving priority to the development of FMPs for regions with severely overexploited and data deficient stocks.
3. Prioritise implementation of recovery plans for severely overexploited stocks, including quantifiable recovery milestones: B_{lim} , B_{pa} and $MSY_{Btrigger}$ reference points within defined and accountable timeframes.
4. Ensure biomass is recovered to above B_{msy} in the fastest time possible as a priority.
5. Include spatial management provisions in all FMPs, namely protection of EFHs and restriction of bottom towed fishing gear activity to certain low risk zones to halt the continued destruction of vulnerable habitats throughout UK waters.
6. Ensure FMPs fully implement Fisheries Act 2020 Objectives, including by detailing how each FMP achieves all the objectives of the Fisheries Act.
7. Ensure that all stocks covered under FMPs have adequate stock assessments, including defined MSY or proxy reference points.

The UK government and its devolved administrations should use this opportunity to develop multi-species ecosystem-based fisheries management plans for all harvested stocks, incorporating integrated decision making and building on best practices from around the globe. These should be reviewed by international bodies, such as ICES, and ensure that precautionary requirements are met. The UK should apply a forward thinking, sustainability focused approach to the exploitation of marine species both within its own waters and those it exploits abroad.

Annex

UK international commitments relevant to the UK Fisheries Act objectives

Article 2 of the OSPAR Convention: *...take the necessary measures to protect the maritime area against the adverse effects of human activities so as to safeguard human health and to conserve marine ecosystems and, when practicable, restore marine areas which have been adversely affected.*

Excerpt from the Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the EU. Article 494 (2): *The Parties share the objective of exploiting shared stocks at rates intended to maintain and progressively restore populations of harvested species above biomass levels that can produce the maximum sustainable yield.*

Excerpt from UN Sustainable development goals (SDG)

SD 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

SD 14.2: By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans

Marine Strategy Regulations 2010, the UK Marine Strategy and retained EU law

Requires UK to achieve Good Environmental Status defined as: the environmental status of marine waters where these provide ecologically diverse and dynamic oceans and seas which are clean, healthy and productive. Specific descriptors include:

Descriptor 1. Biodiversity is maintained

Descriptor 3. The population of commercial fish species is healthy

Descriptor 4. Elements of food webs ensure long-term abundance and reproduction

Descriptor 6. The sea floor integrity ensures functioning of the ecosystem

Excerpt from OSPAR Commission

EC 2008/56 Directive: 'By applying an ecosystem-based approach to the management of human activities while enabling a sustainable use of marine goods and services, priority should be given to achieving or maintaining good environmental status in the Community's marine environment, to continuing its protection and preservation, and to preventing subsequent deterioration.

Excerpt from Aichi Biodiversity targets

Target 3: By 2020, at the latest, incentives, including subsidies, harmful to biodiversity are eliminated, phased out or reformed in order to minimize or avoid negative impacts, and positive incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity are developed and applied, consistent and in harmony with the Convention and other relevant international obligations, taking into account national socio economic conditions.

Excerpt from UNFSA

Take measures to prevent or eliminate overfishing and excess fishing capacity and to ensure that levels of fishing effort do not exceed those commensurate with the sustainable use of fishery resources.

Excerpt from UNCLOS

In taking such measures the coastal State shall take into consideration the effects on species associated with or dependent upon harvested species with a view to maintaining or restoring populations of such associated or dependent species above levels at which their reproduction may become seriously threatened.

References

- ¹ Fisheries Act. 2020. UK Public General Acts, 23 November 2020. Available from: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2020/22/enacted/data.pdf>.
- ² Clause 2 Joint fisheries statement states that: '(1) The fisheries policy authorities must prepare and publish a document, to be known as a joint fisheries statement (a "JFS"), that— (a) sets out the policies of the fisheries policy authorities (or any of them) for achieving, or contributing to the achievement of, the fisheries objectives, (b) contains a statement explaining the use the fisheries policy authorities (or any of them) propose to make of fisheries management plans in order to achieve, or contribute to the achievement of, the fisheries objectives, and (c) contains a statement explaining how the fisheries objectives have been interpreted and proportionately applied in formulating the policies and proposals mentioned in paragraphs (a) and (b).'
- ³ Climate Change Act, 2008. Available from: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/27/contents>.
- ⁴ United Nations. Sustainable Development Goals. Available from: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.
- ⁵ Marine Strategy Regulations. 2017. Available from: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1627/part/4/made>.
- ⁶ United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). 1982. Available from: https://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/UNCLOS-TOC.htm.
- ⁷ Marine and Coastal Access Act. 2009. Available from: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/23/contents>
- ⁸ Marine Act (Northern Ireland). 2013. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2013/10/contents>
- ⁹ Marine (Scotland) Act. 2010. Available from: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2010/5/contents>
- ¹⁰ Habitats Regulations. 2017. Available from: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/contents/made>
- ¹¹ Convention on Biological Diversity. 1993. Available from: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/biological-diversity-day/convention>.
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