

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: UK Seafood Fund, HC 290

Tuesday 28 June 2022

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Members present: Sir Robert Goodwill (Chair); Kirsty Blackman; Geraint Davies; Barry Gardiner; Dr Neil Hudson; Julian Sturdy; Derek Thomas.

Questions 94 - 207

Witnesses

I: Helen McLachlan, Head of Marine Policy, RSPB Scotland; Chloe North, Manager, Western Fish Producers' Organisation; Dr Bryce Stewart, Senior Lecturer, Department of Environment and Geography, University of York.

II: Victoria Prentis MP, Minister for Farming, Fisheries and Food, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Sarah Adcock, Deputy Director for Evidence, Funding and Ocean Sustainability Strategy, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Western Fish Producers' Organisation](#)
- [Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs](#)
- [Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs](#)

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Helen McLachlan, Chloe North and Dr Bryce Stewart.

Q94 **Chair:** Welcome to the EFRA Select Committee, where we are continuing our investigation into the UK seafood fund. The second part of this will be with the Minister, Victoria Prentis, and one of her officials. In this first section, we have three witnesses, who I would like to ask to introduce themselves. Give us a thumbnail of who you are and what you do, please.

Dr Stewart: It is a pleasure to be here. I am Dr Bryce Stewart. I am a senior lecturer at the University of York. I am director for engagement and partnerships in the department of environment and geography. I am trained as a marine ecologist but have increasingly broadened out into general issues around fisheries management and marine conservation.

Chloe North: I am Chloe North. I manage the Western Fish Producers' Organisation, which is a co-operative of fishing companies based mostly in the south-west and covering a range of gear types.

Helen McLachlan: I am Helen McLachlan, head of marine policy at RSPB. I am here today representing the views of the Future Fisheries Alliance, which is a partnership of the Marine Conservation Society, WWF and RSPB.

Q95 **Chair:** I must declare an interest. I am species champion for the sand eel, which many of your feathered friends enjoy, certainly on the Yorkshire coast off Bempton Cliffs.

If I could start the questioning with Chloe, how well does the seafood fund cover the challenges facing the fishing industry and the living environment in which it operates? I guess the fishing industry part of that is the one that you are most interested in.

Chloe North: The most pressing challenge at the moment is, probably quite obviously, the fuel crisis, the price of fuel and access to crew and skippers. The fuel crisis is exacerbating the crewing issue. I have members who are working for £37 a day at the moment, or settling in debt. If fishermen are share fishermen and the boat settles in debt, they do not get paid, and they have already lost crew.

We need to fix this issue. Ultimately, decarbonising the industry is the solution that we need to get to over time, and the fisheries fund will, hopefully, get us there. People have been using the FaSS funding for new technologies on their boats, including hydrogen injections, so that has been really useful, and the FaSS fund is very easily accessible.

Small-scale mobile gear vessels do not get the same funding rate as small-scale static gear vessels, even though the mobile gear vessels use more fuel and need more help.



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Also, the cost of materials has increased by at least 50%. There are things coming over the horizon like remote electronic monitoring that the industry might have to pay for, and extended producer responsibility for the cost of recycling. There are more and more costs coming forward to the industry, which is not making very much profit, if any at all, right now.

Q96 Chair: When we were a member of the European Union, there were quite strict controls on how funding could be allocated. For example, gear and equipment that was mandatory could not be funded, unless you could get a little workaround in some cases. What have been the experiences of businesses within your fish producers' area in accessing the seafood fund so far? Have they found it easy? Have they been successful? Is money coming through?

Chloe North: Money is coming through; it is coming through for additions to their engines that might help with fuel efficiency. We used the last round of the FaSS for trialling the Sumwing technology, where we achieved a 40% reduction in fuel. That was really good, but, in this new round of FaSS, you cannot use it to get new gear, even if it is more sustainable or more fuel efficient, so that is something that needs to be looked at.

A Sumwing beam trawl uses a wing-like technology to create lift and lifts it off the seabed, so that there is less seabed impact and less fuel used, but it is much more expensive than a standard beam trawl. If we could get that through the FaSS and, hopefully, switch the whole beam trawl fleet over to that kind of gear, that would be really useful.

Q97 Chair: That would be a win-win. You would be benefiting the fishermen and the environment on the seabed. Dr Stewart, what is your initial reaction to the way that this scheme is rolling out and your take on it?

Dr Stewart: The scheme is very welcome. It has funded a lot of fantastic projects, through both the seafood innovation fund and the fisheries industry science partnerships, which are the two elements that I am probably most knowledgeable about and interested in.

We will come on to some of the details a bit later in terms of pros and cons, and things like that, but there are some fantastic innovations. I am involved in the so-called scallop discos, so potting with lights to catch scallops, which has the potential—it is still a potential—to provide a more sustainable approach to scallop fishing, with lower impact on the environment. We also have some fantastic examples of fishermen and scientists working together through the FISP, some of which are directed towards things like reducing bycatch, particularly gathering more data on data-limited species, including a lot of shellfish and non-quota species.

When I look at this overall, that is where the fund has to really deliver, by bringing in much more data on those species and habitats, because we really live in an era of uncertainty. We have heard about some of the



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challenges that the fishing industry faces. We also have Brexit not delivering everything that was probably hoped for, to put it mildly.

Chair: "Jam tomorrow" is what the fishermen tell me, not that jam is expensive.

Dr Stewart: I do not think that there will be any, to be fair. Trade has become more complicated. We also have things like climate change going on, shifting the distribution of fish stocks. Some are moving away, but some new opportunities are coming in as well, and so we really need to monitor the environment as well as possible in order to be nimble enough to take advantage of those things, while not overexploiting.

That is where I would bring in my note of caution. One of the things that these funds can do is to encourage overcapacity. We have just had the World Trade Organization and this historic agreement, after 20-odd years of negotiations, to try to phase out harmful fishery subsidies, but exactly what they are is a fine line. There are a lot of scientists who say that subsidising fuel is a harmful fishing subsidy, and yet I am sure that Chloe's members and many others in the fishing industry would say that they cannot survive without that, and so we have to get that balance right. We will have to wait and see, and to keep an eye on the ball with this fund.

Q98 **Chair:** I do not think that it was ever envisaged that this fund would be a fuel subsidy. We can ask the Minister later on if she is looking at that, but that is not something that I was aware of.

Dr Stewart: No, I guess that is what I am suggesting, but, if you make fishing boats even more efficient, there is always that danger of having boats with higher turnover, which puts more pressure on stocks. Ultimately, the way to reduce pressure on the environment is to have a really healthy marine environment with healthy fish stocks that you do not need to fish so hard. There is the example of scallop fisheries off the coast of France, where they fish for only 45 minutes a day, because the stocks are so healthy that that is all they need to do. That is a lower environmental footprint and a lower fuel cost; everyone is a winner. That is really the end goal.

Q99 **Chair:** Certainly, more sustainable scalloping will be music to the ears of the static gear guys off the Yorkshire coast who get the nomadic fleet arriving and not only smashing up lots of crab and lobster, but often hauling away whole fleets of pots and causing carnage.

Helen, we have been talking about sustainability and the environment, which are things that the RSPB will be very conscious of. Do you feel that this scheme is being delivered in a way that benefits bird life and your members' wishes?

Helen McLachlan: We have to look at the backdrop against which it is operating, and Bryce commented there on it. The fact is that there is a climate and a nature crisis. Our biodiversity is in decline, and climate



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challenges are on the increase, so it is incumbent on every sector—not just the fisheries sector but across civil society—to look at what we can be doing to address both of those challenges.

While one of the objectives of the fund was to enable a sustainable fishing industry, there is not really anything encouraging in there explicitly for the purposes of addressing both of those.

Chloe touched on the decarbonisation agenda, which needs big infrastructure priorities to be addressed, but done in a joined-up way. We really need to think about how the fund and the work it supports meet policy priorities and interventions.

You talked about how it helps seabirds. RSPB was a recipient of an early part of the funding in 2020 to look at the bycatch of seabirds. Thousands of seabirds are caught in UK fisheries each year.

Q100 Chair: Is that with longlining?

Helen McLachlan: Longlining is one of the key fisheries, and it was that fishery that we were looking at. They did a bit exploratory to work to find out what the problem was and found that the sinking rate of the lines was slower than other fisheries, and so we could go on and develop the mitigation that you would like to trial. But the next phase was not put together, not because of a failure of the fund but possibly of the enabling circumstances.

There was not an awful lot of support from Government to take that forward, or from the fleet, which, by that time, was a bit reluctant, and yet we have a backdrop of good environmental status, which gives 15 indicators of ocean health, and we are failing to meet 11 of them. On seabirds, it is not only failing but moving further away from the indicator.

We have that policy of wanting to do something for seabirds, which are under increasing stress and pressure, but this is not really helping, and it is a solvable problem in fisheries, so we are about thinking about things like that.

Finally, looking at the sustainability of our stocks, which Bryce mentioned, about 60% of the stocks that are commercially fished have very poor or no data, and so, with no data, are at risk of overfishing.

Chair: We are going to move on to that in a later question.

Helen McLachlan: We can pick that up. Thank you.

Q101 Kirsty Blackman: You have all touched on this, but Defra has said that the three primary components—science and innovation, infrastructure, and skills and training—will all help the fishing industry reach environmental sustainability. Do you think that that is the case? Do you agree or should there have been a specific individual environmental scheme in relation to this?



Dr Stewart: All those components have the potential to deliver environmental sustainability, so I do not think that there necessarily has to be a separate stream. This has been the whole problem with fisheries management since it has existed. We have had the fishing industry and the environmental sector. Look at the EU, which has two completely different directorates. It does not work; we need to be moving towards ecosystem-based fisheries management. Included in that are the people—the fishermen, as well as the scientists. We are all part of the ecosystem that connects to the ocean.

As it stands, the scheme definitely has the potential, but it is really important—and it is great that this inquiry is happening—that, after the first year or so, we look at it and see what it has delivered, where the gaps are and where it can move forward in the future. I can talk about some of those gaps a bit later on. There is nothing wrong with the structure as such. We just have to keep our eye on the ball.

Q102 **Kirsty Blackman:** Just to follow up on that, if you had a magic wand and you could edit the scheme in any way, either massively or a little bit, in order to increase the likelihood that it will get good outcomes for environmental sustainability, what would you do?

Dr Stewart: That is a good question. I am going to say this as a scientist, but one of the biggest issues that we all face is the length of funding schemes. Most of the stuff that I work on is two or three years. You might do some fantastic work, and then you have to start again. It is a huge amount of work. The average success of a funding bid at universities is 10% to 15%, so that means that we waste a huge amount of time, which is not productive for anyone.

Building on existing successes is really important. If a programme of data collection, a partnership between the industry and scientists, or an innovative bit of technology has really delivered, you have to keep backing that.

Again, I can go into more details later, but another thing that is missing so far is more focus on the ecosystem. There is some good stuff on bycatch; there is a lot about fisheries, aquaculture and processing that has been funded, but there is almost nothing on monitoring the environment. For example, marine protected areas have been set up and we are going to see more highly protected marine areas in the future. We have to monitor those and make sure that they are delivering, and potentially adapt them if they are not; otherwise what are we doing? So far, the scheme has not really delivered in that department, so there are definitely opportunities.

Q103 **Kirsty Blackman:** Helen McLachlan, in terms of the questions that I asked about whether there should be a separate environmental scheme and if you had a magic wand in order to fix this, what would you do?



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Helen McLachlan: Bryce is right that the areas identified within the fund can all address environmental issues, but perhaps it could do with identifying some of the key gaps that we already know about, because we do know some of the key gaps. Bryce mentioned effective monitoring of the impact of MPAs, for example. When you look at the European maritime fisheries and aquaculture fund, which has just started a new funding round, it talks about specifics of innovation and the sustainable blue economy. It talks about the economic and social vitality of coastal communities, and sustainable, competitive, low-carbon fishing, none of which are really identified in this call.

With my magic wand, one of the key things that we need in all of this is data. It was something that you heard about when you took evidence from the industry earlier in the month, when Barrie Deas said that data is crucial in order to support effective management.

Chair: Neil Hudson is going to ask specifically about data.

Helen McLachlan: I can come back to that.

Chloe North: I agree that the infrastructure part of the fund has to have a sustainability section, and the FISP is all about data. The FISP lacks a view on socioeconomic data, which can feed into things like wind farms and displacement. You are displacing fishing effort, but you are not reducing fishing effort, and we do not monitor at all the areas that the fishing effort is displaced to. You are increasing it in other areas.

We had got quite far down with creating a project with three universities, looking at the biological and socioeconomic impact of displacement, and it was not in the scope of the FISP fund, so we could not go ahead with that.

Q104 **Geraint Davies:** Leading on directly from that, I was going to ask whether you felt that the £100 million fund overall is big enough. Secondly, as we have just been talking about, what specific projects would you like to see backed to have the biggest impact on the environment? Chloe, are you basically saying that some of that £100 million should be looking at the displacement of fishing from where there are windfarms to over-intensive fishing elsewhere? What should be done about that?

Chloe North: Displacement is another huge challenge that the industry is facing and is only going to get worse. In Brixham, we are trying to expand the port because it is quite dangerous due to the amount of boats that are having to fit in a small space. We could not use the infrastructure fund for that; we had to go for the levelling-up fund, because of the size of the projects. The infrastructure fund is too small.

As Bryce mentioned, it is the length of time for FISP. Most fisheries data requires time series, which FISP does not give. It is short bits of science projects, but not any time series of science projects that we are getting out of it.



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Q105 **Geraint Davies:** So that I am clear here, are you saying that, if we are interested in sustainable fishing, the impact of a large number of windfarms will be to reduce fishing in one area, massively increase it in another area and, therefore, create pockets of unsustainability alongside other areas that are not fished?

Chloe North: There is a potential for that, but there are also things to consider. You are making people go further away to find a fishing ground than their optimal fishing ground, potentially, if you place the windfarm there, which means more fuel burned. There are a lot of knock-on effects that are not considered.

Q106 **Geraint Davies:** Dr Stewart, do you feel that the £100 million is enough? Where should we be focusing our fire in terms of environmental projects? Given what you said earlier about money running out, would it be better to have possibly fewer projects running for longer rather than more projects for a short amount of time, where they cannot mature into benefit?

Dr Stewart: What we want is another fisheries fund when this one stops, basically. That is the simple answer. It is risky to just back fewer projects. One thing that the fund does quite well is that it has two tiers. It has a pilot phase for some projects that then can move into bigger ones, and that is a really good way forward.

Q107 **Geraint Davies:** What projects would you focus on?

Dr Stewart: I have talked a little bit about habitat mapping, marine protected areas and things like that. One thing that I do not think the seafood fund has covered at all so far is recreational fisheries. Depending on how you look at the statistics, there are 800,000 regular anglers in the UK. Again, you can say it is potentially worth even more than commercial fishing when you consider the add-on value.

That is a very key sector in terms of socioeconomics but also mental health and wellbeing. A lot of people get a huge amount of benefits to their mental and physical health. Also, anglers have their eyes on the water, basically, so they are an untapped resource for collecting data, which is something that we could really take advantage of.

There are some projects out there at the moment, like the sea angling diary, run by Cefas, but it seems to be reaching only certain sectors. There are other things that anglers can do—for example, reporting on megafauna like whales and dolphins, seabirds, sunfish and basking sharks, and all these sorts of things that they see out at sea.

There is a lot of potential to support that industry more and to give something to it by providing more infrastructure. I come from Australia, where we love our recreational fishing. Certain areas are purely dedicated to recreational fishing. They have excellent facilities on land—boat ramps, toilets, fish cleaning sites et cetera. They use the angling sector as citizen scientists to fill some of these information gaps. There is definitely a lot of potential there.



I talked about marine protected areas and habitat mapping, and all of this goes together with monitoring the effects of climate change, which is clearly something that needs long-term datasets to really get a handle on.

Q108 Geraint Davies: If we want to sit alongside the fishing and seafood scheme as well, you are saying that we should embrace the opportunities of recreational fishing in the round, in order to bring people close to the environment, to bring in tourism, to help the economy, to have more empathy, if you like, with the sea world, and to provide more support for more funding. Is that right?

Dr Stewart: Yes, I think so. I was an angler myself from the age of three. It is half the reason why I am here today. My parents took me down the coast and, when I was five years old, I told my dad I wanted to be a professional holiday man so that I could live at the beach all day. He said, "You should become a marine biologist instead", and here I am—not at the beach, but it is still fascinating. There is a lot of potential there, so we should not forget about it.

Q109 Geraint Davies: Helen, in terms of the size, breadth and focus of the fund, what sort of projects would you like to see the focus of the £100 million being, and is it enough?

Helen McLachlan: First of all, the size of the fund in comparison to money we were getting through the EMFF is about half at the minute, and the way that it is being distributed is not similar to the way that we did it under EMFF, whereby it was allocated to different countries, broadly reflecting the fleets. As I said previously, if we are going to address the climate and nature challenges and the emergencies we are facing, data is going to be key. We need to have sustainable management of the stocks we are fishing, and data will be absolutely key for that.

In terms of addressing the climate impact, decarbonisation is going to be fundamental, as it will be for all maritime users. Looking at how we invest in that decarbonisation and supporting fleets to move away from fossil fuel use will be really important strategically. How do we do that from innovation at the minute to off-the-shelf being a real option for vessels?

Data collection needs to be something that is across the fleets. The use of remote electronic monitoring with cameras is something that the seafood industries have been calling for. It was identified as a key compliance issue by the House of Lords in its inquiry into landing obligation, and it was cited as the key tool that would really start to move our fisheries management towards a more sustainable future. Those would be two of the big pieces that we would look to prioritise.

Chair: Just following on from that, we talked about windfarms. I was always led to believe when I was at Defra that you are, in effect, creating a spawning ground for fish, but you cannot fish between the turbines and, therefore, that would help stock build. Is there any evidence that that is happening or is that just another justification for building them?



Dr Stewart: You are right to bring that up, because there are pros and cons to windfarms. Clearly, the big pro is the fact that they are reducing our reliance on fossil fuels, so even if they do have some impacts on the environment, and on the fishing industry, they are a necessary way forward. The UK is one of the best places in the world, if not the best, for wind power.

We have to try to find ways to build and operate them that provide as many joint benefits as possible. There is good evidence that they do provide extra shelter around the bases. The rock foundations provide extra settlement habitat in areas that did not normally have boulders, for example.

Work done up on the Yorkshire coast by the Holderness inshore fisheries group has shown very little impact, if not a positive one, of windfarms on their crab and lobster catchers. Like you say, they provide conservation benefits.

That sector of the fishing industry is probably benefiting other sectors. Then you have displacement issues.

Chair: We have already heard from Chloe about the problems.

Chloe North: In the North Sea, most of the windfarms are fixed, but now we have floating windfarm technology and you cannot fish within a floating windfarm. There are cables everywhere. You cannot bury the cables, so we do not yet know the impact of the electromagnetic field around the cables. The issues are changing as the technology changes.

Chair: We could build the turbines on land, but then you get all sorts of people objecting to it.

Geraint Davies: We have it in Wales, of course, because we are more advanced there, so maybe we will see it on land.

Q110 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you to our witnesses for being before us today. I wanted to get on to science and sustainability, so I am going come to you first, Dr Stewart. You are in academia. You have exchanged fishing off the beaches of Australia for the halls of academia in the UK. I wanted to ask you about perceptions about academia and science. Defra has said that there is a high degree of scepticism among fishing communities and fishers about the use of science for fishing. Do you recognise that? Is there a disconnect between science and academia, on the one hand, and the fishing industry on the other?

Dr Stewart: Yes, absolutely. We published a study on this a couple of years ago. We put ourselves out there as well. We worked with a very clever former student who had a psychology degree and looked at levels of trust that the fishing industry had in all the different management bodies and scientific bodies across the UK, as well as NGOs and academics. Overall, it was low, not surprisingly. Cefas was the only one that passed—just.



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The real feature of it was the amount of variation, which was found with how much they trusted academics—there were different responses—and NGOs. That absolutely ties with my own experience. I have been lucky enough to work with the fishing industry quite extensively, originally in the Isle of Man when I first came to the British Isles, and then up in Scotland. I have friends in the fishing industry and we work very well. I could not do what I do without them.

The recreational fishing industry also has a lot of distrust in scientists and managers. If you put in the time, you can build those relationships, but not across the board. Some fishermen may see this, or hear about it, who do not like me very much. They do not like what I have to say, which, I guess, is a feature of life.

It is in fishing, because it is really difficult to balance the needs of all the different sectors. You support one and you are probably not going to be delivering the best outcome for another. There is a huge issue here.

The FISP is doing a great job of delivering against that. I have looked through all the FISP projects; I know all the scientists involved. It is a small world. Almost all of those projects are built on existing relationships that they have. This is where, whether through this fund or in another way, the Government could do a lot of good by providing opportunities for the fishing industry and scientists to work together. A couple of years ago, we had a conference called the Future of Our Inshore Fisheries. It was in London for two days, and it was brilliant, with people all mixed up. It funded fishermen to come, and we just shared ideas and challenges. We got to hear about each other's perspectives. You need time to build those relationships.

Q111 **Dr Hudson:** Chloe, do you have anything to add? Do you recognise that disconnect from your side and the communities that you represent?

Chloe North: Yes. The fishing industry completely understands the need for data and for science to set the quotas. The problem is that the quotas are set based on data from two years previously, because it takes a year to gather last year's data, and then you set next year's quotas, so we could try to invest more in more real-time data use.

Q112 **Dr Hudson:** I am going to come on to data with the next part of my question. In the organisations that you represent, is there some distrust or do they recognise that the science has to be there and has to be evidence-based? Do you recognise the disconnect at all?

Chloe North: There is a variation in opinion. There are some things like remote electronic monitoring where some fishermen will not mind at all, and others have tried it in the past, did not see the results of it, and so think that there is no point in it.

Q113 **Dr Hudson:** I am going to come back to data, but I will go to Helen first and then come back to you, Chloe. Helen, you started talking earlier about data collection. Should data collection to help support stocks and



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determine fisheries management plans be the focus of the science and innovation scheme?

Helen McLachlan: Yes, absolutely. As I said earlier, for a large number of our stocks we have very little or no data, so we need to fill those gaps in the first instance and really use that data to feed into the fisheries management modelling. Also, when we look at a tool like remote electronic monitoring, as Chloe pointed out, some of the fishermen did not like it because they did not get feedback. These things have to be done properly for it to work.

It involves working in collaboration with the fishermen to get the systems out there in order to see the real benefits. We have seen the real benefits where some fishermen in the south-west challenged scientific advice and were able to demonstrate their argument by having cameras on vessels and looking at near real-time monitoring of what was coming up in the net.

Data is important not just in getting the stock sustainability in play, but also in looking at the true impact of fisheries on non-target marine wildlife. Coming back to seabird and marine mammal bycatch issues, we know very little about the true impact of that, because we have so little real-time monitoring at sea. We could start to build up that information base and look at how we can put out mitigation to try to minimise and, hopefully, eliminate some parts. Those cameras would help with that as well.

That system can then help up and down the supply chain in terms of assurances. Consumers are interested in the provenance of their fish, so I do see that as a real key, but, as Chloe pointed out, it needs to be done absolutely correctly. You cannot put a camera on to a vessel and then never talk to that fisherman about what is coming up. It has to be interactive. There need to be feedback systems. The data has to be looked at. They need to be able to respond. It allows adaptive management in your fishery, as well as providing that massive base of new data and information that can be used.

Q114 **Dr Hudson:** That is really helpful. So it is a two-way process whereby the data is collected and needs to be fed back, and then evidence-based decisions can be made. Your comments about marine mammals are very timely. This Committee has launched an inquiry on marine mammals, which we will be looking at in the autumn, and some of that is the implications on marine mammals potentially from the fishing sector.

Coming back to you, Chloe, do you have anything to add about data? I will go to Bryce and then end with a final question for all of you about the priorities.

Chloe North: One of the things that fishermen do not really understand is the scientific process and the rigidity of it. Cefas has to do its surveys in exactly the same way, using exactly the same methods, in exactly the same places as it did 60 years ago, so the time series is comparable. But our fishermen fish in different places now, because the fish have moved



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and they have innovated their gear, so they are getting different results than Cefas is getting, because the gear is totally different. They do not really understand why the scientists cannot adapt to the way that they are fishing, and then they might get similar results.

Q115 Chair: That is exactly the point the fishermen in Scarborough gave me. In fact, they said that Cefas could not even catch a cold, never mind catch fish. That may be a little too critical, but it is exactly the criticism that fishermen across the country are levelling.

Dr Stewart: There is a huge cuttlefish fishery down in the south-west. Because of its short lifespan, we need real-time data to manage that fishery, which we have not invested in, because it so expensive.

Q116 Dr Hudson: Do you feel that the projects funded so far under the SIF, the seafood innovation fund, and the FISP, the fisheries industry science partnerships, reflect the announced priorities of the science and innovation scheme?

Dr Stewart: I do, partly. Like I said, the seafood innovation fund is very much focused on aquaculture and processing at the moment. By my reckoning, there are 94 funded projects, only 12 of which are on fisheries or the environment—mostly on fisheries. There are some great projects in the fishing industry science partnership, but almost entirely on shellfish or bycatch.

There are good signs. Some of them are focused on delivering the fisheries management plans, for example, which is really needed, but we are totally lacking the stuff I talked about before on monitoring environmental impacts.

Dr Hudson: So there is some good stuff in there, but it could be broader.

Dr Stewart: It needs to be broader and to shift from where it has been.

Q117 Dr Hudson: That is a helpful recommendation for us. Chloe and Helen, do you have anything to add on that? Is it reflecting the priorities?

Chloe North: We have a blue carbon project that we have applied to the FISP for, but we have had to cut it down in size because of the size of the projects that we can apply for. In the next round of the innovation fund, we are planning to apply for a gear trial. Those things can also be quite expensive because you have to charter the vessel for a decent amount of time in order to properly do the trial and, hopefully, it will be successful. We are hoping that that will be within the scope of the next round.

Helen McLachlan: It would be useful to review previous schemes that have gone into operation—things that have been trialled, thought to be good and then gone into widespread operation. That is something that is possibly missing. Again, looking at the policy priorities that Governments are committed to and how well the money that is being used here supports that, transparency is a real key issue in terms of how the money is divided and allocated.



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Dr Hudson: Thank you very much. That is very helpful.

Q118 **Julian Sturdy:** What should be the focus of the infrastructure scheme's second round? Some of it has already been touched on. Also, what are the lessons learned from the first round of the funding scheme that can be drawn into that potential second round scheme?

Chloe North: The first round of the infrastructure scheme did not cover fishing vessels or anything to do with their decarbonisation, so that needs to be absolutely key in the second round. A lot of other EU countries do provide some funding for newbuild vessels. I know that this is a thorny issue when it comes to funding, because some people think that it could increase capacity, but there are other ways that you can manage that through quotas. When we have the fishery management plans, all of the shellfish and non-quota species will, hopefully, be under proper management as well.

We are buying second-hand vessels from Europe. One of my members just bought a vessel that was built in the 1980s, and it uses tonnes of fuel. Our regulations, which we can sort out, hopefully, in the fishery management plan, encourage people to build shorter vessels to get around vessel length regulations. They are shorter and wider, which we know is a very fuel-inefficient shape of vessels.

Chair: There are stability issues as well, as we have sadly seen.

Chloe North: We need to build new vessels that have space for new technologies to come in, as well as AdBlue and different kinds of fuels that can be put in those vessels, which are built with that in mind. Otherwise, we are just wasting money on patching up old vessels.

Julian Sturdy: There is some really good stuff there.

Dr Stewart: I would back up a lot of what Chloe has just said. We need to decarbonise—the whole world does. There should definitely be a focus on safety. Fishing is still the most dangerous peacetime occupation. There needs to be a modernisation of the fishing industry in order to attract more local people. I went to the States a few years ago; some of the fishing vessels over there have wi-fi, gyms and showers. They attract bright young people who are ambitious and who want to be successful businesspeople. I have been on some pretty rough fishing boats. I would never want to be a commercial fisherman on those things. It is tough and it is dangerous. We need people who are smart and who are embracing the latest technology not only to fish efficiently and safely, but also to keep in mind environmental sustainability. It is all of those things.

Julian Sturdy: So it is about the modernisation of the fleet.

Dr Stewart: Absolutely, yes.

Q119 **Julian Sturdy:** Helen, is there anything that you feel Defra could do to increase the account taken for environmental considerations when the second round of the infrastructure funding scheme comes forward?



Helen McLachlan: As I mentioned at the top of the session, good environmental status, turning those red and amber indicators to green, is where we need to get to. Being clear about what the gaps are in the ability to do that across the piece would be really helpful, because there are key gaps in our knowledge around features such as what are really critical habitats for certain species, and what the diet compositions and temporal changes are of some of our top predators.

It is about funding in the right place for the right bits of research to support the shift towards good environmental status, but also, as Bryce and Chloe said, it is absolutely fundamental that we get the decarbonisation agenda right. A key barrier is port infrastructure—charging points and shifting vessels away from fossil fuel use and towards electrification and other methods.

Chair: The final question, you will be pleased to hear, comes from Derek Thomas, from the south-west.

Q120 **Derek Thomas:** I am quite familiar with the CFPO, as I am sure you are, Chloe. How does the seafood fund compare to funds that EU competitors are receiving? Is it a fair playing sea?

Chloe North: At the moment, some EU countries do get fuel subsidies for the fuel crisis, and we have been told by Defra that that is not an option for us, but it means that we cannot really increase the price of our fish that we are selling because the French, who are getting a fuel subsidy, are selling it at a lower price. It is important to make sure that we remain competitive against our EU counterparts.

Q121 **Derek Thomas:** Is it just the help with fuel that is making it less competitive for our fishermen?

Chloe North: Their fuel subsidies will not last forever. It is a short-term sticking plaster, but they do get subsidies for new boats. Denmark gets a 50% funding rate for a new vessel. Belgium gives *€1 million*[14.08.35] for a new vessel, and Holland gives €500,000. They all have a lot more modern vessels than we do, and then we buy their old vessels when they are done with them.

Q122 **Derek Thomas:** Is that money targeted specifically at vessels that are fishing in UK waters? Do you get that impression?

Chloe North: Yes, a lot of their fishing is in UK waters.

Q123 **Derek Thomas:** I understand that, at the moment, the seafood fund is there for the whole of the fleet across UK waters to get hold of, if they can. Do you think that, rather than doing it that way, it should have been distributed to the four nations and then distributed that way? Do you have a view on that?

Chloe North: So distributing the seafood fund four ways first and then each nation deciding—I do not know. I have not thought about that one.



Q124 **Derek Thomas:** For the last question, you have the Minister right behind you, so this will be interesting. How will you measure the seafood fund as having been successful? If you were in a room with the Minister, what would your advice be about how the fishing sector would say, "Yes, that was a success. That was money well spent. That has done the job"?

Chloe North: Are people feeling positive about the industry? When you talk to fishermen in some ports that you go to, they are all negative feelings. In Brixham, it was the other way round. There was a lot of positive feeling and a lot of investment. We are trying to expand the port. Right now, it has switched, because of the fuel crisis. Are people investing in the industry? Can we say for definite that all the fish stocks are in a healthy place? Those two things are key.

Q125 **Chair:** Probably the other two witnesses could follow up on the question of what you would see as being a measure of success of this £100 million, which is quite a lot of money going into the industry. Will it stick to the sides or is it just going to flow through?

Dr Stewart: Overall, across all the things that we have heard about, Helen has talked about the ecosystem indicators and the mixed bag on sustainability of stocks. We want to see all those things going up. We want to see a more modern fishing fleet and fishing industry with safer and lower environmental and carbon footprints.

From the perspective of the fund itself, we want to see the projects that it has funded being used. Whatever technology has been funded, whether it is lights to reduce bycatch or to increase scallop catches, we want to see that those have not just been good ideas that were funded for a couple of years and then forgotten about, but that they have been adopted and managed as well. You can fund some fantastic innovations that make things really efficient, but if you do not manage them you might have unintended consequences. Anyone who works in fisheries knows that it is full of them. You fix one thing and you cause another problem over here.

It is about all of those things, but also, coming back to the question about trust, a better relationship between the fishing industry, scientists, managers and the Government would be a wonderful thing. We are all working for the same end goal—healthy seas, a productive fishing industry, reduced climate impact and lots of lovely seafood on our plates. It is all good.

Q126 **Chair:** Helen, have you a final point on that? What does success look like? I presume more seabirds would be your answer in short.

Helen McLachlan: Absolutely—more seabirds moving up towards being in a better place, reducing bycatch, sorting out their feed, and a sand eel ban across the UK EEZ at this point in time would be a win-win. Taking it back, we did pass the Fisheries Act, which has some very good objectives. If we were to achieve those objectives of sustainability, ecosystem management, climate change mitigation and modification, and the bycatch objective, that would be success to my mind. We want to be



able to step back and see, as Bryce said, flourishing coastal communities operating in healthy seas, so that we have a broad range of seafood available to us, but not at the expense of other marine wildlife.

The one key thing that would really underpin meeting a lot of those objectives would be the adoption of remote electronic monitoring with cameras, because it will start to evidence it. It will hit the supply chain up from consumer through to catcher. That would be a really wise investment of money.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed, and thanks to our two witnesses in the room as well. It has been a very useful session and we are now going to hear from the Minister.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Victoria Prentis and Sarah Adcock.

Q127 **Chair:** Welcome back to the EFRA Select Committee. I am Robert Goodwill, Chair of the Committee, and we are very pleased to be joined by the Minister, Victoria Prentis, and Sarah Adcock, who I remember from when I was doing Victoria's job.

Victoria Prentis: She remembers you too, Sir Robert.

Chair: What is your title now, Sarah?

Sarah Adcock: I am deputy director of evidence, funding and ocean sustainability strategy.

Q128 **Chair:** Victoria, you have an opening statement that you are hoping will head off all the difficult questions, but I suspect that it may not.

Victoria Prentis: It is not so much a statement. I am trying to be helpful, Sir Robert, because our funds are many and complex, and I thought that it might make life easier if I did a bit of a slide pack for you. If it would help you, I will talk you through it quickly.

Chair: Yes, please, bearing in mind that people watching on TV will not have the benefit of the slide pack.

Victoria Prentis: Yes. The first page is about the UK seafood fund, which is what I believe we are here to discuss. Its objective is to revitalise the seafood industry, so that it has the capability to land, process and bring to market a larger share of quota, while also supporting the industry to become more self-sustaining. You will see that beneath that are four blocks—£24 million for science and innovation, at least £65 million for reforming and modernising infrastructure—

Q129 **Chair:** When you say "at least", do you mean that there could be more money to come or will it pinch from the others?



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Victoria Prentis: We would anticipate that it would be pinching from the others. I should say at this point, though, that, although this is a £100 million fund, much of it is match funding, so we would expect significantly more investment to flow from this one fund, if you see what I mean.

Chair: Understood.

Victoria Prentis: There is up to £10 million for skills and training in order to encourage new entrants to the industry and upskill the existing workforce, and £100 million for export promotion in order to boost our seafood exports to both new and existing markets. That just gives you a picture, so that, when we start talking about the science and innovation block, you know what we mean.

On the infrastructure scheme and round one, there is quite a useful pie chart. We recently closed round one on 14 June. We did lots of engagement beforehand. We had webinars and meetings, and met the larger POs individually. We talked to lots of fishermen across the piece, really. These efforts resulted in 33, if I may say so, cracking applications—we are really pleased with the quality of application—which request, if you add them up, over £60 million worth of Government funding. Because of the match funding element, they are worth over £220 million altogether. I am not saying that all of them will succeed, because you saw our budget on the previous slide, but that gives you some idea of the quality of the applications that we have had so far.

Q130 **Chair:** When that happens, are you going to reduce the amount for each project? Are you going to select the projects that are the best and then fund those fully?

Victoria Prentis: We have a really well-worked set of metrics. It will vary from project to project. There are not millions of these. These are large infrastructure projects. There are 33 applications, so it will have to be done very much on a case-by-case basis, if I am honest.

Q131 **Chair:** Some of the ports did not put an application in, because the timescale for completion was too ambitious, but then, when you extended the timescale, you did not reopen. They feel a little bit miffed. Will they be able to apply on the next one?

Victoria Prentis: Yes, they will be able to reapply in a future round, which is why we must keep some of the money back to ensure that they are not disadvantaged.

Sarah Adcock: We talked to stakeholders about whether we just extended round one to the end of 2025 deadline, but the stakeholder feedback we got was that a lot of projects that had submitted a bid for round one were ready to deliver by a March 2024 deadline and did not want that delay in their project starting. Based on stakeholder feedback, we are going to open a second round of large infrastructure projects in about September, with a March 2025 deadline.



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We already signalled that we were going to do that anyway. You will have noticed on here that Northern Ireland did not bid in this round. We had indicated that there would be a second round, largely because, again, stakeholder feedback said that they might have difficulty in putting applications in due to the Ukraine crisis. We had signalled that there was going to be a second round and we are honouring that signal, but we are doing that now with a March 2025 deadline, and we have contacted everybody.

Victoria Prentis: Those who had already put in wanted us to reply to their bids, which we are doing by 7 September. They will then know how they got on. It is right that we listen to them as well. These are substantial bids for, often, changes to port structures. They will require things like planning permission and they are not the sorts of projects that can be built in a matter of weeks.

Q132 **Chair:** It is not just a few portakabins on the dockside.

Victoria Prentis: I completely sympathise with why the application process has been more complicated for some and why others have wanted to get it over and done with quickly.

Chair: Sorry, I interrupted. You will be pleased to know that we are mopping up one or two of the questions I was going to ask.

Victoria Prentis: These are major infrastructure, with multiple benefits, transformational improvements to ports, harbours and processing, for example. We then go on to the next slide, which actually answers a lot of what we were just talking about—infrastructure next steps. We will launch future rounds. We will also have a round for the catching sector and there are some ideas given on this slide as to the sorts of things we might fund, not conclusive, for the catching sector, providing to the smaller boats no more than 10 grand each, incentivising a reduction in carbon emissions complementary to existing schemes, for example. That is not written in stone.

Q133 **Chair:** Not fuel subsidies, as we heard from fishermen in the south-west.

Victoria Prentis: Would you like to talk about fuel now or later?

Q134 **Chair:** It was touched on. I do not think that it was one of the things we were going to ask about, because it only came up in the first evidence session, if you would like to talk about that.

Victoria Prentis: Yes, I am very happy to talk about fuel. Anybody who has filled the car, let alone a vessel, knows that fuel costs have gone up across the board, because of Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine. We do not know, of course, how long that situation is going to last or what is going to happen to fuel costs in the meantime.

The fishing sector is unusual compared with other sectors in various ways. One is that fuel is a major cost of each trip, as you know, Sir Robert. It is a very significant part of a fisherman's budget, much more



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so than in the case of most industries. That means that fishing is one of the very few sectors to benefit from duty relief on fuel.

There are two types of duty relief. One is the marine voyages relief and the other is the extension of red diesel, which the Chancellor was pleased to give us in this year's Budget, for the fishing sector. Taken in combination, that should add up to 100% of relief on fuel duty costs for fishing. We are not minded to pay fishermen's fuel bills, apart from the relief that they have been given.

Chair: Okay. That is understood.

Q135 **Geraint Davies:** So we understand that, if I was a fisherman, obviously you have taken the duty off, but the price has gone up. How much would my cost of energy go up?

Victoria Prentis: It completely depends on the cost of diesel. You are buffeted from the tax cost.

Q136 **Geraint Davies:** I mean the percentage cost.

Victoria Prentis: How much has diesel gone up?

Q137 **Geraint Davies:** Yes, because you are taking off the duty. The price goes up, but the duty goes down, so how much is the net increase?

Victoria Prentis: It is very variable at the moment, is it not?

Sarah Adcock: Yes. Across the UK, the price of diesel ranges from about 99 pence a litre currently in Peterhead to something like £1.34 in Wales.

Q138 **Chair:** I was quoted £1.14 plus VAT, but obviously one gets the VAT back. All my tanks are empty on my farm. I am waiting for the price to come down, in vain I suspect, but it is a major cost. The problem is that, if a fisherman goes out and has an unsuccessful voyage for whatever reason, he can end up actually losing money on the trip.

Victoria Prentis: Yes. As you will know, fuel costs have always been a major part of the equation for fishermen: "Is it worth me making this trip?"

Geraint Davies: I will leave it there, because we do not know.

Q139 **Chair:** Some EU boats are getting fuel subsidies, we understand. Does that put us at a competitive disadvantage to them?

Victoria Prentis: We understand that some EU countries have made some interventions on the fuel front. We have to be careful that we do not fall foul of international trading rules. I do not think that we could go below the price of fuel. We have removed all the tax. It is quite hard for us to go any further than that. If you are seeking to make a food security argument, that is quite difficult if you are a vessel that catches only fish that is exported, for example.



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Q140 **Geraint Davies:** On this, my understanding is that, in Russia, they have now reduced the price of gas and oil for domestic consumption, which would include fishing boats. Is there an issue of Russian vessels coming in and doing a lot of fishing on a much cheaper cost basis, where our fishermen and women will not be in a position to viably fish?

Victoria Prentis: We are not permitting Russian vessels to either land or fish in our waters.

Q141 **Geraint Davies:** I know that they cannot land, but can they fish?

Victoria Prentis: They cannot fish either, no. We are not permitting Russian-flagged vessels to fish in our waters or to land in our ports. I only wish the same was true of everyone else.

Q142 **Geraint Davies:** There are areas they can fish and they can more economically fish now because of the crisis we face. That is right, is it not?

Victoria Prentis: I do not know what is going on in the Russian domestic situation with its subsidy to its fishing fleet.

Sarah Adcock: Its export markets are being closed off, so it cannot export its fish to the UK.

Victoria Prentis: We have closed off specifically some of its products. We have engaged in a really robust sanctions package. As we have said before, we are about to increase the tariff on Russian white fish to a really substantial amount, 35%, which I think means that it will not be bought and sold here.

Q143 **Chair:** Shall we trot through the rest of your presentation? It has been very helpful, because we are picking up things as we get to them.

Victoria Prentis: Yes, exactly. On science and innovation, we have made £24 million available to fund scientific research and the development of new technologies and ideas. There are two schemes within this, and this is where it starts to get quite confusing: the seafood innovation fund and the fisheries industry science partnerships scheme. The second of those supports the fishing and seafood industry to work jointly with scientists in order to gather new data to manage our fish stocks more sustainably. The first of the funds supports projects that develop innovative ideas and technologies.

I have done some pictures there of some examples of innovative technologies. They do not have to be terribly complex, but they can be very effective.

Q144 **Chair:** Can you describe, for the record, what they are, please?

Victoria Prentis: Yes. The one on the left has been described by the media as a scallop disco. It is putting little LED lights to attract scallops into pots. It works very well. It means that other species are not so attracted. You can use an LED light that we know is more attractive to



scallops. It thereby reduces bycatch and makes the pots more efficient. Do you want to go on on that?

Sarah Adcock: I will say two things. First, it was sort of found by accident. That was not the original intention of the original piece of work that led to this project being funded. Secondly, to pick up on what Dr Bryce said, your previous witness, the thing that is really exciting about that project is that it is now being looked at to see how you can tailor it and make it really useful from a commercial perspective, so you can scale it up and actually introduce it.

As was flagged, you have to be really careful in doing that. You do not want to introduce a new method of catching scallops without taking the old method away, because you would increase the catching capacity of the stock and you do not want to do that. You have to manage that quite carefully, but it is a really exciting project that is being looked at to upscale and commercialise.

Chair: As I said in the first session, the nomadic scallop fleet comes up to the Yorkshire coast and just causes mayhem. They make a load of money, but it really can be very destructive for the other static gear that is in the area.

Q145 **Dr Hudson:** You probably heard from the previous session that there is some scepticism among the fishing communities about some of the science and the role of academia. One of our witnesses has suggested that a lot of it has to be communications. What is Defra doing to try to improve that communication that the science is there, we want the same things, we want to get sustainable fishing, but to communicate that so it is a two-way process as well? What is Defra doing to improve that?

Victoria Prentis: This is not a bad example. Yes, we have the Fisheries Act. Yes, we have our overreaching sustainability goals, but they are possibly not very easy things to communicate, or very interesting to those of us who are not very, very keen on fishing or sustainability. This was a really good story. I did a local, regional media round about the scallop disco. It was the sort of story that grasped people's imagination.

It is quite important, when we talk about science and innovation, in both ag and fish actually, that we bring it to people's level and talk about the practicalities of how it can help. If this means that you catch more scallops more quickly and therefore you do not fish for as long or as hard, or upset the marine environment, as Sir Robert was hinting, that is a good thing. You can then talk about the sustainability gains at the same time as the fishing gains.

Sarah Adcock: Under the fisheries industry science partnerships, exactly what you described is what is going on. It is about bringing the fishers and the scientists together. You do not get a project funded if it is not a collaboration between at least one fisher and one scientist, but actually it is open to much more.



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The general concept behind that was that we have quite a lot of science in the fishing industry. It does not often cover everything that we need it to cover, but there is a lot of science. There is that trust element—not knowing who the skipper is of the vessel where it was caught, not being aware of the methodology of what was caught, not understanding what fishing season it was caught in. It is all that, which is what FISP is trying to get underneath and communicate to the industry: that we are doing this science at the times you would want us to do this science, rather than what is convenient from a commercial vessel point of view.

Q146 **Dr Hudson:** You are optimistic that these sorts of projects and schemes are breaking some of the barriers down.

Sarah Adcock: Yes, very much so.

Victoria Prentis: Actually, I am very grateful to have the opportunity to talk about some of them, because it is important that we bring science to where people are.

Sarah Adcock: There is one further example. We have run two rounds of the FISP scheme now. In the first round, I cannot remember off the top of my head, but I think we funded eight projects. I think that we had a couple more.

We have been working with animators—is that what they are called? I might have pronounced it incorrectly, forgive me. They are going out to local towns to explain to the fishers how they might come up with their own ideas and then introduce them to scientists to make that sort of partnership. The second round closed and we had significantly larger numbers of bids, so it is working in that way.

Victoria Prentis: It works.

Chair: That is interesting.

Victoria Prentis: My second picture is about cameras in baskets, so that you do not have to fiddle around with the basket. You can check what is in the basket remotely, which I think all of us would agree is a win.

Sarah Adcock: I was in Weymouth the other week at Cefas labs. They had said that they had put a camera in one of their tanks and they had recognised that the behaviour of the fish is significantly different than what you expect it to be. When you used to go to the tank and lift the lid up, the fish would go crazy. You think they are doing that all the time, but they are not. It was the interference of the human that caused the fish to go a bit nuts in the tank, which I thought was really interesting.

Q147 **Chair:** Are you saying that you could put a camera in a lobster pot or creel and haul it only when you have some lobster in there.

Victoria Prentis: When there is something to catch, yes, absolutely.

Chair: That is an interesting one.



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Victoria Prentis: Yes, exactly. Again, it is easy to grasp the concept and the value of that very quickly.

Q148 **Chair:** Once these new innovations are developed to the extent that they can be rolled out, will there be funding through this fund for them then to be deployed?

Victoria Prentis: Yes, or other funds. This is very much looking to the future of the industry and sensible changes that we can all make.

Chair: Understood. Are we nearly there?

Victoria Prentis: Yes, we really are nearly there. I will whizz through skills and training.

Q149 **Geraint Davies:** Is there a danger, if you have these pots that have cameras in them and you pull them up only if they have lobsters in them, that you will just extinguish the whole population of lobsters? I know that you are trying to put controls on this, but it gives rise to intensive overkill, does it not?

Sarah Adcock: That is a very good point and very well made. The project that we are funding is less at the moment about monitoring when to pull up your pot and more about that data collection aspect, so that we can indeed set sustainable management measures for the sustainable fishing of lobster. It is the step before the point.

Chair: Of course, lobster are non-quota species.

Victoria Prentis: They are non-quota stocks.

Chair: We manage them by carapace size.

Victoria Prentis: Yes.

Q150 **Chair:** If you catch a lobster that is too small, you have to put it back. There are things like tail notching as well, which help to conserve them.

Victoria Prentis: We are drastically improving our knowledge of non-quota species, not in all stocks immediately, but we are working very hard on this, because we need to check that we are managing them sustainably.

Q151 **Geraint Davies:** Will this stop people landing lobsters that have eggs? There are stories of people brushing the eggs off and catching the lobsters. Does this help with that or hinder?

Victoria Prentis: If we become concerned about the sustainability of the stock, we can then put management measures in place to ensure that the wrong sorts of lobsters are not caught, or at certain times. We are a bit of a way off that, truthfully.

Chair: They are berried hens, are they not? That is what they call them.

Victoria Prentis: Berried hens, yes.



Chair: It is quite a serious offence to actually scrub a lobster, but allegedly it happens.

Sarah Adcock: Back to the point that Dr Hudson made, if you have developed that science and that relationship with the fishers, you are more likely to have compliance, because they understand why you are setting what you are setting. It is again that circle.

Victoria Prentis: Because of the way that we are working with the fishing industry in setting local laws and regulations to manage different stocks, we are very much trying to bring people with us.

Chair: What about skills and training?

Victoria Prentis: Yes, skills and training, sorry. It is for both new entrants and existing people in the fishing industry to purchase training and training equipment, and to build specialist hubs. We want to improve accessibility of courses—for example, quite a lot of it might be remote—as well as funding portable training, which would itself go to you, as it were, around the UK.

The aim is to help educate and attract catching sector workers in the longer term, so that people can take advantage of the sustainable opportunities for fishing in the future. That is quite an ambitious package.

Finally, there is the seafood exports package, which has just launched. It is £1 million to promote UK seafood in new and existing markets overseas. Funding is being used to achieve the Government's general objectives to promote Great British produce around the world. Very recently, we funded our first ever UK pavilion at the Seafood Expo in Barcelona, so that was a step forward. It went down very well and everybody was very pleased with it. The package is also funding a UK-based seafood specialist, who will work with businesses to help them with their export journey.

Chair: We have a question about that later on, so we will come to that.

Victoria Prentis: The slides were intended to be a bit of a whistlestop tour of our funding packages at the moment.

Q152 **Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister. Fishermen were very disappointed that they did not get the fishing opportunities at the point we came to the agreement with the European Union and there is this five-year transition. That is only moving from access to about a third of the stocks up to about half the stocks, because of things like zonal attachment et cetera. This scheme was designed, I think, to ensure that we would still have a fishing industry at the end of this process to be able to catch the fish when the sea of opportunity presented itself. Are you confident that this is going to actually deliver that?

Victoria Prentis: Yes. It is a good scheme. It is sufficiently diverse and targeted to make sure that we put the industry in the place it needs to be to benefit from increased quota. Also, along the way, it ought to make



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some real sustainability and environmental changes, so that this is a fully modernised industry, with a decent skilled trained workforce to do the catching.

Q153 Chair: A lot of the money, so far at least, has gone into land infrastructure and other ways. It has not actually got on to fishing boats. Can we hope for that? I know that the industry was quite critical that its suggestions during the consultation were not picked up and it became very infrastructure heavy.

Victoria Prentis: We had to start with the big bits of infrastructure because those take the longest to get planning permission for, to build and to work with local authorities and other partners in delivering. There will certainly, coming forward in future rounds, be much more of an emphasis on the catching sector in particular. One of my slides touched on the plans we have for smaller boats, for example.

Some of that will be to help them with sustainability changes and changes to engines to make them greener, but it is not restricted to that at all. As you have seen, I think, Sir Robert, even our science fund ought to be accessible to the sort of person who puts down pots.

Q154 Chair: I said that there will be 50% access to the fish that is there. What are the predictions in terms of quota that will be there in 2026? What sort of data do you have? You cannot catch fish if it is not actually there. Some of the stocks seem to be either moving or declining.

Victoria Prentis: We are doing a very large piece of work on non-quota stocks, which I would be delighted to come and talk to the Committee about on another occasion, when we are a bit further forward. The data in that area, frankly, had not been very good.

Q155 Chair: We heard in the first session that fishermen themselves can give you an awful lot of information about what they are catching in real time. Because Cefas has to go to the same place on the same day with the same gear over a six-year period, the fishermen take the view: "They are not being flexible like we have had to be. They are not using the latest technology and latest gear". Would you accept that criticism?

Victoria Prentis: I have a lot of respect for Cefas; I really do, and the information we are provided with to help us do negotiations on the international stage is genuinely second to none. Having said that, I definitely think that the way forward is to work with local fishermen to find a plan for sustainable fishing in their area. That is why the whole Fisheries Act is designed to have high-level objectives but to keep getting more and more local in the way that the plans are actually delivered. We are now going round the country, starting to make these local plans. I am sure that that is the way that sustainable fishing will be managed.

Q156 Chair: You are listening to the industry, as I think you described it.



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Victoria Prentis: There is absolutely no point in doing it without the industry.

Q157 **Chair:** Do the fishermen believe you when you say that?

Victoria Prentis: As you know, Sir Robert, we have quite a wave to climb, but we are definitely serious about it. We are definitely serious about local management. I think that that is becoming accepted. IFCA's really vary in their listening ability. Where there is good local management, it is noticeable that it works very well. Is that fair?

Chair: The IFCA's work very well in that regard, actually.

Sarah Adcock: It is also bearing fruit through the UK seafood fund. As we talked about earlier, the number of applications from joint partnerships between fishers and scientists is increasing. The number of bids we had under the infrastructure pillar is quite significant. The amount of engagement we are getting under skills and training, where the industry is coming to talk to us, has been increasing throughout the life of this.

Victoria Prentis: With solutions, I was really pleased in those bids that we got, my pie chart earlier, with the geographical spread. Northern Ireland is going to bid later, but I was very pleased with the number of bids from both Scotland and England. I was also pleased with the different types of bids that came forward. I thought that they were really varied and diverse. I think that shows that we are getting through.

Chair: You will be pleased to know that my next three questions were covered during the presentation.

Q158 **Geraint Davies:** On that particular point you have just raised, I notice that there are only two bids from Wales out of 33 applications. Wales has quite a large waterfront. Does that really cover the waterfront? Are you listening to people in Wales? What are those bids about?

Sarah Adcock: I cannot give much detail about the bids, because it will be fairly obvious where the bids have come from if I give you any detail, so forgive me for not being able to do that. We were really pleased that we had two bids from Wales. Actually, we think that it is economically proportionate, if that makes sense. Of course, Wales can still bid into the future rounds, so there is no door that has been closed off to it or anything of the sort.

The two places that came to talk to us were the two bids that have been put in. It is back to Minister Prentis's point. We engage and then the bids come to fruition, rather than that we engage and the bids get turned off.

Victoria Prentis: There has been really quite considerable engagement with the industry around all four nations, before and during the process of bidding. That is a good thing. I do not view that as favouring one bid over another. I would very much encourage anyone who is considering



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bidding to get in touch with Sarah and her team. They have done a formal webinar process for people who are thinking about bidding that anybody can log on to. Also, anybody can get in touch. We really mean it. We are very happy to hold hands through the process.

Q159 **Chair:** I think that the total pot for infrastructure is £65 million.

Victoria Prentis: Yes, thereabouts.

Chair: You have received bids of about £60 million already. Is that going to mean people being scaled back or are you going to be much more selective?

Victoria Prentis: We obviously will not be able to pay everybody everything they want, but we are going to have to look at this on a case-by-case basis. This is a competitive process and I am pleased that there are really good-quality bids in there.

Q160 **Chair:** If you cut some of them back, those bids may then not be viable and they will fall completely.

Victoria Prentis: We will be careful not to do that.

Sarah Adcock: It is less likely that we will cut a bid back and it is more likely that we will be selective about who gets funding in the first place. We have a very detailed and fair assessment process, because, as Minister Prentis mentioned, we do not want anyone to think that England will benefit more favourably than Scotland or Wales, for instance. It is a very thorough process with very clear selection criteria that are available on the website, which every application will be assessed against.

Those selection criteria may get changed for future rounds, because they might not be a sensible set of criteria for a catching sector round, for instance. They are assessed by independent assessors. The role of the devolved Administrations is to make sure that the bids that are looking like they are going to get funding have not been given funding through their own schemes. Then we will make sure that we have been geographically consistent and awards will be given by 7 September.

Chair: That is understood.

Q161 **Derek Thomas:** I will mention my local harbour, so I declare a bit of an interest, just in terms of context, not for you to comment on the harbour. Newlyn wanted to apply for the infrastructure fund, but the time it takes to get a harbour revision order ruled it out. Depending on how you give them the money, that is going to be tricky to achieve in Newlyn. Newlyn is the fourth biggest port, in terms of landing value, but desperately in need of investment. Have you been able to address this issue of how long it takes to deliver a harbour revision order, or is it actually the case that infrastructure will be spent on only where we do not have to get a harbour revision order in place?



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Victoria Prentis: I would suggest that Newlyn comes and talks to me specifically about its plans, as other areas have done. We are working very closely with DLUHC on some of these issues. Indeed, I met with the Minister at DLUHC who is charged with this earlier today and we chatted about two projects in particular that are possibles.

These are complicated. You know from Newlyn that there will have to be local authority involvement. There will have to be DLUHC involvement, possible Defra involvement. There is the shared prosperity fund and the coastal communities fund that are in play. I am very keen that our areas, coastal areas with fishermen in them, are able to benefit from all these as appropriate. If you have a specific set of asks, for goodness's sake come and make them.

Q162 **Derek Thomas:** I will do that. Thank you. The point is this: if you have a situation where anything that needs a harbour revision order cannot be funded, does that reflect on how poorly the scheme is developed, or the lack of ambition for the scheme? On that basis, now that you have closed the first round, what can you learn from the first round to pitch forward and improve it for the second?

Sarah Adcock: I will try to answer both those questions. First, we have been engaging with Newlyn in particular. It was one of the test cases for why we actually sought to extend the scheme to March 2025, because we recognised that you needed more time in that area. You are very right to call out that, as I said earlier, we were looking to open or, indeed, run round one longer to address the March 2025, but it was asking, "Can you learn some lessons? Can you improve the process? Can you make it a little easier?" et cetera. We are taking all that on board before we launch a second round.

Q163 **Derek Thomas:** I will find out exactly what is happening in Newlyn, but I still think that the harbour revision order means that we cannot deliver major investment in the time of the fund, even if it is into 2025.

Chair: Is that because of statutory times to consult?

Derek Thomas: No, it is not statutory. It just takes forever. It is two years to get the harbour revision order.

Victoria Prentis: It is worth engaging with us and the Minister from DLUHC, because we are genuinely trying to make these schemes as useful and accessible as possible.

Derek Thomas: It is really about the time.

Victoria Prentis: If shared prosperity fund or coastal communities fund funding is useful as well, we need to make sure that you are fully plugged into those.

Q164 **Derek Thomas:** That is great. I can take that away. I had not meant to concentrate on Newlyn. It was just an example of how the fund is so



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limited when we want to build a fleet that can sustain all the great opportunities coming our way.

Victoria Prentis: The fund is what it is. It is £100 million. It is a significant investment in our future industry, but clearly we will not be able to fund everything everywhere. I am determined to make sure that we access all other pots of funding, so that we can make the most of this money.

Q165 **Derek Thomas:** The challenge for all ports is that, as time moves on and there is legislation that requires foreign investors to land in UK ports, all UK ports want to be ready for that and not to lose that opportunity.

Victoria Prentis: This is why it is quite important, if you go back to my pie chart, that we are putting some real effort into the processing sector as well. We need to make sure that not just in the catching sector but at every point of actually getting the fish to market we are ready for them.

Q166 **Derek Thomas:** Can you confirm which sectors the second round of the infrastructure scheme is going to support? We have hinted that there might not be much money in it, but what sectors are going to be included in the second round?

Sarah Adcock: It would help if I can actually cover the second and third rounds. We need to assess the £60 million worth of grants from the first round. At this moment in time, we cannot make an assumption of whether it will be £15 million, £10 million, £40 million that gets funded. We do not know until we have done the assessment.

We promised that we would do a second round of the same sort of thing we have done now, specifically for the likes of Newlyn, with a March 2025 deadline, and for Northern Ireland. Also, we have been talking to the recreational fishers. They will have some access under that. We are looking specifically at the building of infrastructure for things like training hubs. Going back to the point we made earlier, that will not come from the infrastructure money, but it will be part of an infrastructure bid.

In the third round, as Minister Prentis mentioned earlier, we really want to put some money into the catching sector itself, into the fleet, into modernising. The second round on infrastructure—a bit of the same, some recreational fishers and a bit of training hubs—will be September. The third round on the catching sector will be more towards the end of the year, November time.

Q167 **Derek Thomas:** When you move to the fish catching sector, we are talking about much smaller businesses. What support will Defra be able to give to people who have fairly small businesses, possibly one-man or woman bands?

Sarah Adcock: There are two points that I will make on that. One of the other complaints we have had, or a thing that has been raised, is that the minimum spend under an infrastructure project would blow an individual



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business out. They do not have £250,000. To be really clear, the caps that we have put on round one are not likely to be the caps for round three. Each round will be assessed on its merits and the caps set accordingly.

Secondly, as Minister Prentis said earlier, we are very happy to talk to anybody and everybody. The MMO, which is the Marine Management Organisation, has a really good “ask us anything” service and genuinely means “ask us anything”. Not everyone has done a bid before, but some of them have done bids under EMFF money, EU schemes and our own domestic schemes. There is a lot of experience and knowledge in that system, but we are very happy to answer any questions. Again, I would really promote the MMO’s “ask us anything” service.

Victoria Prentis: I suspect that we will be doing webinars again: “Are you considering bidding? If so, come online for an hour and we will talk through how to do it”.

Sarah Adcock: We really want to do lots of comms, because I appreciate that an individual businessman might miss that bulletin that we put out a fortnight ago or might not look at that website. It will be much more on-the-ground communications to make sure people are aware of the fund. We have been really successful in round one and that was not a surprise, but it was brilliant.

Victoria Prentis: We were pleased.

Sarah Adcock: We were very pleased, but talking to the catching sector is very different. You have to get to where they are accessing the information and not rely on the internet.

Victoria Prentis: Truthfully, if MPs want to be involved in those comms, I would very much welcome that.

Derek Thomas: You could just do alerts on the catch app. We all have to do that.

Q168 **Dr Hudson:** We have talked about some of the overarching aims and mission statements of the funding, but some stakeholders have reported to us some criticism that there was no specific funding gearing up to look out for the environment and environmental sustainability. Do you recognise that criticism and why was that?

Victoria Prentis: The simple answer is that it was baked in.

Q169 **Dr Hudson:** Was it baked in at quite a high level?

Victoria Prentis: It was baked into everything we are doing. I would politely refer those critics to the Fisheries Act objectives, to everything that we are seeking to do, in fisheries management terms, at the local level, to what we are doing in MPAs and highly protected marine areas,



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for example. This is a real, objective-led stream of work, which I hope is present in every single part of our funding.

Q170 **Dr Hudson:** Can I follow up then? If it is baked in, as you say, Minister, for the bids for the science and innovation scheme and the seafood fund more generally, what weight will be given to the environment when determining whether a bid could be successful?

Victoria Prentis: For the infrastructure fund, all the assessment criteria are available online. I would encourage anybody who is interested to have a good look. I have the ones for the infrastructure fund in front of me, as it happens. Strengthening the supply chain can be seen in food security terms and other terms as a sustainable thing to do. Of course, "sustainable" encompasses quite a lot of our industry, and we hope all of it in the end.

Fisheries health and environmental sustainability is our second heading, as it were. Then there is social and economic sustainability, which is, yet again, part of the balance always when funding, in fisheries terms. We need to make sure that these coastal communities are sustainable ones.

Then there is project location, to ensure that the funding is going to the most deprived communities. Again, that is sustainability, although perhaps not environmental sustainability as such. Value for money and efficiency, et cetera, can be an environmental issue, as you know.

Q171 **Dr Hudson:** Are these different criteria equally weighted, or some more heavily than others?

Victoria Prentis: There is a scoring system.

Sarah Adcock: There is. It has been made public in the invitation to tender. It is public.

Dr Hudson: You know what you are bidding for.

Sarah Adcock: Exactly, yes.

Victoria Prentis: You have to get 50% in any of the topics in order to pass, as it were.

Q172 **Dr Hudson:** Okay, but you are comfortable that the criticisms about the environment and sustainability not being looked out for are measured in the criteria.

Victoria Prentis: They are very easy criticisms to make. When you look at the details, you will find that they are really not substantiated.

Q173 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you for that clarification. That is very helpful. Sorry to be throwing criticisms out, but this is evidence that we have taken and we throw it back to you. We have also heard queries about the timeframe over which data are collected.

Victoria Prentis: We have heard that too.



Dr Hudson: Will data collection projects be funded over a sufficient timeframe to allow a clear picture of the stocks to be established? If that is the case, can you give us a ballpark of what sort of timeframes we might be looking at?

Sarah Adcock: Yes, I can. The first thing to say is that we have that extension to the UK seafood fund to run to March 2025. The funding is only for the spending review period. In answer to your question of whether it will be sufficient, I would always want time series data that covers six, seven, 10 or 20 years and I only have the three years to play with.

For the next two rounds of the fisheries industry science partnerships, which are being launched around August and October/November time, both of those projects will look at bids running to March 2025, so more fishing seasons will be covered in that data collection. So it is yes, with the limitations that I have this fund for only as long as I have this fund.

Q174 **Dr Hudson:** When will we know? We will not know until closer to 2025 what the next chapter will be, will we? That is political. That is Government.

Sarah Adcock: I am responsible for the UK seafood fund, but it is only one part of the work that we do on data collection. There is big programme of work under the data collection framework that we still continue doing. There is still data collected. The bit that we are focusing predominantly on, in particular for Minister Prentis's fisheries management plans, is those non-quota stocks. We have been really data poor for that.

Victoria Prentis: There, we do not have the historic data that, frankly, we need and should have.

Q175 **Dr Hudson:** Are you optimistic? Are there mechanisms in place, as we get closer to the end of the timeframe that you have, that people will be thinking holistically, biologically and ecologically: "We need to be thinking about the next five or 10 years, in terms of stocks"?

Victoria Prentis: I really hope so.

Dr Hudson: Are you optimistic that those discussions will take place?

Victoria Prentis: Yes. I hope that they will be baked into our local fisheries management plans, because it is very hard to manage a fishery without data, including local data and complete data of all stocks, not just the ones that we trade internationally. It is really important. Data will become increasingly important as we try to manage our fisheries sustainably.

Dr Hudson: You are speaking to a vet and a scientist. The fact that data will be important is music to my ears. Thank you.



Victoria Prentis: It will be much more important than it has ever been before.

Q176 **Dr Hudson:** I am going to move now on to my next question, which is on the skills and training. Thank you for your presentation on that. What do you see as the priority areas for the skills and training scheme when assessing applications? In your answer, can you talk about whether the focus is going to be on supporting new entrants or upskilling existing workers, or a bit of both?

Victoria Prentis: It is very much both. We need new entrants into our industry; we really do. We need people who are prepared to make this their career and see a future in it. We will be improving the quality and increasing the range of training. These are all stated objectives. We will be contributing to upgrading knowledge and skills, for example offering qualifications and certificates that help people with their continuing professional development, essentially. We will also look at the levelling-up agenda and make sure that this is genuinely delivered in coastal communities and possibly on a mobile basis geographically, where we, the trainer, go to the fisherman, not the other way round.

Q177 **Dr Hudson:** Can I push you on that point, in terms of the levelling-up agenda and equality of access to these opportunities? We have heard in previous evidence sessions that, when fishers come back into shore, perhaps the last thing they want to do is then go off and do their CPD or further training. Will you be looking at making things a lot more flexible moving forward, so that online learning can be part of it and so that people, when they are coming back to shore, can be looked after, to make sure that they can upskill and train in an equality of access way?

Victoria Prentis: One of the very few good points coming out of the pandemic is that we have all learned that online training is a good thing. It does not completely deal with every training need. I also think that it is important, from a developmental point of view, that people in a profession are able to get together at times.

Mobile training is often really useful as well, when we take the trainer to the fisherman. That is very much part of the plan.

Q178 **Dr Hudson:** You will give weight to flexibility, like mobile and online training. They will be looked at and enhanced through this.

Victoria Prentis: Yes, very much so. As always, we are concerned about safety in this industry. That will be very much part of this offer as well.

Q179 **Dr Hudson:** In previous evidence sessions—and it ties in with another inquiry that we are doing on rural mental health—we have heard about the physical and mental health and wellbeing of fishing communities. Is that going to be factored into this?

Sarah Adcock: We are very much hearing that on the coast, particularly through the consultations that Minister Prentis talked about previously. It



is a competitive bid. If somebody wants to put in a bid for a training programme to increase resilience in the fleet, or help people to identify diversification, we will look at that.

Dr Hudson: Or mental health first aid training in the workplace.

Sarah Adcock: Yes, exactly that. We will look at any of that on the case-by-case basis. As Defra, we are also doing a lot of work with the charity organisations. We are talking to the other organisations in which some of the mental health issues might be arising. We are trying to marry all that up to deliver something.

Victoria Prentis: We are trying to make sure that we, as Government, are not adding to people's stress and are working with the really superb fishermen's charities to deliver mental health training where appropriate. My grandfather was a Missions to Seamen chaplain, so the stress in fishing communities is very much something that I was brought up to recognise. Geraint knows where I am from—where my mother was from anyway. The work done by those charities is modern, efficient and should be recognised as such. This is not necessarily the scheme to help with that, but if they wanted to make a bid we certainly would not stand in their way.

Q180 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you for shining a spotlight on those charities and the work that they do. That is great. Why is the scheme, the training and skills side of things, not accessible to businesses to allow them to offer apprenticeships?

Sarah Adcock: It is accessible to businesses, but we are not looking at apprenticeships this time round. There is an apprenticeship that exists only in the fishing industry.

Dr Hudson: Businesses can apply, but they cannot use it to fund an apprenticeship; that is what you are saying.

Sarah Adcock: Yes.

Q181 **Dr Hudson:** Is that something that could be looked at in the future?

Sarah Adcock: It is. Interestingly, we had a really good conversation with someone from the Cornish Fish Producers Organisation last week. Yes, we are going to look at what that might look like in the future. No promises have been made, but what could be possible will be examined.

Victoria Prentis: Traditionally, the fishing industry has not used the apprenticeship scheme in the way that perhaps it might. We need to look at why that is.

Q182 **Chair:** To follow up on that, one of the problems has been that, if you are a share fisherman, you are not an employee. If you are not an employee, you cannot then do an apprenticeship. A lot of the industry is still based on a share of the catch, which obviously gives you variable income. I hope you might be able to look at whether share fishermen starting off in



the job could have some sort of training apprenticeship type thing.

Victoria Prentis: We might look at a way of producer organisations, for example, taking responsibility for apprentices in the future. We have 15,000 fishermen. Many of them have one vessel and it has not been a model that has worked awfully well with the apprenticeship model. That is definitely something we are willing to look at. If you, as a Committee, have ideas, we would love to receive those.

Q183 **Chair:** You mentioned the seafood exports package et cetera. It is only £1 million out of the £100 million. Why have you chosen to have it for non-EU countries and missed out our closest and best market?

Victoria Prentis: It is for both markets we already export to and markets we want to export to. We export £1.6 billion of seafood, or thereabouts, at the moment. Of that, £1.3 billion is to the EU, so we have very well-worn market access with parts of the EU. However, there are other markets within the EU that we do not yet reach, and we want to explore that.

We also want to explore new markets. You will all remember the difficulties our exporters had at the beginning of last year. It is very important that we have a wide range of markets available to what is in fact a very wide-ranging sector. We have talked a lot about the catching sector today, but agriculture is a very big part of our export market.

Q184 **Chair:** We have people in embassies around the world promoting British food. This money will not be used just to pay those people already there. It is new money.

Victoria Prentis: This is new money and we will demand new returns on the new money.

Q185 **Chair:** For the million you are putting in, what amount of extra trade do you hope to generate?

Sarah Adcock: We will struggle to put a figure on that. There are so many different things at play, unfortunately, like prices and stock sustainability et cetera. We have done an awful lot of work with DIT to figure out where we are likely to get most bang for our buck in those new markets in particular.

Q186 **Chair:** The biggest market for British-caught fish that is not really exploited by our own fish is the UK market. We import most of the fish we eat and we export most of the fish we catch. Are we really flogging a dead horse on persuading people to eat fish that is not covered in batter or breadcrumbs?

Victoria Prentis: No, you carry on, Sir Robert, and I carry on. You will have noticed that it was very much part of the food strategy. Fish featured at every stage of that food strategy as part of what we are trying to promote. During the pandemic, we made some progress. We



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had a substantial fund, which encouraged people who normally export to sell directly.

The difficulty is that our fishermen, understandably, want to achieve the best prices for them. Those prices, particularly for the crabs and lobsters, are not in this country. I love our seafood and am terribly proud of our seafood. We should do all we can to promote it among our fellow countrymen.

Chair: One legacy of my time in your position was that every time I arrived somewhere they gave me oysters to eat, which I did not used to really fancy, but actually I love oysters now.

Victoria Prentis: Delicious.

Q187 **Chair:** I love them now. I was completely weaned on to them. If more people would eat British oysters and other fish that we catch, it would be great.

Victoria Prentis: Genuinely, in the food strategy, things like the new public procurement targets will really help British produce across the board. We are going out to consultation on that 50% goal of public procurement being local. I am very hopeful that British seafood becomes genuinely part of the national diet.

Sarah Adcock: Bringing it all the way back to the UK seafood fund, the infrastructure pillar in particular, in order to get the seafood to the domestic consumer, we need to improve our domestic supply chains. That is predominantly one of the things that the infrastructure scheme is looking at. Sort out what consumers want to eat on the one hand; make sure we can get the fish to them on the other.

Victoria Prentis: I do not know if you have already heard evidence about this, but Brixham market would repay a bit of investigation by the Committee in this space. It made real progress during the pandemic and drastically increased the amount of domestic selling that it did. It would be worth using Brixham as an example.

Q188 **Geraint Davies:** I will not talk about oysters, but you will know Oystermouth. We should be putting more in people's mouths. On the last question, just briefly, it strikes me that £1 million as a marketing budget on the back of a trade worth £1.6 billion, namely less than 0.1%, is a very small amount. I remember some years ago I think Unilever was spending £15 million just marketing PG Tips. Do you not feel that we should be spending more than the million, both at home and abroad, to increase sales?

Victoria Prentis: I do not have the figures with me, but I think that you will find that the Scottish salmon spend is really considerable. Do you know off the top of your head?

Sarah Adcock: I do not.



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Victoria Prentis: Its market share increase, in terms of our exports over the last few years, has been very impressive.

Q189 **Geraint Davies:** That is very good. In other words, the £1 million is quite a small proportion of the total marketing. It is sort of icing on the cake. It is not going to make much of a difference, is it?

Victoria Prentis: In my view, the role of Government is to help exporters with difficulties, with form filling and barriers to trade. This is very much targeted at practical, on-the-ground help to encourage our exporters to get over specific difficulties with the market.

We have our agri-food counsellors across the board. I think that we are recruiting 11. We are recruiting eight extra, so I think that we will have 11 in total. They are going to be very much part of that international work. I fully expect there to be considerably more marketing spend by specific types of seafood.

Sarah Adcock: It is also £1 million more. It is almost like a top-up. It will not be the money that is used to pay for those eight counsellors, for instance. It is additional money. The agri-food counsellors will already have the marketing role and will be reaping rewards. This is additional money to top that up.

Q190 **Geraint Davies:** If we are going into these big, complicated markets, such as the CPTPP or whatever, with many different sorts of people in many sorts of countries, and we are serious about that, we will need a bit more bang to make our buck, will we not? That is in terms of the investment in market research and then in marketing. I am just saying that the £1 million does not go very far. I know that that sounds a lot to most people.

Victoria Prentis: When taken across the board, with all the DIT and Foreign Office weight and effort behind it, this is part of a much bigger picture. It will help. This is going to be targeted at specific problems with exporting.

Q191 **Geraint Davies:** Coming back to the seafood funds and how they are allocated across the UK, I think Sarah mentioned that, in the case where a devolved Administration is already funding a project, that will be excluded. It strikes me that they would only be funding the best application in the first place. Does that not make it discriminatory, in the sense that that would have been funded, because it was a good project? In a way, that money will be displaced back into a non-devolved area.

Victoria Prentis: I do not think so. It is good that there are various streams available to our fishing industries. We have this £100 million scheme over three years. We then have the repatriated EU funding of £32.7 million a year. Adding it up, that is almost another £100 million, if you see what I mean, over the three-year period. That was already organised into schemes that are delivered via the devolved Administrations and by England. Those schemes are well understood by



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the fishing industry and are often smaller and more targeted at individual fishermen. I am not anticipating difficulties with that.

There is one piece of clarification I should make. You can apply for the same scheme, if you like, within different funds. You will just get funded once. We are working extremely closely with the DAs on these schemes. I have no doubt that that will work properly, as it should do.

Q192 Geraint Davies: One could argue that the fund should be proportionately distributed to the four nations to start with. Otherwise, they may have funded something from their original block grant that then is being displaced. Do you see what I mean? They lose out.

Victoria Prentis: The repatriated funding is provided by the DAs and by England. This £100 million seafood fund that we are here to talk about today was very much viewed as a project to bring the industry together, to get us ready for the opportunities that came our way and to modernise us and make sure that we were fishing in a sustainable way, as a united UK.

Q193 Chair: It was not just the Prime Minister trying to sweeten the pill that was a little bit bitter for the fishing industry and address its disappointment at the deal.

Victoria Prentis: It was an extremely useful fund and I am very happy to be responsible for spending it.

Q194 Geraint Davies: On the EU landscape, do you feel that the amount that is being provided and the way it is being spent is competitive with the amount of support that is being given to—I do not know—French fishermen and other fisherpeople across Europe.

Victoria Prentis: Sir Robert was just then being a bit sniffy about the TCA. That is a technical term. It is fair to say that the industry abroad was even more upset by the TCA than we were. It is fair to say that there are gains for our industry in the TCA and there is definitely an uplift in quota. We have been very pleased to give that in particular to the inshore fleet. I have been pleased with the way that has gone.

I have noticed that other countries have wanted, possibly, to sweeten the pill for their industries, to coin a phrase. What we are doing is comparable. You should view it as part of the schemes in total, so £100 million under this fund over three years and about £100 million under the repatriated funds over three years. That is a really significant investment by Government in the future of our fishing industry and we should be really pleased with that.

Q195 Geraint Davies: How does that compare on a like-for-like basis with some of our main competitors, such as France?

Victoria Prentis: It is very hard to compare like for like, not least because they are losing quota and we are gaining quota. The aim of this fund is to get us ready to catch the extra quota that is coming our way.



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Q196 **Geraint Davies:** I am wondering whether to leave it there. On the specifics of the funding streams, the fishing and seafood scheme in England and marine fund Scotland, is there not a problem here? Plus, there is the fact that other money may be spent in other ways in devolved Administrations. Is there not a possibility for a bit of confusion here?

Victoria Prentis: No, I do not think so. As I said earlier, those funds are very well understood by our fishing industry. They are very happy to bid into them. They are open to much smaller bids than those we have opened under this fund to date. I do not think that there is. There may be confusion among the general public, but I think that it is very well understood among the fishing industry. Would you agree?

Sarah Adcock: Yes, completely. The thing to labour there is that, as Minister Prentis says, the repatriated funds, the schemes there, are very similar to what we used to do under the EU. They are not the same. We have taken advantage of the fact that we can do what we want to do in our own areas. They are schemes that the local fishermen know very well and can utilise.

In the development of the UK seafood fund, we worked really closely with the devolved Administrations to make really clear water between what you would normally go to in a domestic scheme to fund and what you should go to for a UK seafood fund. The big difference is the scale. With the domestic schemes, so both the fisheries and seafood scheme in England and the marine Scotland fund, you go for smaller projects. With the infrastructure pillar, for instance, you are looking at projects worth £250,000 to £5 million. That is not something that the marine Scotland fund is in the same bracket of.

Q197 **Geraint Davies:** I do not know whether you have the figures, but, if you were to look at the size and value of the market going to British fishers in, say, 2018 or 2019, something like that, and what it is projected to be in the next year, is there a big difference? Has it gone down much since the Brexit experience?

Victoria Prentis: Do you mean the size of the export market?

Q198 **Geraint Davies:** The total market and the export market, yes. They are separate questions really. Do you have those figures?

Victoria Prentis: They are figures that I look at regularly. I would not like to remember them wrongly. I am very happy to write to the Committee, if that would be helpful, on projected sales. I think that that is what you are asking.

Q199 **Geraint Davies:** In generality though, exports for British fish, if I can call it that, are down. Is that correct or not?

Victoria Prentis: No. We continue to have significant difficulties in some areas. We are still working hard, for example, in the live bivalve mollusc



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sector and the eel sector, to take two examples. It is fine to export from class A waters, but not from class B waters. The rest of our export market is holding up well and prices are really good at the moment. That is why I have some hesitation in sharing figures. There is always the volume figure and then the value figure. They are both worth tracking, but separately.

In value terms, we are doing very well at the moment. If you look at our global sales, particularly on the Scottish salmon side, for example, it is growing extremely satisfactorily. It is a very broad and complex market. This is why it is worth putting investment into this industry. I want us to eat more at home; I really do, but I also think that this is a valuable export.

Q200 **Geraint Davies:** I do not know. Is employment growth likely to grow or shrink in the fishing sector?

Chair: We are not talking Filipinos and Ghanaians, by the way.

Victoria Prentis: The skills and training fund is very much part of our emphasis to try to upskill and make a career for a local workforce—one that views this as perhaps not for life but for a good few years as part of their life plan, as it were. There are many opportunities in fish, not just in catching. A lot of our value in fish, about half, is in aquaculture, though a very small proportion of the workforce is employed in aquaculture. It is hard for me to give an exact answer without splitting it into sections.

Q201 **Chair:** Could you maybe drop us a line about the eel situation, particularly as it affects Northern Ireland in Lough Neagh and the glass eel trade?

Victoria Prentis: I would be delighted to update you.

Chair: Could you copy that in to Simon Hoare, the Chair of the Northern Ireland Select Committee? They take an interest in that as well. It is very important.

Victoria Prentis: Yes, they do, as do the colleagues from Gloucestershire, where the eels originate. I have been keeping them updated, but possibly not the EFRA Committee in the way that I should have been.

Q202 **Dr Hudson:** Minister, we just touched there on some of the difficulties of moving products. We are trying to help our industries. Can I ask you for Defra's perspective? I have been calling for the UK and EU to get round the table and think very seriously about signing a veterinary and SPS agreement. Can I get Defra's perspective on that? Do you feel that that would help a lot of the situation, in terms of movement of seafood, but also animal and plant products? It would help a lot of the GB-Northern Ireland side of things as well. What is Defra doing about that? I have raised that with the Foreign Office and the Northern Ireland Office. Is Defra on board with that?



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Victoria Prentis: The TCA allows for a vet meds or similar SPS agreement. As far as we are concerned, we like trading with the EU. We think our products are safe and fantastic, and should be as easy to export now as they were before we left the EU. We are frustrated by the attitude that some of our friends in the EU have taken, particularly, for example, in the live bivalve mollusc space.

We continue to work very closely. We have a stream of work set out in the TCA for the Specialised Committee on Fisheries. We are very much engaged with that. In some ways, things are going well. In digitalisation, for example, of export health certificates, we have actually made real progress and things have got much easier. There is a long way to go and I am quite sure that, when relationships improve and as the situation continues to improve, things can get better.

Q203 **Dr Hudson:** I see your frustrations there. Do you see that there could be a direction of travel that the UK Government could get behind, in terms of a veterinary SPS agreement?

Victoria Prentis: My perspective is that we are doing absolutely everything we can to make things as easy for our traders as possible.

Q204 **Dr Hudson:** Do you agree that, if we had a veterinary SPS agreement, that would help things?

Victoria Prentis: It is certainly not us standing in the way of it.

Dr Hudson: It would help the situation.

Victoria Prentis: The problem is not us. It is some of our former partners that do not wish to make the changes that we think would be perfectly sensible.

Q205 **Chair:** The EU's equivalent scheme, EMFAF, runs from 2021 to 2027. How long will the UK's equivalent scheme run for? If it is due to expire before that, will you be making representations to that nice Mr Sunak to try to extend it? I was going to say he has hold of the money, but he has the country's credit card, in effect.

Victoria Prentis: Is this for the repatriated funding or for the seafood fund as well?

Chair: I was talking about for a follow-on scheme.

Sarah Adcock: The funding we have, the UK seafood fund, is due to end. It is £100 million that is due to end by March 2025. In answer to your question of whether we would be making representations to the Treasury for more money, I think that it will depend on what we have managed to achieve, how successful the scheme have been and what is left at the end of it. We all want to be in a world where the industry is not reliant on Government funding. The aim of this scheme is to make the industry self-sustaining. Depending on where we are at the end of that, we will need to decide.



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Victoria Prentis: It will also very much depend on what we are expecting to get in 2026.

Q206 **Chair:** If you have no objection, Minister, or members of the Committee, could I suggest that we put your slide pack on the Committee's website?

Victoria Prentis: That would be a very good thing.

Chair: It will not be up straight away, but we will get it on today, if those watching in want to look at the detail, which is very helpful.

Victoria Prentis: It is very much simplified and there is much more information available for those who want to apply for the fund on the various GOV.UK websites. It is quite helpful for the general viewer, as it were.

Q207 **Chair:** I hope that people who have been listening will understand. I did not realise about the recreational sector. A lot of chartered fishermen in my constituency take people out. They always complain that the toilets are not open at 6 am when they set out. There are little things like that.

Victoria Prentis: I was particularly keen to make the recreational fishermen part of the scheme. They can work hand in hand, as you know, with the catching sector. They are a group of people who could be, if treated right, very much part of making coastal communities' livelihoods sustainable going forward.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Sarah. Thank you very much indeed, Minister. That is the end of this session.