

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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# Resetting the relationship with fishing communities

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Seventh Report of Session 2024–26

HC 680

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# Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and its associated public bodies.

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## Publication

This Report, together with formal minutes relating to the Report, was Ordered by the House of Commons, on 21 April 2026, to be printed. It was published on 24 April 2026 by authority of the House of Commons. © Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2026.

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# Summary

Fishing remains central to the identity, economy and social fabric of many coastal towns and villages, yet communities continue to face long-standing challenges including inadequate port infrastructure, fragile skills and training pathways, and limited targeted support for active fishing communities.

We welcome the establishment of the Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund and recognise the opportunity it offers to strengthen fishing and coastal communities that have felt overlooked for too long. While the government has now recognised the link between the fishing industry and coastal communities, it has not clearly explained the rationale for committing £360 million over 12 years to the new fund. The duration of the new Fund mirrors revised access arrangements between the United Kingdom and the European Union, but there is no convincing explanation for why this time-frame is right for effective investment or how the funding total was calculated.

We are clear that projects driven by active fishing communities must remain the priority throughout the 12-year life of the Fund. This principle must be built into any expanded delivery model with clear criteria to ensure funding strengthens the fishing sector and the communities that depend on it. We are, however, concerned that the current funding profile undermines ambition; spreading investment thinly over 12 years risks delaying benefits that communities urgently need. Front loading funding would provide greater certainty and allow meaningful multi-year projects to get off the ground. As things stand, England's first year allocation of £22.6 million is strikingly modest when set against the overall lifetime funding. Greater transparency is needed on year-by-year allocations and on how funding will flow to the devolved administrations.

We welcome the engagement undertaken to shape the Fund's early design and acknowledge that stakeholder input influenced first-year arrangements. However, important voices, such as Cornish fishing communities and the largest fish market in England, Brixham, were missing. Consultative gaps must be addressed as the Fund evolves.

Applying the Barnett formula produces outcomes that feel detached from the lived reality of fishing communities, where the sector is concentrated in specific nations and regions rather than shared evenly across the UK. For the UK Government to engage respectfully and meaningfully with the devolved administrations is important, but that is no substitute for early, meaningful engagement with the industry. It is not credible for any devolved

administration to demand devolution of a scheme and then to complain about the financial consequences of them being given what they asked for. It is difficult not to see this as a demand that was driven by the politics of the constitution rather than effective fisheries management.

Trust between fishers and the government has been badly eroded over successive administrations. Rebuilding that trust is essential if the sector is to realise its economic and social potential. Fishers are asking for a genuine voice in decisions that affect their livelihoods. Clearer communication, consistent engagement and visible understanding of life at sea are vital if confidence is to be restored.

We are also deeply concerned by poor communication around regulatory changes and a lack of transparency in enforcement. Confusion following UK-EU consultations left fishers uncertain about rules that directly affect their operations, while the decision to stop routinely publishing enforcement data only fuels mistrust. Those who are regulated deserve clarity and openness.

Finally, mounting competition for marine space is creating real and growing pressure. Fragmented governance and outdated policy frameworks are failing to provide the clarity needed to manage competing demands fairly. A comprehensive UK-wide “Sea Use Framework” is now essential. This must be developed collaboratively, place fishing and coastal communities at its heart, and be supported by strong cross government leadership if it is to command confidence and endure.

## Our inquiry

We launched our long-term iterative inquiry into fisheries and the marine environment in January 2025 to examine how competing pressures on the sea are managed alongside post-Brexit fisheries arrangements and marine conservation. As part of this work, we issued a call for evidence on the “future of fishing communities”, with a focus on the proposed Fisheries and Coastal Growth Fund, which received 27 written submissions. We visited Brixham and Charlestown to hear directly from fishers and environmental organisations, and during visits to Brussels we spoke with representatives of the European Parliament’s Fisheries Committee and *Europêche*. We also took oral evidence from Defra Ministers, the Marine Management Organisation, The Crown Estate and Seafish between April 2025 and January 2026.

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# 1 Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund

1. Fishing has deep community roots, and it is often woven into the history and identity of coastal towns and villages. During our visit to Brixham Harbour, community representatives told us that fishing remains central to the town’s character and economy, with local tourism strongly shaped by the industry’s heritage, supply chains and daily activity.<sup>1</sup> Although fishing and aquaculture accounts for only a small share of the UK economy (0.03% of GVA in 2025),<sup>2</sup> it is highly concentrated and therefore critical to specific areas. In Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, for example, 2.9% of jobs depend on seafood, compared with the UK average of 0.7%.<sup>3</sup> Despite its size, the fishing sector’s footprint extends beyond its direct economic contribution, influencing local communities, tourism, and internationally recognised British food traditions.
2. On 19 May 2025, the government announced the creation of a Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund.<sup>4</sup> The then Secretary of State for Defra, Steve Reed, described it as “worth £360 million specifically for the fishing communities in those coastal areas.”<sup>5</sup> This announcement coincided with the 2025 UK–EU summit at which both sides agreed to guarantee reciprocal access to each other’s waters for a further 12 years (to 30 June 2038). This mechanism was formalised by the UK-EU Specialised Committee on Fisheries on 19 June 2025.<sup>6</sup>
3. Many fishers told us that the 12 year reciprocal access deal with the EU will not benefit the UK fishing sector. Fishing organisations characterised the agreement as “devastating for morale”<sup>7</sup> and a “significant blow”.<sup>8</sup> The National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations (NFFO) views the timing of the Fund’s announcement as a form of “consolation” that has been put in place as an alternative means of supporting the sector’s long term economic future, rather than the annual access negotiations it

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1 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee ([FME0031](#))

2 Office for National Statistics, [GDP output approach - low level aggregates](#), release date 12 February 2026

3 Cornish Fish Producers Organisation, [Value of Seafood to Cornwall](#), August 2023

4 Gov.uk, [Government to launch £360m Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund](#), 19 May 2025

5 [Q182](#)

6 The Specialised Committee on Fisheries, [Decision on fisheries access from 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2038](#), 19 June 2025

7 Scottish Fishermen’s Federation ([FME0014](#))

8 The National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations ([FME0027](#))

was expecting.<sup>9</sup> The government states that the arrangement “provides stability and predictability for communities fishing in EU waters,”<sup>10</sup> with the former Defra Secretary describing it as a “fair deal for the sector.”<sup>11</sup> The Fisheries Minister, Dame Angela Eagle MP, has said that the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreement between the UK and EU, also announced at the summit and currently being negotiated, will benefit the fishing sector as well and increase opportunities for UK seafood exporters.<sup>12</sup>

## Design of the Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund

4. Despite reservations about the motivations behind the Fund, the sector largely welcomes its establishment. Stakeholders have highlighted ongoing, community-specific issues such as port infrastructure, suitable accommodation for workers, and training pathways for young people, which require dedicated attention.<sup>13</sup> Fishers have called for the Fund to prioritise active, fishing-community-led projects aimed at improving the resilience of coastal towns and villages.<sup>14</sup> Written evidence highlighted the importance of: investment in science, research, and skills development; modernisation of the fleet rather than incremental upgrades; improvements to port infrastructure; initiatives to raise awareness of career opportunities; and the development of a fishing advisory service.<sup>15</sup> Environmental organisations stressed that the Fund should promote more sustainable fishing practices.<sup>16</sup>
5. In February 2026, Defra published its priorities for the first year of the Fund in England.<sup>17</sup> These include: labour and workforce development; health and safety; community place-based pilot schemes; strengthening of domestic and international trade and market access; and investment in

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9 The National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations ([FME0027](#))  
10 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ([FME0029](#))  
11 [Q179](#)  
12 [UK Relations with EU: Fisheries](#), UIN 82134, answered 22 October 2025  
13 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee ([FME0031](#)), Clyde Fishermen’s Association ([FME0026](#))  
14 Clyde Fishermen’s Association ([FME0026](#))  
15 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee ([FME0031](#)); APPG Fisheries ([FME0012](#)); Mallaig and North West Fishermen’s Association ([FME0021](#)); Northern Ireland Fish Producer’s Organisation ([FME0007](#))  
16 Oceana UK ([FME0009](#)); Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) ([FME0010](#))  
17 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Guidance: Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund](#), 19 February 2026

infrastructure. In year two, the Fund will not be limited to delivery through the current Fisheries and Seafood Scheme (FaSS) and is expected to incorporate broader priorities.<sup>18</sup>

6. Fleet modernisation is not explicitly identified as a priority of the new Fund. The eligibility criteria, published on 13 April 2026, outline that the Fund cannot be used for the construction or purchase of new vessels, nor for the installation of new engines. However, it may be used for the purchase and installation of specified equipment that reduces carbon emissions from existing propulsion systems.<sup>19</sup> We have received strong representations that fleet modernisation is integral to the future of the industry, both for attracting new participants to the workforce—since younger people do not want to be out at sea on an old, often uncomfortable boat—and for improving sustainability and environmental performance to meet net-zero targets.<sup>20</sup> Fishers in Brixham expressed frustration that previous funding schemes incentivise retrofitting older vessels rather than enabling investment in new builds that younger skippers would prefer, describing retrofits as akin to “turning a Morris Minor into an electric car.”<sup>21</sup> The Joint Fisheries Statement agreed by the four UK fisheries administrations includes a presumption against allocating public funding for new fishing vessels where this increases fishing capacity beyond sustainable levels.<sup>22</sup>

## 7. **CONCLUSION**

While we welcome the Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund, the government has not clearly set out its rationale for committing £360 million over 12 years. The timeframe aligns with revised reciprocal access arrangements between the UK and EU, but it is unclear why this duration is the most suitable for investment planning or how the funding level was calculated. Including coastal community priorities within the Fund’s remit reflects the close link between fishing activity and local economic wellbeing, but the government has not demonstrated why this is best delivered through a new, single integrated scheme. While the Fund provides an opportunity for growth, resilience and competitiveness of the sector, it lacks clear objectives to track progress.

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- 18 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Guidance: Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund](#), 19 February 2026; [Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund](#), UIN 118698, answered 17 March 2026
  - 19 Marine Management Organisation, [Guidance: Fisheries and Seafood Scheme](#), updated 13 April 2026
  - 20 Mallaig Harbour Authority ([FME0024](#)); Scottish White Fish Producers Association ([FME0006](#)); Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee ([FME0031](#)); Northern Ireland Fish Producer’s Organisation ([FME0007](#))
  - 21 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee ([FME0031](#))
  - 22 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Welsh Government, Scottish Government, Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (Northern Ireland), [Joint Fisheries Statement](#), November 2022, p.38

**8. RECOMMENDATION**

The government should provide this Committee with the analysis supporting the £360 million funding level, the 12-year duration and whatever the profile of this spending is expected to be over that period, including the reasons for establishing a new scheme rather than building on existing ones. It should also set out its rationale for integrating community investment and define measurable longterm outcomes for growth, resilience and competitiveness to enable a proper assessment of progress over the lifespan of the Fund.

**9. CONCLUSION**

The government clearly recognises the strong relationship between fishing activity and coastal community wellbeing. Evidence shows that challenges such as inadequate port infrastructure and limited skills and training pathways require targeted support to sustain active fishing communities. The Fund's priorities for its first year reflect this need. However, from the second year, the Fund will cover a broader set of priorities and delivery will not be limited to the current Fisheries and Seafood Scheme (FaSS) framework administered by the Marine Management Organisation.

**10. RECOMMENDATION**

Priority should be given to projects driven by active fishing communities during the Fund's 12 years of operation. This principle should be embedded in any expanded delivery model or in any new scheme developed, with clear and measurable criteria to ensure support continues to strengthen the fishing sector and the communities that rely on it. Priorities of the Fund from year two onwards should include fleet modernisation that reduces carbon emissions and does not increase fishing capacity beyond sustainable levels as well as the development of place-based fishing advisory services.

- 11.** Stakeholders have argued for the 12 year funding period to be front-loaded and delivered in multi-year packages to enable longterm project planning.<sup>23</sup> The November 2025 Budget allocated £165 million between 2026–27 and 2030–31 for the Fund.<sup>24</sup> The NFFO described this front-loading as welcome but insufficient, and raised concerns that this could not be guaranteed beyond the end of the current Parliament.<sup>25</sup> In the 2026–27 financial year,

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23 Seafood Scotland ([FME0022](#)); APPG Fisheries ([FME0012](#))

24 HM Treasury, [Budget 2025](#), 28 November 2025

25 Fishing News, [First five years of Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund revealed in budget documents](#), 18 December

£22.6 million has been allocated to England,<sup>26</sup> which is less than one-twelfth of the total £304 million allocated across the 12 years, meaning it has not been front-loaded in year one for England.

12. The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) will be delivering the first year of funding for England using the mechanics of the existing Fisheries and Seafood Scheme (FaSS).<sup>27</sup> At our roundtable event in Brixham and in evidence, stakeholders criticised current schemes, including FaSS, as being poorly administered.<sup>28</sup> It was noted that larger operators often benefited from earlier awareness of funding rounds, while smaller businesses faced disproportionately high administrative burdens.<sup>29</sup> Due to its first-come-first-served model, FaSS closed six and a half weeks after opening in 2025 because of “high demand.”<sup>30</sup> Evidence also highlights that the FaSS required applicants to cover the full project costs upfront before being reimbursed, which can create a barrier for individuals, small businesses, and community groups.<sup>31</sup> However, the Fisheries Minister described the FaSS as “popular with stakeholders in England”<sup>32</sup> and Michelle Willis, interim Chief Executive of the MMO, told us that “the schemes have gone really well” and that the MMO provides one-to-one support for fishers who struggle with using its systems.<sup>33</sup>
13. The department has been clear that the new Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund is being developed in collaboration with stakeholders,<sup>34</sup> and has published the methodology and approach used for its Autumn 2025 round of engagement.<sup>35</sup> This engagement has led to changes in the Fund’s design. For example, the 2026–2027 round, delivered as the FaSS, will have £6 million ringfenced for small businesses, three competitive rounds for projects costing over £250,000, and funding for multi-year projects.<sup>36</sup> However, whilst the list of participating English stakeholders appears comprehensive,

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26 [Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund](#), UIN 118697, answered 12 March 2026

27 [Q166](#)

28 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee ([FME0031](#)); Mallaig and North West Fishermen’s Association ([FME0021](#))

29 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee ([FME0031](#)); R & J Seafoods Ltd ([FME0017](#))

30 Marine Management Organisation, [Fisheries and Seafood Scheme 2025 closed following strong demand](#), 25 July 2025

31 The National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations ([FME0027](#)); Mallaig and North West Fishermen’s Association ([FME0021](#))

32 [Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund](#), UIN 118698, answered 17 March 2026

33 [Q166](#)

34 Correspondence received from the Secretary of State, following the evidence session held on 11 November, [dated 29 January](#)

35 Defra, [Research and analysis Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund stakeholder engagement: autumn 2025](#), 19 February 2026

36 Defra, [Guidance: Fisheries and Coastal Growth Fund](#), updated 13 April 2026

it is notable that Brixham, the largest fishing port in England, was not visited, and that Cornwall was not specifically represented in any of the port visits or regional fisheries groups and stakeholder organisations engaged.<sup>37</sup>

**14. CONCLUSION**

No Parliament can bind its successor and therefore front-loading the 12-year investment would better support ambitious, multi-year projects and deliver early benefits. Current plans for the Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund provide £165 million up to 2030–31, yet England’s first-year allocation is just £22.6 million, less than one-twelfth of the £304 million allocated to England over the lifetime of the fund.

**15. RECOMMENDATION**

In response to this report, the government should set out the year-by-year allocation of the budget in England for the next four years and clarify how funding will be provided to the devolved administrations through the block grant, including whether this will be annual, front-loaded, or issued as a single payment to be profiled independently.

**16. CONCLUSION**

We welcome the scale of engagement carried out in developing the Fund and note clear evidence that stakeholder views have informed its early design, such as the introduction of competitive rounds in the first year of the fund. However, there were significant gaps in representation that must be addressed in future engagement exercises.

**17. CONCLUSION**

From year two onward, delivery of the Fund will not be limited to the Fisheries and Seafood Scheme and will incorporate a broader range of priorities such as community projects which are potentially beyond the remit of what the current schemes, and the Marine Management Organisation, deliver.

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37 Defra, [Research and analysis Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund stakeholder engagement: autumn 2025](#), 19 February 2026

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#### RECOMMENDATION

Industry engagement should continue at a consistent level in the development of the Fund from year two onwards and be expanded to include additional fisheries groups and representatives from Cornwall. In response to this report, the government should set out whether, from year two of the fund onwards, it intends to develop a single new system that incorporates both traditional FaSS activity and the wider Fund priorities, or whether it will use a two-tier delivery model. The government should specify the proportion of the Fund that will be allocated to each priority area, and which organisations will be responsible for delivery in England.

## Devolved allocations

19. On 20 October 2025, the government announced that the Fund would be devolved, with allocations made using the Barnett formula:<sup>38</sup> England (£304m), Scotland (£28m), Wales (£18m), and Northern Ireland (£10m).<sup>39</sup> The stated rationale was that the devolved administrations are best placed to determine how funding should meet the needs of their fishing and coastal communities, and would allow each administration to bolster the programme from other funds as they see fit.<sup>40</sup>
20. Prior to this announcement, the UK Seafood Federation recommended to us that distribution of the Fund should reflect the relative scale of the fishing industry across the UK,<sup>41</sup> and Seafish said that a single central fund would benefit from economies of scale and be more efficient to administer.<sup>42</sup> Following the announcement of funding allocations, however, concerns were raised that the devolved allocations did not consider the distribution of the industry across the UK. For example, Scottish fishers make up more than 40% of the UK fleet and land more than half the UK's catch, yet Scotland is allocated only 8% of the Fund.<sup>43</sup> In correspondence, however, the Defra Secretary of State told us that, "The Scottish Government was particularly clear in representations to Defra that they wanted the fund to

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38 The Barnett formula is mainly used during spending reviews to calculate how the block grant given to devolved governments changes each year. The Barnett formula aims to give each country the same pounds-per-person change in funding and takes into account the levels that services are devolved, the population proportions of each nation and in Wales a 'needs-based' factor. More details can be found in the House of Commons Library research briefing '[The Barnett formula and fiscal devolution](#)'. 22 January 2026.

39 Defra, [Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund will boost regional economies](#), 20 October 2025

40 Defra, [Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund will boost regional economies](#), 20 October 2025; HC debate, Thursday 23 October 2025, [Col 1112](#); Correspondence received from the Secretary of State, following the evidence session held on 11 November, [dated 29 January](#)

41 UK Seafood Federation Limited ([FME0008](#))

42 Seafish ([FME0018](#))

43 BBC news, [UK fishing fund offer to Scotland is 'madness', minister told](#), 23 October 2025

be fully devolved.”<sup>44</sup> The Fisheries Minister informed the House that as a consequence, “We have now devolved a fund in the way in which funds are always devolved: using the Barnett formula.”<sup>45</sup>

21. The fishing sector operates across all four nations of the UK but remains highly concentrated in certain areas, making targeted support important. An alternative to using the Barnett formula could draw on the precedent set by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which allocated funding directly to local authorities, bypassing devolved administrations, through a bespoke formula.<sup>46</sup> This approach used indicators such as population size, measures of need, and, in Scotland’s case, population density, offering a model which could be adapted to direct resources to communities across the UK most reliant on a specific industry such as fishing. The Secretary of State told us that, although other models for funding allocations were considered, the use of the Barnett formula was “in line with normal funding arrangements for Devolved Governments” and provides them full discretion over how they choose to spend their allocations.<sup>47</sup>

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44 Correspondence received from the Secretary of State, following the evidence session held on 11 November, [dated 29 January](#)

45 Defra, [Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund will boost regional economies](#), 20 October 2025; HC debate, Thursday 23 October 2025, [Col 1112](#)

46 House of Commons Library [The UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#), Section 2.3, April 2022

47 Correspondence received from the Secretary of State, following the evidence session held on 11 November, [dated 29 January](#)

**22. CONCLUSION**

The allocation of the Fisheries and Coastal Growth Fund through the Barnett formula is inconsistent with model preferred by industry stakeholders in all parts of the United Kingdom. We are concerned that it does not reflect the relative scale, distribution or needs of the fishing industry across the UK. In the absence of any proper explanation by the government of why the total sum that has been allocated to the fund was chosen, or for the duration of the scheme itself, it is impossible for anyone to have confidence that there is political or fiscal integrity in the thinking behind the scheme. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund provides a precedent for region-specific funding using bespoke metrics. Collaborative implementation and administration should have been possible and would have been in the best interests of fishing communities. Beyond the fact that the Scottish Government demanded that administration of the fund should be devolved, there is no obvious reason for the departure from previous practice. Engagement with the devolved administrations is important, but should not replace early, meaningful engagement with the industry. For the UK Government to engage respectfully and meaningfully with the devolved administrations is important, but that is no substitute for early, meaningful engagement with the industry.

**23. CONCLUSION**

It is not credible for any devolved administration to demand devolution of a scheme and then to complain about the financial consequences of them being given what they asked for. It is difficult not to see this as a demand that was driven by the politics of the constitution rather than effective fisheries management.

**24. RECOMMENDATION**

Going forward, the UK Government should work collaboratively with the devolved administrations on the design and allocation of the Fund to ensure consistency and fairness across the sector for the allocations in year two. Seafish should be used to support a coherent UK-wide approach.

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## 2 Communication and trust

25. Fishers feel that successive governments have not adequately recognised or supported their sector.<sup>48</sup> As previously noted, many expressed concern that the 12 year reciprocal access deal with the EU was a significant setback for the UK fleet;<sup>49</sup> the NFFO argued that industry proposals were disregarded and that fishers were then told the agreement was favourable and to be grateful.<sup>50</sup> In Brixham, fishers and local representatives told us they wanted more involvement in policy development. Participants in our meetings in Brixham described the detrimental impacts of rising regulatory demands, fragmented policymaking and limited government engagement.<sup>51</sup> Those operating smaller vessels or businesses said the administrative burden was increasingly unmanageable, with some indicating that they were considering leaving the sector or decommissioning.
26. After raising our concerns around industry engagement with government, the Fisheries Minister, Dame Angela Eagle MP, assured us that, while Defra officials probably did not regularly visit ports, “the Marine Management Organisation has a particular presence at every port for every landing of every catch.”<sup>52</sup> The Minister later emphasised the importance of listening to fishers to understand the challenges they face.<sup>53</sup> Michelle Willis, MMO interim Chief Executive, recognised that increasing resilience and improving outcomes in the sector must be done in partnership with industry, communities, and government,<sup>54</sup> and said that the MMO’s marine officers work with industry and coastal communities across England on a day-to-day basis.<sup>55</sup> Recent media reports note that Defra is inviting applications from organisations, public bodies and local authorities engaged in the seafood sector in England to take part in a trial of regional seafood

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48 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee ([FME0031](#)); Mallaig and North West Fishermen’s Association ([FME0021](#))

49 The National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations ([FME0027](#)); UK Seafood Federation Limited ([FME0008](#)); Scottish Fishermen’s Federation ([FME0014](#)); APPG Fisheries ([FME0012](#))

50 The National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations ([FME0027](#))

51 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee ([FME0031](#))

52 [Q28](#)

53 [Q31](#)

54 [Q173](#)

55 [Q55](#)

planning, with up to four areas to be selected. Those selected would work with Defra to develop local seafood plans and set priorities for their respective areas.<sup>56</sup>

**27. CONCLUSION**

Trust between government and the fishing industry has been damaged by successive administrations. Rebuilding that trust is essential if the sector is to deliver its full economic potential for the individuals and communities it supports. Fishers are calling for a stronger voice in the decisions that affect them. Although the government has acknowledged the importance of partnership and communication in developing resilience within the sector, the perception among fishers is that this is not happening in practice.

**28. RECOMMENDATION**

Defra should require all officials working on fisheries policy, funding schemes and regulatory design to undertake regular, in-person engagement at ports and with those operating active fishing vessels. This programme should mirror the department's existing initiative to place civil servants on farms, ensuring that officials have a clear, practical understanding of the operational realities of the fishing industry.

**29. CONCLUSION**

We welcome Defra's trials of regional seafood planning in England, but more benefits will arise if the scope and participation of the trials are broadened to better capture the full range of perspectives from fishing communities and the wider seafood sector. This will enable policy to be shaped more effectively around the realities and needs of those it affects.

**30. RECOMMENDATION**

Defra should establish a UK-wide network of Regional Fisheries Management Forums, comprising of fishers, marine scientists and environmental organisations. These forums should meet at least three times a year, with minutes published within 20 working days, and be given a formal role in reviewing and commenting on any draft technical measures or policies affecting UK waters. As many fisheries decisions have UK-wide implications, the forums should operate on a UK-wide basis and be empowered to submit timely written recommendations to the relevant administration, with Defra required to respond formally to those in England before each forum's next planned meeting.

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<sup>56</sup> Fishing News, [UK Government trialling regional approach to seafood planning](#), 3 March 2026

## Regulatory burdens

31. An example of limited engagement in policy that affects fishers concerns the outcomes of the annual UK-EU fisheries consultations for 2026. The written record of the those consultations, published on 10 December 2025, includes urgent remedial actions for critically depleted stocks and changes to technical measures such as mesh sizes,<sup>57</sup> and states that all parties are required to introduce these changes by 1 June 2026.<sup>58</sup> The NFFO raised concerns over the speed of the proposed changes and the limited notice for their implementation, as well as concerns over a lack of industry consultation.<sup>59</sup> Michelle Willis, MMO interim CEO, acknowledged that she had not seen a rule change expected at this pace before.<sup>60</sup> Only through our correspondence with Defra did clarity emerge on both the timing of the introductions of the new rules to the negotiations and the expected timeframe for implementation. The Fisheries Minister said that because of legislative and secondary legislation timetabling constraints, full implementation by 1 June 2026 is unlikely, and Ministers intend to allow sufficient lead in time and a transition period for the fleet.<sup>61</sup> Yet over a month after the measures were published, the interim CEO of the MMO still believed that the implementation window was the six months outlined in the written record.<sup>62</sup>

32.

### CONCLUSION

Communication and engagement with the fishing industry on the outcomes of the annual UK-EU consultations for 2026 regarding changes to technical measures were inadequate, with unclear messaging on implementation timelines and confusion even among delivery bodies. This has left industry without reliable information on changes that directly affect their operations.

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57 Defra, [Written Record of fisheries consultations between the United Kingdom and the European Union for 2026](#), 10 December 2025

58 Defra, [Written Record of fisheries consultations between the United Kingdom and the European Union for 2026](#), 10 December 2025

59 National Federation of Fishermen's Organisation ([FME0033](#))

60 [Qq60-63](#)

61 Correspondence from Dame Angela Eagle, Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs, following the fisheries evidence session on 28 January, [dated 2 March 2026](#)

62 [Q66](#)

**33. RECOMMENDATION**

In response to this report, Defra should provide the Committee with a clear written account of its engagement with the fishing industry following the release of the December 2025 UK–EU fisheries written record. This should set out the dates and stakeholders involved, how the new technical measures and deadlines were communicated and whether the flexibility around the 1 June 2026 implementation date was explicitly conveyed. The department should also urgently publish a confirmed implementation timeline for the new technical measures for vessels operating in UK waters, alongside detailed steps it is taking to support industry to prepare for and implement the new requirements.

## Transparency and accountability

- 34.** In July 2025, the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) highlighted the central role that inspections play in effective environmental regulation and called for greater transparency across regulators.<sup>63</sup> In particular, its review of marine licensing noted that there was no statutory duty for the MMO to carry out inspections or to publish information about them. While acknowledging broad discretion can be appropriate to allow regulators to determine how best to fulfil their responsibilities, the OEP stressed that such discretion must be accompanied by transparency. The Office noted that where published inspection activity is lacking, scrutiny is weakened and those being regulated are deprived of clarity.<sup>64</sup>
- 35.** In addition to marine licensing, the MMO is also responsible for managing and monitoring fishing fleet sizes, quotas for catches and ensuring compliance with fisheries regulations. In August 2025, the Angling Trust reported its concerns around poor enforcement of fishing management rules concerning sea bass, bluefin tuna and mackerel.<sup>65</sup> The Open Seas Trust told us that the MMO does not routinely publish data on its regulatory enforcement actions albeit being under no specific obligation to do so.<sup>66</sup> We raised these concerns with Michelle Willis, who acknowledged that whilst the MMO no longer publishes the number of inspections and outcomes annually in reports, this data is collected and is seen by the National

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63 Office for Environmental Protection, [Environmental Inspections in England - Case studies on selected laws and their implementation](#), 10 July 2025

64 Office for Environmental Protection, [Environmental Inspections in England - Case studies on selected laws and their implementation](#), 10 July 2025

65 The Angling Trust, [Angling Trust Raises Alarm Over Lack of Fisheries Enforcement](#), 13 August 2025

66 The Open Seas Trust ([FME0015](#))

Audit Office and Ministers.<sup>67</sup> Following our evidence session, the MMO shared inspection data with the committee from April to December 2025,<sup>68</sup> a summary of which can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1: Summary of Marine Management Organisation inspection activity 1 April 2025–31 December 2025<sup>69</sup>**

	Activity	Compliance rate
At Sea	612	55% <sup>70</sup>
In Port	1885	92%
Premises and Markets	1465	94%
Transport	624	95%
Marine Licence	249	85%
MPA incursions	499	90%

Source: Marine Management Organisation

The MMO has said a review is underway to develop a routine publication of its enforcement activity and that it “will look to engage stakeholders as part of this review to confirm which of this data will be valuable and relevant.”<sup>71</sup>

### 36. CONCLUSION

Those who are regulated need clear visibility of how that regulation is being enforced, so it is concerning that the MMO no longer routinely publishes its enforcement data in its annual reports, despite continuing to collect it. While we welcome the MMO sharing a snapshot of this data with us and reviewing its publication procedures, fishers and the wider industry must also be able to access this information each year.

67 [Qq99-111](#)

68 Correspondence from the Marine Management Organisation following the evidence session on Fisheries and the Marine Environment on 28 January, [dated 25 February 2026](#)

69 More detailed breakdown of the data is available in Annex 1 of Correspondence from the Marine Management Organisation following the evidence session on Fisheries and the Marine Environment on 28 January, [dated 25 February 2026](#)

70 Compliance rate of at sea assurance inspections (UK) 67%, Compliance rate of at sea assurance inspections (non-UK) 38%

71 Correspondence from the Marine Management Organisation following the evidence session on Fisheries and the Marine Environment on 28 January, [dated 25 February 2026](#)

**37.**

**RECOMMENDATION**

In the interests of transparency, the MMO must include inspection rates and enforcement outcomes in its annual reports beginning with the 2025–26 report. In response to this Report, it should also retrospectively publish inspection data and outcomes for the previous three years to enable meaningful comparison, assessment of trends, and scrutiny of improvements.

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## 3 Spatial squeeze

38. Fishers are concerned that the growing footprint of offshore wind developments and the designation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) is restricting access to traditional fishing grounds. Increasing displacement, with vessels being pushed into smaller or less productive areas, is a major cause of anxiety in fishing communities.<sup>72</sup> The Fisheries Minister acknowledged that this “spatial squeeze” is one of the most complex, cross-cutting pressures on the sector, affecting both inshore and offshore fleets. She also recognised that the government’s multiple ambitions, including renewable energy expansion, biodiversity recovery, and decarbonisation, increasingly overlap within the same marine space.<sup>73</sup>
39. In written evidence, the catching sector, environmental stakeholders, academics and seabed users all call for the government to urgently strengthen spatial planning for the UK marine environment.<sup>74</sup> All UK administrations share a common UK Marine Policy Statement (MPS), published in 2011, which provides the policy framework for the marine planning system and the context for devolved marine plans.<sup>75</sup> The Environmental Audit Committee’s June 2025 report on governing the marine environment, found the MPS was “...outdated, not fit for purpose and no longer reflects Government policy or pressures on the marine environment. [The MPS] therefore must be updated at the earliest opportunity.”<sup>76</sup> In response, the government acknowledged the role of the MPS in setting highlevel direction for marine planning and recognised concerns about its age and diminishing relevance in some sectors. However, it rejected the EAC’s recommendation to update the MPS, stating instead that it would take a “more strategic approach to marine spatial planning.”<sup>77</sup>

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72 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee ([FME0031](#)); The National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations ([FME0027](#))

73 [Qq31–33](#)

74 The Open Seas Trust ([FME0015](#)); The National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations ([FME0027](#)); Sarah Carpenter ([FME0025](#)); Policy Impact Unit at University College London ([FME0013](#)); APPG Fisheries ([FME0012](#))

75 HM Government, [UK Marine Policy Statement](#), March 2011

76 Environmental Audit Committee, [Governing the marine environment](#), Second Report of the Session 2024–25, HC551, 5 June 2025

77 Environmental Audit Committee, [Governing the marine environment: Government Response](#), Fourth Special Report of the Session 2024–25, 9 September 2025

40. In evidence to this Committee, Olivia Thomas, Head of Marine Planning at The Crown Estate, referenced both The Crown Estate’s Marine Delivery Routemap and the Fishing Liaison with Offshore Wind and Wet Renewables Group (FLOWW) as programmes intended to address marine spatial pressures.<sup>78</sup> Publicly available information on the Marine Delivery Routemap, however, focuses on developing a “whole-systems” approach centred on offshore wind, carbon capture and storage, marine minerals and nature recovery, with no equivalent emphasis on fishing interests.<sup>79</sup>

## Sea use framework

41. In light of these competing interests, we asked the Fisheries Minister whether she would consider developing a sea use framework, building on the department’s recently launched Land Use Framework.<sup>80</sup> She stated that the marine area is “about the only thing that we do not have a strategy for,” acknowledged the strategic benefit of creating one, and indicated that considering the idea once immediate post-negotiation pressures ease, “has potential.”<sup>81</sup>
42. We raised the prospect of such a framework with the MMO, The Crown Estate and Seafish. Seafish explained that it does not have an official position on a sea use framework, but would “play their full part” in making one work if it became government policy.<sup>82</sup> The MMO argued that existing marine plans already play an “instrumental part in facilitating a sea use framework,” emphasising that “we should really look at the tools that we already have and see if we can use them to better effect.”<sup>83</sup> The Crown Estate similarly stated in writing that it “does not currently see the need for an additional framework,” noting that the current statutory marine planning system provides “a positive foothold” for prioritising action and delivering shared outcomes in the marine space.<sup>84</sup> During this discussion, however, Michelle Willis, MMO, did acknowledge that there were “many competing government strategies for use of the marine environment,”<sup>85</sup> and that it “... is safe to say that we do not have a single clear grade system or framework that steers decision-making, but we are working very collaboratively towards that.”<sup>86</sup>

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78 [Qq116–120](#)

79 The Crown Estate, [Marine Delivery Routemap](#), accessed 30 March 2026

80 Defra, [Land Use Framework](#), 18 March 2026; [Q32](#)

81 [Q32](#)

82 [Q131](#)

83 [Q130](#)

84 Correspondence from The Crown Estate following the evidence session on Fisheries and the Marine Environment on 28 January, [dated 23 February 2026](#)

85 [Q130](#)

86 [Q124](#)

## Marine Spatial Prioritisation programme

43. In oral evidence both Michelle Willis and Olivia Thomas referred to the Defra-led Marine Spatial Prioritisation programme (MSPri).<sup>87</sup> According to evidence submitted by Defra to the EAC, to “... address the increasing spatial squeeze, Defra established the cross-government Marine Spatial Prioritisation (MSPri) programme to optimise the use of the English sea and maximise colocation.”<sup>88</sup> Ms Willis indicated that outputs from MMO modelling have been incorporated into the MSPri process and that the MSPri includes work to improve opportunities for colocation between different sectors.<sup>89</sup>
44. The Marine Conservation Society and The Wildlife Trusts have raised concerns about a lack of strategic oversight to align spatial priorities across biodiversity, energy, fisheries, and other marine sectors, and that Defra’s MSPri programme has produced no public outputs.<sup>90</sup> The EAC has similarly raised concerns about the limited indication of evolved progress or a clear outline of objectives and timeline for outputs of the MSPri programme.<sup>91</sup>
45. The 2023 Three-year Report on the East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plans states that “the outputs of the MSPri programme will evolve the marine planning approach and inform the development of the East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plans.”<sup>92</sup> Despite frequent such references to MSPri in government announcements, ministerial evidence and official publications, we were unable to identify any publicly accessible document outlining the programme’s objectives or delivery timeline. In response to our request for examples of where MSPri had directly informed sea-use prioritisation decisions, Defra said it has:
- increased departmental appreciation of the role of marine planning;
  - supported more effective cross-departmental engagement;
  - improved access to inshore and offshore fisheries data and mapping to inform policy development;
  - enabled co-location work to integrate with MMO plan development; and

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87 [Q126](#); [Q151](#)

88 Written evidence from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, incorporating contributions from FCDO, Department for Transport and Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, [GME0055](#)

89 [Q126](#); [Q151](#)

90 Marine Conservation Society, [Parliamentary Briefing: Marine Spatial Planning](#) 2025; The Wildlife Trusts ([GME0039](#))

91 Environmental Audit Committee, [Governing the marine environment](#), Second Report of the Session 2024–25, HC551, 5 June 2025

92 Defra, [Three-year report on the East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plans](#), March 2023

- facilitated closer collaboration between the MMO and The Crown Estate.<sup>93</sup>

**46.** However, it went on to say that:

No prioritisation/trade-off decisions have been made through MSPri about future locations for offshore wind [...] If and when prioritisation between trade-offs is needed, Government can provide a steer to [The Crown Estate] on its position. It is important to recognise that [The Crown Estate] are independent and are responsible for making decisions about leasing the seabed in line with their Strategic Objectives and, at the appropriate point, the existing regulatory/consenting process.<sup>94</sup>

### North Sea Future Plan

**47.** The November 2025 North Sea Future Plan is the UK Government’s strategy to grow a successful offshore clean energy industry while also transitioning away from oil and gas. It states it is “taking a more strategic approach to spatial planning in the North Sea and building on the government-led Marine Spatial Prioritisation programme in England.”<sup>95</sup> However, there is no direct reference to the fishing sector or marine protection within the plan itself, which Michelle Willis described as “interesting” but that “It does not mean that [the MMO] did not feed into it.”<sup>96</sup> Following the session, when we asked the MMO to share its inputs from the MSPri programme to the North Sea Future Plan it clarified that:

The North Sea Future Plan was not developed through the MSPri Programme and was led by [Department for Energy Security and Net Zero] and the NSTA (North Sea Transition Authority). As such the MMO has not submitted any specific documentation...<sup>97</sup>

The Fisheries Minister has confirmed that DESNZ sits on the MSPri board which met five times in 2025 prior to the publication of the North Sea Future Plan.<sup>98</sup>

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93 Correspondence from Dame Angela Eagle, Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs, following the fisheries evidence session on 28 January, [dated 2 March 2026](#)

94 Correspondence from Dame Angela Eagle, Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs, following the fisheries evidence session on 28 January, [dated 2 March 2026](#)

95 Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, [The North Sea Future Plan](#), 26 November 2025  
96 [Qq124-125](#)

97 Correspondence from the Marine Management Organisation following the evidence session on Fisheries and the Marine Environment on 28 January, [dated 25 February 2026](#)

98 Correspondence from Dame Angela Eagle, Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs, following the fisheries evidence session on 28 January, [dated 2 March 2026](#)

**48. CONCLUSION**

There is growing spatial conflict between fisheries, offshore energy, conservation and other marine users, yet current governance arrangements still lack a coherent “shore-to-sea” approach. Defra’s Marine Spatial Prioritisation programme (MSPri) remains opaque and underused, The Crown Estate’s Marine Delivery Routemap has a limited remit focused on the seabed, and the UK-wide Marine Policy Statements are outdated. Together, these policies fail to provide clear and consistent direction for the management of marine space. A single, comprehensive UK-wide sea use framework is therefore required to bring these strands together, offering clarity, predictability and a consistent basis for decision-making, co-location and conflict resolution across all sectors.

**49. RECOMMENDATION**

In response to this report, the government should confirm its commitment to development of a ‘Sea Use Framework’. It should set out a clear timetable for developing such a Framework, which should follow a similar structure and methodology to the Land Use Framework and be created in collaboration with all sea users. This Framework must integrate the needs of fishing and coastal communities alongside environmental and energy priorities. It should include a formal mechanism enabling coastal communities to participate in decisions that affect them, and should address the use of the seabed, the shore, and the wider marine environment. Development of the Framework should be undertaken jointly with the devolved administrations to ensure a coherent, UK-wide approach.

**50. CONCLUSION**

Spatial squeeze poses significant and growing challenges, with an increasing number of sectors competing for limited marine space. Although initiatives such as the MSPri programme are intended to inform cross-departmental policy and planning, the absence of any reference to fishing or environmental protection in the North Sea Future Plan, despite its ambition to support a prosperous and sustainable future for the region, shows that this approach is failing. Confirmation that the MSPri programme was not used in the development of the Plan, despite being explicitly referenced within it, further undermines confidence in the purpose and effectiveness of the programme. The MSPri programme is of little value if it is not used consistently, or at all, across departments when planning activity in the marine environment.

51.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Defra should introduce an annual reporting process which details the use of the Marine Spatial Prioritisation programme (MSPri). The first report, covering activity during 2025–26, should be published within six months of the publication of this Report. Thereafter, annual MSPri reports should be published by 1 July each year, with the first full annual cycle completed by 1 July 2027. Each report should, as a minimum, set out:

- the projects, plans and policy decisions in which MSPri was used during the reporting period;
- which government departments used MSPri, and the specific purposes for which it informed their work;
- how MSPri was applied in the development of each relevant plan or programme;
- an explanation of any cases where MSPri was not used, despite relevance, and the rationale for its omission;
- a record of the stakeholders and departments attending MSPri governance meetings, working groups or workshops; and
- a summary of all engagement activities undertaken by the programme during the reporting period, including the locations, dates and types of engagement (such as workshops, site visits, or community meetings).

To strengthen transparency and public confidence in interdepartmental decision-making, Defra should also commit to publishing the MSPri Programme Board minutes no later than two months after each meeting.

52.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Defra should work with DESNZ to publish, within six months of the government response to this Report, an addendum to the North Sea Future Plan that explicitly sets out how fishing interests and marine environmental protections are assessed and incorporated into decisions affecting the sustainability of the North Sea.

## Government coordination

53. Responsibility for marine planning, licensing, conservation, safety, trade, and energy infrastructure spans several departments and agencies, including Defra, the Department for Transport, the MMO, the Maritime

and Coastguard Agency, DESNZ and the Department for Education.<sup>99</sup> This distribution of responsibilities is creating a fragmented and often incoherent system that is difficult for fishers and coastal stakeholders to navigate.<sup>100</sup> A lack of cross-governmental coordination was clearly illustrated during the development of the North Sea Future Plan, as discussed above, where there seemed some initial confusion on whether the MSPri programme fed into the DESNZ plan or not.<sup>101</sup> Olivia Thomas from The Crown Estate said that the MSPri Board, on which she sits, was intended to be the key governance body for bringing departments together and taking a “system-level” approach to early de-risking and de-conflicting between marine users.<sup>102</sup> However, she emphasised that ultimate decisions about competing priorities fell to the relevant Government Ministers across the responsible departments, and not to delivery bodies.<sup>103</sup>

54. Poor coordination was seen by stakeholders as not only a cross-departmental problem, but also a problem within Defra teams. Evidence from the Communities Inshore Fishing Alliance suggested that mixed policy signals meant that exporting of catch was promoted yet conservation closures and increased management of fishing grounds contributed to spatial squeeze,<sup>104</sup> reflecting persistent policy silos that undermined coherent marine management. Oceana UK argued that “The lack of a strategy, and the current siloed approach taken to fisheries management, means that we are also not realising the wider societal benefits of well-managed fisheries.”<sup>105</sup>

55. **CONCLUSION**

Fragmented responsibilities and siloed decision-making continue to undermine coherent marine management. Confusion over the North Sea Future Plan and conflicting policy signals experienced by fishers demonstrate that existing coordination structures are not delivering consistent cross-government direction. Although mechanisms such as the MSPri Board exist, they do not provide the strategic, ministerial level leadership required to align marine, fisheries, conservation and energy priorities across government.

99 APPG Fisheries ([FME0012](#))

100 Policy Impact Unit at University College London ([FME0013](#)); APPG Fisheries ([FME0012](#))

101 [Qq123-125](#); Correspondence from the Marine Management Organisation following the evidence session on Fisheries and the Marine Environment on 28 January, [dated 25 February 2026](#)

102 [Q151](#)

103 [Q151](#)

104 Communities Inshore Fisheries Alliance ([FME0028](#))

105 Oceana UK ([FME0009](#))

56.

**RECOMMENDATION**

To ensure coherent cross-government leadership of the proposed Sea Use Framework by the end of 2026, the government should establish a ministerial board, to oversee the coordination of government policy on the use of UK waters. This ministerial board would complement or absorb, rather than replace, the existing MSPri Board by focusing specifically on the strategic coordination and delivery of the proposed Sea Use Framework. This “Sea Use Coordination Board” would provide the strategic direction necessary to align departmental objectives relating to marine planning, fisheries, conservation, energy and coastal communities. The Board should:

- oversee and steer the development of the Sea Use Framework, ensuring it is genuinely cross-government and integrates environmental, fisheries, energy and spatial planning needs;
- meet quarterly, with minutes and attendance lists published within two months of each meeting;
- ensure structured engagement across all relevant Defra family bodies and agencies, including Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Natural England, the MMO, Cefas, and Defra’s fisheries, conservation and marine management teams, with a requirement to demonstrate collaborative input into the development of the Framework; and
- produce, by April 2027, a public progress report on the Sea Use Framework, setting out how departments and delivery bodies have contributed to shared priorities and how conflicting objectives have been addressed.

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# Conclusions and recommendations

## Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund

1. While we welcome the Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund, the government has not clearly set out its rationale for committing £360 million over 12 years. The timeframe aligns with revised reciprocal access arrangements between the UK and EU, but it is unclear why this duration is the most suitable for investment planning or how the funding level was calculated. Including coastal community priorities within the Fund's remit reflects the close link between fishing activity and local economic wellbeing, but the government has not demonstrated why this is best delivered through a new, single integrated scheme. While the Fund provides an opportunity for growth, resilience and competitiveness of the sector, it lacks clear objectives to track progress. (Conclusion, Paragraph 7)
2. The government should provide this Committee with the analysis supporting the £360 million funding level, the 12-year duration and whatever the profile of this spending is expected to be over that period, including the reasons for establishing a new scheme rather than building on existing ones. It should also set out its rationale for integrating community investment and define measurable longterm outcomes for growth, resilience and competitiveness to enable a proper assessment of progress over the lifespan of the Fund. (Recommendation, Paragraph 8)
3. The government clearly recognises the strong relationship between fishing activity and coastal community wellbeing. Evidence shows that challenges such as inadequate port infrastructure and limited skills and training pathways require targeted support to sustain active fishing communities. The Fund's priorities for its first year reflect this need. However, from the second year, the Fund will cover a broader set of priorities and delivery will not be limited to the current Fisheries and Seafood Scheme (FaSS) framework administered by the Marine Management Organisation. (Conclusion, Paragraph 9)
4. Priority should be given to projects driven by active fishing communities during the Fund's 12 years of operation. This principle should be embedded in any expanded delivery model or in any new scheme developed, with

clear and measurable criteria to ensure support continues to strengthen the fishing sector and the communities that rely on it. Priorities of the Fund from year two onwards should include fleet modernisation that reduces carbon emissions and does not increase fishing capacity beyond sustainable levels as well as the development of place-based fishing advisory services. (Recommendation, Paragraph 10)

5. No Parliament can bind its successor and therefore front-loading the 12-year investment would better support ambitious, multi-year projects and deliver early benefits. Current plans for the Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund provide £165 million up to 2030–31, yet England’s first-year allocation is just £22.6 million, less than one-twelfth of the £304 million allocated to England over the lifetime of the fund. (Conclusion, Paragraph 14)
6. In response to this report, the government should set out the year-by-year allocation of the budget in England for the next four years and clarify how funding will be provided to the devolved administrations through the block grant, including whether this will be annual, front-loaded, or issued as a single payment to be profiled independently. (Recommendation, Paragraph 15)
7. We welcome the scale of engagement carried out in developing the Fund and note clear evidence that stakeholder views have informed its early design, such as the introduction of competitive rounds in the first year of the fund. However, there were significant gaps in representation that must be addressed in future engagement exercises. (Conclusion, Paragraph 16)
8. From year two onward, delivery of the Fund will not be limited to the Fisheries and Seafood Scheme and will incorporate a broader range of priorities such as community projects which are potentially beyond the remit of what the current schemes, and the Marine Management Organisation, deliver. (Conclusion, Paragraph 17)
9. Industry engagement should continue at a consistent level in the development of the Fund from year two onwards and be expanded to include additional fisheries groups and representatives from Cornwall. In response to this report, the government should set out whether, from year two of the fund onwards, it intends to develop a single new system that incorporates both traditional FaSS activity and the wider Fund priorities, or whether it will use a two-tier delivery model. The government should specify the proportion of the Fund that will be allocated to each priority area, and which organisations will be responsible for delivery in England. (Recommendation, Paragraph 18)
10. The allocation of the Fisheries and Coastal Growth Fund through the Barnett formula is inconsistent with model preferred by industry stakeholders in all parts of the United Kingdom. We are concerned that it does not reflect the relative scale, distribution or needs of the fishing industry across the UK. In

the absence of any proper explanation by the government of why the total sum that has been allocated to the fund was chosen, or for the duration of the scheme itself, it is impossible for anyone to have confidence that there is political or fiscal integrity in the thinking behind the scheme. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund provides a precedent for region-specific funding using bespoke metrics. Collaborative implementation and administration should have been possible and would have been in the best interests of fishing communities. Beyond the fact that the Scottish Government demanded that administration of the fund should be devolved, there is no obvious reason for the departure from previous practice. Engagement with the devolved administrations is important, but should not replace early, meaningful engagement with the industry. For the UK Government to engage respectfully and meaningfully with the devolved administrations is important, but that is no substitute for early, meaningful engagement with the industry. (Conclusion, Paragraph 22)

11. It is not credible for any devolved administration to demand devolution of a scheme and then to complain about the financial consequences of them being given what they asked for. It is difficult not to see this as a demand that was driven by the politics of the constitution rather than effective fisheries management. (Conclusion, Paragraph 23)
12. Going forward, the UK Government should work collaboratively with the devolved administrations on the design and allocation of the Fund to ensure consistency and fairness across the sector for the allocations in year two. Seafish should be used to support a coherent UK-wide approach. (Recommendation, Paragraph 24)

## Communication and trust

13. Trust between government and the fishing industry has been damaged by successive administrations. Rebuilding that trust is essential if the sector is to deliver its full economic potential for the individuals and communities it supports. Fishers are calling for a stronger voice in the decisions that affect them. Although the government has acknowledged the importance of partnership and communication in developing resilience within the sector, the perception among fishers is that this is not happening in practice. (Conclusion, Paragraph 27)
14. Defra should require all officials working on fisheries policy, funding schemes and regulatory design to undertake regular, in-person engagement at ports and with those operating active fishing vessels. This programme should mirror the department's existing initiative

to place civil servants on farms, ensuring that officials have a clear, practical understanding of the operational realities of the fishing industry. (Recommendation, Paragraph 28)

15. We welcome Defra's trials of regional seafood planning in England, but more benefits will arise if the scope and participation of the trials are broadened to better capture the full range of perspectives from fishing communities and the wider seafood sector. This will enable policy to be shaped more effectively around the realities and needs of those it affects. (Conclusion, Paragraph 29)
16. Defra should establish a UK-wide network of Regional Fisheries Management Forums, comprising of fishers, marine scientists and environmental organisations. These forums should meet at least three times a year, with minutes published within 20 working days, and be given a formal role in reviewing and commenting on any draft technical measures or policies affecting UK waters. As many fisheries decisions have UK-wide implications, the forums should operate on a UK-wide basis and be empowered to submit timely written recommendations to the relevant administration, with Defra required to respond formally to those in England before each forum's next planned meeting. (Recommendation, Paragraph 30)
17. Communication and engagement with the fishing industry on the outcomes of the annual UK-EU consultations for 2026 regarding changes to technical measures were inadequate, with unclear messaging on implementation timelines and confusion even among delivery bodies. This has left industry without reliable information on changes that directly affect their operations. (Conclusion, Paragraph 32)
18. In response to this report, Defra should provide the Committee with a clear written account of its engagement with the fishing industry following the release of the December 2025 UK-EU fisheries written record. This should set out the dates and stakeholders involved, how the new technical measures and deadlines were communicated and whether the flexibility around the 1 June 2026 implementation date was explicitly conveyed. The department should also urgently publish a confirmed implementation timeline for the new technical measures for vessels operating in UK waters, alongside detailed steps it is taking to support industry to prepare for and implement the new requirements. (Recommendation, Paragraph 33)
19. Those who are regulated need clear visibility of how that regulation is being enforced, so it is concerning that the MMO no longer routinely publishes its enforcement data in its annual reports, despite continuing to collect it. While we welcome the MMO sharing a snapshot of this data with us and reviewing its publication procedures, fishers and the wider industry must also be able to access this information each year. (Conclusion, Paragraph 36)

20. In the interests of transparency, the MMO must include inspection rates and enforcement outcomes in its annual reports beginning with the 2025–26 report. In response to this Report, it should also retrospectively publish inspection data and outcomes for the previous three years to enable meaningful comparison, assessment of trends, and scrutiny of improvements. (Recommendation, Paragraph 37)

## Spatial squeeze

21. There is growing spatial conflict between fisheries, offshore energy, conservation and other marine users, yet current governance arrangements still lack a coherent “shore-to-sea” approach. Defra’s Marine Spatial Prioritisation programme (MSPri) remains opaque and underused, The Crown Estate’s Marine Delivery Routemap has a limited remit focused on the seabed, and the UK-wide Marine Policy Statements are outdated. Together, these policies fail to provide clear and consistent direction for the management of marine space. A single, comprehensive UK-wide sea use framework is therefore required to bring these strands together, offering clarity, predictability and a consistent basis for decision-making, co-location and conflict resolution across all sectors. (Conclusion, Paragraph 48)
22. In response to this report, the government should confirm its commitment to development of a ‘Sea Use Framework’. It should set out a clear timetable for developing such a Framework, which should follow a similar structure and methodology to the Land Use Framework and be created in collaboration with all sea users. This Framework must integrate the needs of fishing and coastal communities alongside environmental and energy priorities. It should include a formal mechanism enabling coastal communities to participate in decisions that affect them, and should address the use of the seabed, the shore, and the wider marine environment. Development of the Framework should be undertaken jointly with the devolved administrations to ensure a coherent, UK-wide approach. (Recommendation, Paragraph 49)
23. Spatial squeeze poses significant and growing challenges, with an increasing number of sectors competing for limited marine space. Although initiatives such as the MSPri programme are intended to inform cross-departmental policy and planning, the absence of any reference to fishing or environmental protection in the North Sea Future Plan, despite its ambition to support a prosperous and sustainable future for the region, shows that this approach is failing. Confirmation that the MSPri programme was not used in the development of the Plan, despite being explicitly referenced within it, further undermines confidence in the purpose and effectiveness

of the programme. The MSPri programme is of little value if it is not used consistently, or at all, across departments when planning activity in the marine environment. (Conclusion, Paragraph 50)

- 24.** Defra should introduce an annual reporting process which details the use of the Marine Spatial Prioritisation programme (MSPri). The first report, covering activity during 2025–26, should be published within six months of the publication of this Report. Thereafter, annual MSPri reports should be published by 1 July each year, with the first full annual cycle completed by 1 July 2027. Each report should, as a minimum, set out:
- the projects, plans and policy decisions in which MSPri was used during the reporting period;
  - which government departments used MSPri, and the specific purposes for which it informed their work;
  - how MSPri was applied in the development of each relevant plan or programme;
  - an explanation of any cases where MSPri was not used, despite relevance, and the rationale for its omission;
  - a record of the stakeholders and departments attending MSPri governance meetings, working groups or workshops; and
  - a summary of all engagement activities undertaken by the programme during the reporting period, including the locations, dates and types of engagement (such as workshops, site visits, or community meetings).

To strengthen transparency and public confidence in interdepartmental decision-making, Defra should also commit to publishing the MSPri Programme Board minutes no later than two months after each meeting. (Recommendation, Paragraph 51)

- 25.** Defra should work with DESNZ to publish, within six months of the government response to this Report, an addendum to the North Sea Future Plan that explicitly sets out how fishing interests and marine environmental protections are assessed and incorporated into decisions affecting the sustainability of the North Sea. (Recommendation, Paragraph 52)
- 26.** Fragmented responsibilities and siloed decision-making continue to undermine coherent marine management. Confusion over the North Sea Future Plan and conflicting policy signals experienced by fishers demonstrate that existing coordination structures are not delivering consistent cross-government direction. Although mechanisms such as

the MSPri Board exist, they do not provide the strategic, ministerial level leadership required to align marine, fisheries, conservation and energy priorities across government. (Conclusion, Paragraph 55)

- 27.** To ensure coherent cross-government leadership of the proposed Sea Use Framework by the end of 2026, the government should establish a ministerial board, to oversee the coordination of government policy on the use of UK waters. This ministerial board would complement or absorb, rather than replace, the existing MSPri Board by focusing specifically on the strategic coordination and delivery of the proposed Sea Use Framework. This “Sea Use Coordination Board” would provide the strategic direction necessary to align departmental objectives relating to marine planning, fisheries, conservation, energy and coastal communities. The Board should:
- oversee and steer the development of the Sea Use Framework, ensuring it is genuinely cross-government and integrates environmental, fisheries, energy and spatial planning needs;
  - meet quarterly, with minutes and attendance lists published within two months of each meeting;
  - ensure structured engagement across all relevant Defra family bodies and agencies, including Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Natural England, the MMO, Cefas, and Defra’s fisheries, conservation and marine management teams, with a requirement to demonstrate collaborative input into the development of the Framework; and
  - produce, by April 2027, a public progress report on the Sea Use Framework, setting out how departments and delivery bodies have contributed to shared priorities and how conflicting objectives have been addressed. (Recommendation, Paragraph 56)

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# Formal minutes

**Tuesday 21 April 2026**

## Members present

Mr Alistair Carmichael, in the Chair

Sarah Bool

Juliet Campbell

Charlie Dewhirst

Sarah Dyke

Josh Newbury

Jenny Riddell-Carpenter

Henry Tufnell

## Resetting the relationship with fishing communities

Draft Report (*Resetting the relationship with fishing communities*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 56 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Seventh Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

# Adjournment

Adjourned till Tuesday 28 April at 9.30am.

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# Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

## Tuesday 1 April 2025

**Daniel Zeichner MP**, Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs; **Colin Faulkner**, Head of External Fisheries and Trade, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs; **Mike Dowell**, Head of EU Fisheries Policy and Negotiations, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs [Q1-27](#)

## Tuesday 16 December 2025

**Dame Angela Eagle MP**, Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs; **Gareth Baynham-Hughes**, Director of Marine and Fisheries, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs; **Mike Dowell**, Deputy Director for Marine and Fisheries, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs [Q28-43](#)

## Wednesday 28 January 2026

**Colin Faulkner**, Chief Executive, Seafish; **Olivia Thomas**, Head of Marine Planning & Technical, The Crown Estate; **Michelle Willis**, Iterim CEO, Marine Management Organisation (MMO) [Q44-182](#)

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# Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

FME numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1	APPG Fisheries	<a href="#">FME0012</a>
2	Angling Trust	<a href="#">FME0005</a>
3	Bass Angling Conservation	<a href="#">FME0011</a>
4	Blue Marine Foundation	<a href="#">FME0023</a>
5	Carpenter, Sarah	<a href="#">FME0025</a>
6	Clyde Fishermen's Association	<a href="#">FME0026</a>
7	Communities Inshore Fisheries Alliance	<a href="#">FME0028</a>
8	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	<a href="#">FME0029</a>
9	Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee	<a href="#">FME0031</a>
10	Historic England	<a href="#">FME0019</a>
11	Mallaig Harbour Authority	<a href="#">FME0024</a>
12	Mallaig and North West Fishermen's Association	<a href="#">FME0021</a>
13	Northern Ireland Fish Producer's Organisation	<a href="#">FME0007</a>
14	Oceana UK	<a href="#">FME0009</a>
15	Policy Impact Unit at University College London	<a href="#">FME0013</a>
16	R & J Seafoods Ltd	<a href="#">FME0017</a>
17	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)	<a href="#">FME0010</a>
18	Scottish Fishermen's Federation	<a href="#">FME0014</a>
19	Scottish White Fish Producers Association	<a href="#">FME0006</a>
20	Seafish	<a href="#">FME0018</a>
21	Seafood Scotland	<a href="#">FME0022</a>
22	The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations	<a href="#">FME0027</a>
23	The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations	<a href="#">FME0033</a>
24	The Open Seas Trust	<a href="#">FME0015</a>

25	UK Fisheries Ltd	<a href="#"><u>FME0030</u></a>
26	UK Seafood Federation Limited	<a href="#"><u>FME0008</u></a>

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# List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

## Session 2024–26

Number	Title	Reference
6th	Erosion of trust: the impact of coastal erosion on communities	HC 1317
5th	UK-EU agritrade: making an SPS agreement work	HC 1661
4th	UK-EU trade: towards a resilient border strategy	HC 1279
3rd	Biosecurity at the border: Britain's illegal meat crisis	
2nd	Priorities for water sector reform	
1st	The Government's vision for farming	HC 906
5th Special	UK-EU agritrade: making an SPS agreement work - Government Response	HC 1833
4th Special	UK-EU trade: towards a resilient border strategy (Government Response)	HC 1496
3rd Special	Biosecurity at the border: Britain's illegal meat crisis: Government Response	HC 1490
2nd Special	The Government's vision for farming: Government Response	HC 1255
1st Special	Pet welfare and abuse: Government response	HC 581