

REPORT

Meeting: **DG MARE Meeting with DEFRA**

Parties: **DG MARE, DEFRA, AC Chairs, Secretariat and Members, and Member States representatives**

Date: **21 February 2024**

Location: **Brussels, BL and online**

Chair: **Eva Carballeira, DG MARE**

Rapporteur: **Kateryna Urbanovych, NSAC Secretariat**

1. Welcome and introduction

Eva Carballeira (DG MARE) started the meeting by welcoming Anne Freeman and other DEFRA representatives. Carballeira clarified that the purpose of the day's meeting is to **discuss follow-ups on the DEFRA fisheries management plans (FMPs)**, first introduced in [September 2023](#). Five FMPs were published in 2023, with plans to publish five more in 2024, aiming for a total of 43 FMPs. Consultations on the plans have also been released. DEFRA representatives will later outline the process for handling feedback on the FMPs. Carballeira stressed ongoing collaboration between DG MARE and DEFRA to stay updated on forthcoming measures and emphasized the crucial role of the Specialised Committee on Fisheries (SCF) in maintaining the positive relationship between the two parties.

Anne Freeman (DEFRA) thanked for the warm welcome in Brussels, highlighting that the meeting would solely focus on FMPs, with other topics to be addressed separately. She clarified that while FMPs themselves don't directly alter fisheries management, they outline necessary actions for improving fish stock sustainability. Freeman emphasized the challenge of FMP implementation and ongoing efforts to develop and consult on solutions. Continuation of discussions with the EU on these matters is crucial. She outlined the UK's current context, noting ministerial commitment to advancing FMP implementation and industry pressure for long awaited change. DEFRA is tasked with delivering numerous actions within a **six-year timeframe**, with each plan lasting six years before revision. Having this timeframe, allows FMPs to be dynamic in responding to marine ecosystem changes.

Looking ahead, the UK's upcoming general elections, set to take place by January 2025, will have a short notice period of 4-6 weeks. During the elections, DEFRA's ability to conduct consultations will be restricted. Following elections, there may be delays in forming a new government with potentially different priorities, impacting FMP implementation. While many FMP measures are fixed, adaptations may be needed to align with changing approaches and priorities.

Similarly to Carballeira, Freeman emphasized the importance of the SCF as a platform for EU-UK collaboration on shared measures, though also acknowledging the need for alternative approaches for matters that cannot be jointly addressed.

Freeman thanked Member States (MS), EU stakeholders, and Advisory Councils (ACs) for their consultation input. She noted that, with 500 responses received, individual responses couldn't be provided, but that a summary of consultation responses was published on [December 14th](#).

2. Follow up on Fisheries Management Plans

DEFRA representatives provided updates on FMPs, mandated by the Fisheries Act 2020 to ensure sustainable fisheries management. FMPs outline policies and measures to restore and maintain fish stocks while supporting the fishing industry and marine environment. Of the FMPs published as of now, three cover English waters and two (seabass and scallops) covering English and Welsh waters. Collaborative development involves industry, NGOs, scientists, as well as EU stakeholders and MS.

In 2023, **consultations on six FMPs** led to amendments based on feedback. Five FMPs were published in December 2023. An implementation program is underway, addressing regulatory changes and evidence gaps, with the Southern North Sea flatfish FMP slated for publication in late spring/early summer 2024.

Following consultations, changes were implemented in the FMPs as follows: for **cuttlefish**, the proposed minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) was removed, replaced by a commitment to develop an action plan; for **seabass**, measures were expanded to include inshore and shore-based netting reviews; the **Channel FMP** and **shellfish FMPs** saw minimal changes but underwent reprioritization; for **whelk**, new measures included a permit scheme and MCRS; for **King scallop** effort management and environmental impact assessment were prioritized; finally for **crab and lobster FMPs** pilot schemes to test effort management approaches will be featured. Throughout the consultations, emphasis was placed on reviewing engagement, ensuring transparency, and maintaining positive EU relations.

The future agenda includes developing and consulting on **five more FMPs** (Cockles, North Sea and Channel sprat, Southern North Sea and Channel Skates and rays, Southern North Sea demersal NQS, and Queen scallop) **in 2024** and four more in 2025.

On the **Irish** front, in 2024, DEFRA and the Irish government will publish two joint FMPs: the Irish Sea Pelagic FMP and the Irish Sea Demersal FMP. DEFRA is collaborating with stakeholders to draft these plans and is also working on a third plan for the Northern Ireland inshore area through a co-design process.

On the **Scottish** front, twenty-one Scottish-led plans are scheduled for publication by the end of 2024, categorized into nephrops, pelagic, and demersal plans. These plans focus on well-established fisheries with existing TACs and management regimes, backed by solid scientific evidence with only some gaps. Therefore, the Scottish led FMPs will be limited in terms of new policies, maintaining current stock management. The development process will involve

internal collaboration, pre-engagement with UK stakeholders, and drafting for consultation. Plans will have consistent content, aiding in review. Consultations are scheduled for summer, with a 12-week period and possibly accompanied by in-depth workshops. Emphasis will be on transparency in managing joint stocks without conflicting with international management.

An update was also provided on **Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM)** for fishing vessels, a longstanding policy priority. Legislation will soon make it mandatory for large pelagic and scallop dredge vessels in **Scottish waters** to carry REM, comprising cameras, sensors, and GPS systems. The aim is to enhance compliance with fisheries legislation and monitor high-risk vessels. Public consultations have been conducted, and legislation is being finalized to balance robust requirements with a level playing field. Approval in the Scottish Parliament will precede implementation, with scallop dredge vessels subject to the requirement shortly after. For pelagic vessels, recognizing the novelty and burden of the technology, there will be time to prepare and ensure resources for installation. The REM legislation entails technical and data requirements, with provisions for data protection, malfunctioning systems, tampering prevention, and non-compliance penalties. Once guidance and specifications are published, collaboration with fishers will be stressed for smooth implementation.

In **England**, a consultation was conducted on implementing REM on boats in English waters. DEFRA is currently analyzing the consultation results, with further announcements expected in the future.

Short, medium, and long-term measures have been outlined for implementing published plans, with ongoing collaboration with the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) to determine delivery methods. Various mechanisms, including voluntary measures, statutory instruments, license conditions, or byelaws, will be utilized.

Short-term actions for 2024 were presented, with distinctions between those impacting EU fisheries immediately and those without immediate effects. Measures affecting EU fisheries shortly include a ban on soft-shelled crab landings for bait, development of a whelk permit scheme, and legislation to manage fly seining effort and establish minimum 100 mm mesh size and engine power limitations. Additionally, MCRS will be introduced for lemon sole, turbot, and brill in the Channel.

The evidence gaps identified through consultations have underscored the need for collaboration across academia, industry, conservation, recreation, policy, science, and regulation areas to access, utilize, and share information.

3. Q&A with the audience

After the presentations, floor was opened for questions from the audience.

Carballeira highlighted the **need for clarity on REM** measures in UK waters, emphasizing the importance of informing the EU industry about potential implications. Freeman stated that details will be provided after completion of consultations.

Peter Clinton (DG MARE) inquired about the **timeline for introducing the REM legislation** in the Scottish parliament and its technical aspects. As the Scottish representative had to leave the meeting, the question was taken and will be replied to in written form.

Emiel Brouckaert (NWWAC) inquired about the **cuttlefish action plan** and stakeholder involvement, including EU stakeholders. It was clarified that the current focus is domestic, with consideration of Channel challenges from various perspectives. A single action plan will encompass existing measures and those not included in FMPs. Further discussion will occur once timing is clearer regarding offshore measures and potential impacts on EU vessels.

Vincent Dauchy (French State Secretary for the Sea and Biodiversity) highlighted the **lack of clarity in FMPs** due to vague measures, which limited the consultations. He stressed the need for a collaborative approach, especially under SCF.

Etienne Le Marchand (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs) cautioned against politicizing fisheries technical measures, mentioning the recent UK announcement of stringent technical measures in **13 Marine Protected Areas** (MPAs). He urged for careful consideration to prevent unintended escalations from FMPs.

Freeman explained that FMPs lack clarity as they were designed to explore various management methods. For instance, within the scallop industry differing views exist, all in need of consideration to identify the best way forward. Collaboration with stakeholders will be sought once dialogue is established to clarify the measures. On MPAs, comments have been noted and will be reported to the parties in charge.

Dauchy inquired whether the MMO was involved in FMPs development, to which it was clarified that the **MMO serves as a delivery partner for some FMPs**. The organization will also play a role in implementing management measures from FMPs and evaluating actions related to offshore MPAs.

Carballeira reassured that a discussion with DEFRA on the topic of MPAs, where concerns about level playing field and collaboration were flagged, already took place. In the future, the same format of discussion currently taking place on FMPs might be replicated to engage on MPAs. She noted that, while the SCF forum is useful, capacity limits can hinder action delivery. Nevertheless, engagement efforts under SCF have been ongoing, informing both parties of upcoming measures. Consultations alone are insufficient; alternative engagement methods are being explored.

Jean Christophe Vandevelde (BSAC) queried how FMPs covering **shared stocks** like North Sea sprat will influence negotiations with other fishing parties. He asked if planned measures will solely guide UK negotiating positions or will they simply be implemented in UK waters. In response, it was clarified that this is being determined. FMPs must be considered when published, informing UK positions but not solely dictating them. Negotiation teams are currently working through these considerations.

Johanna Ferretti (German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture) inquired about DEFRA's **co-design approach** to FMPs development, particularly regarding EU collaboration. It was clarified that the development phase aims to explore various stakeholder collaboration

methods. While a specific process for each FMP hasn't been finalized, early plan development with stakeholders is prioritized.

Karin Victorin from the Swedish Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries raised concerns about the clarity of FMPs regarding management measures for various **stocks**, especially those **jointly managed by the UK and EU** and the **non-quota** ones. It's unclear if the FMPs will follow the traditional TAC setting approach or if agreements with co-managers for shared management will be pursued. Additionally, she inquired about the extent to which **ICES** scientific advice would be utilized.

Freeman clarified that the first FMPs focused on non-quota stocks due to their value and vulnerability. While TACs may eventually be introduced for these stocks, collaboration will be sought in the eventuality it occurs. She also informed that DEFRA will continue relying on ICES for scientific input.

As no more comments were put forward, Carballeira closed the meeting, emphasizing remaining work ahead.