



Department
for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Proposed Fisheries Management Plan for Irish Sea Pelagic (Herring) for Northern Ireland, English and Welsh waters

Date: July 2026

Version: Final draft



Contents

Executive Summary	4
What is an FMP?.....	5
Why an FMP for Irish Sea herring?	5
Stakeholder Engagement.....	5
Vision	6
Policy Goals	6
Scope and Purpose.....	7
Background	8
Stock Assessment and MSY	21
Assessment of evidence	20
Fisheries Management.....	22
Environmental Considerations	26
Policy Goals	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Implementation, Monitoring and Review	39

Abbreviations

Blim - Biomass Limit Reference Point

Bpa - Precautionary Reference Point for Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB)

Btrigger - Biomass Trigger Reference Point

EU - European Union

FMP – Fisheries Management Plan

GES – Good Environmental Status

HAWG – Herring Assessment Working Group

ICES – International Council for the Exploration of the Sea

JFS – Joint Fisheries Statement

JNCC – Joint Nature Conservation Committee

MCRS - Minimum Conservation Reference Size

MPAs - Marine Protected Areas

MSY – Maximum Sustainable Yield

PMFs – Priority Marine Features

ROI – Republic of Ireland

SNCB – Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies

SSB – Spawning Stock Biomass

TAC – Total Allowable Catch

TCA – Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and the UK

The Act – The Fisheries Act 2020

WKBeamish – Biology, Ecology and Management of Irish Sea Herring Working Group

WKIrish – Irish Sea Benchmark Working Group

WFA - Windsor Framework Agreement

Executive Summary

The Irish Sea pelagic herring (*Clupea harengus*) Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) is one of 43 FMPs proposed around the UK, as set out in the [Joint Fisheries Statement \(JFS¹\)](#). The plan has been developed jointly by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Welsh Government, in collaboration with industry, scientists, regulators, statutory nature conservation bodies (SNCBs) and stakeholders.

The FMP sets out the policies to manage the Irish Sea herring stock (defined as that within Division 7.a North of 52°30'N) sustainably in line with the objectives of the Fisheries Act 2020 ('the Act') and as required by the JFS. This FMP has been prepared and published for the purposes of the Act and in accordance with the policies within the JFS.

This FMP does not apply directly to the territorial waters of Scotland or the Isle of Man, but the policies within it will inform our approach to fishing activity carried out in these waters, while recognising their independence and autonomy.

The preparation process had regard for the prevailing Marine Plans (as required by section 58(3) of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009) and the Environmental Principles (as required by section 17(5)(a-e) and 19(1) of the Environment Act 2021).

The Irish Sea herring stock is jointly managed with the European Union (EU) and fishing opportunities for herring are managed by the setting of total allowable catches (TACs). These, and other joint management measures, are set through international negotiations in accordance with the provisions of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and the UK (TCA), guided by the best available scientific advice, balancing environmental, social, and economic factors. The principles followed by the UK in relation to international fisheries negotiations are laid out in the JFS under section 4.2.

There is sufficient scientific evidence for the fisheries policy authorities to assess the stock's maximum sustainable yield (MSY). Until 2024, the fishing opportunities for the herring fishery relevant to this FMP were set within an MSY approach. Revision of the scientific advice in 2024 and 2025 has changed the scientific perception of the stock. As a result, the TAC for 2026 has been set above scientific advice.

The policies within this FMP seek to:

- restore and maintain the fishery above the level capable of producing MSY, and
- ensure that the stock is fished sustainably.

¹ [Joint Fisheries Statement \(JFS\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Fishing opportunities for the Irish Sea herring fishery relevant to this FMP have been agreed at an international level, following receipt of scientific advice using the MSY approach. The actions within this FMP reflect this and are focused on restoring and maintaining the stock above the level of producing MSY, delivering the existing management approach, and identifying and delivering improvements to management where this is needed. The actions within the FMP also allow for future action to be taken should it be needed.

What is an FMP?

An FMP is a document prepared and published under the Act that sets out policies designed to restore one or more stocks of sea fish to, or maintain them at, sustainable levels or contribute to the restoring or maintenance at sustainable levels, in line with section 6(3)(a) of the Act. It is an evidence-based action plan that supports delivery of sustainable fisheries for current and future generations.

The FMP is a long-term plan that must be reviewed and, if necessary, revised at least once every six years. It sets out both a longer-term vision and goals for the fishery (or fisheries), together with the policies and management interventions necessary to achieve these goals in the shorter term, and appropriate indicators.

Why an FMP for Irish Sea herring?

The Irish Sea herring fishery is a particularly important fishery for the Northern Ireland fishing industry, which holds the majority of the UK quota allocation. The fishery contributes socially and economically, and in some cases culturally, to coastal communities through employment in both fishing and processing. This FMP seeks to ensure the ongoing sustainable management of this fishery in line with the fisheries objectives.

Stakeholder Engagement

This FMP has been developed collaboratively by three UK fisheries policy authorities — DAERA, Defra and the Welsh Government — alongside engagement with UK-wide fishing organisations and stakeholder groups.

A working group of key stakeholders was formed in September 2023 and met regularly to inform the content of this FMP. This group was known as the Irish Sea Pelagic FMP Working Group and was made up of pelagic fishing industry representatives, relevant fisheries policy authorities, fisheries scientists, and eNGOs (Environmental non-governmental organisations). In addition, separate bilateral meetings took place over several months to gather additional views and input during the pre-consultation phase.

Output from the Irish Sea Pelagic FMP Working Group was reviewed by the NI FMP Advisory Group, which also consisted of stakeholders with oversight of all DAERA-led

FMPs. Input was also provided through the UK-level FMP Working Group (FMPWG), which is made up of representatives of the four UK fisheries policy authorities (Defra and the devolved governments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).

Further stakeholder engagement took place during 2025. Feedback received as part of the formal public consultation will also shape the final FMP. Further engagement is foreseen prior to the implementation of the FMP policies.

Vision

The vision for this FMP is that the Irish Sea herring fishery is managed sustainably, ensuring that stocks are restored and maintained on a long-term basis above levels capable of producing Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). The policy goals and actions set out in this FMP suggest how this could be achieved in a way that is consistent with, and supportive of, the wider achievement of the fisheries objectives set out in the Act, and the policies contained within the JFS.

Policy Goals

As there is sufficient available evidence to assess MSY, the FMP must contain policies which at least contribute to restoring or maintaining the stock at MSY.

To ensure effective management of the herring fishery, this FMP identifies five policy goals (detailed below) focused on domestic and international management priorities. These goals are subject to the consideration of the consultation responses and will be prioritised appropriately to ensure realistic and measurable outputs. They were drafted to meet the requirements of section 6(3)(a) of the Act and policies set out in the JFS. For each goal, the plan sets out:

- a rationale;
- ongoing, short and longer-term actions; and
- how the actions support delivery of the fisheries objectives.

The policies of this FMP are:

- Policy Goal 1: Harvest Irish Sea herring sustainably with biomass restored and maintained above the level capable of producing MSY.
- Policy Goal 2: Use the best available scientific evidence to support management decisions relating to the setting of sustainable fishing opportunities.
- Policy Goal 3: Deliver wider sustainable management by taking steps to minimise the impact of Irish Sea herring fisheries on the marine ecosystem.
- Policy Goal 4: Support the fishing industry to deliver socio-economic and cultural benefits for rural and coastal communities.

- Policy Goal 5: Minimise the impact of fish activities on climate change and support the fishing industry to adapt to climate change.

Performance indicators for the FMP are addressed in the Monitoring section.

Scope and Purpose

This FMP relates to the management of the stock of Irish Sea herring (*Clupea harengus*) in ICES Division 7.a North of 52°30'N within Northern Irish, English and Welsh waters of ICES Division 7.a. This excludes the territorial waters of Scotland and the Isle of Man.

The Act requires the relevant authority or authorities to prepare and publish FMPs in accordance with the list and timetable included in the UK JFS. The relevant authorities for this FMP are the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Welsh Government.

This FMP has been prepared and published to:

- comply with requirements in the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS)
- comply with section 6 of the Fisheries Act 2020;
- comply with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (the SEA regulations)
- contribute to achieving the eight fisheries objectives in the Act.

This plan is applicable to all removals of herring, by all methods and by all vessels from all nations operating in the area covered by this plan.

Background

Location

This fishery is found in ICES Division 7.a North of 52°30'N (Irish Sea).

This FMP only applies to fishing activity on this stock in Northern Irish, English and Welsh waters. Figure 1 shows the general location of ICES Division 7.a, and Figure 2 shows the waters considered under this FMP. The Irish Sea herring stock is the stock described by ICES within Division 7.a, north of 52°30'N.

DRAFT

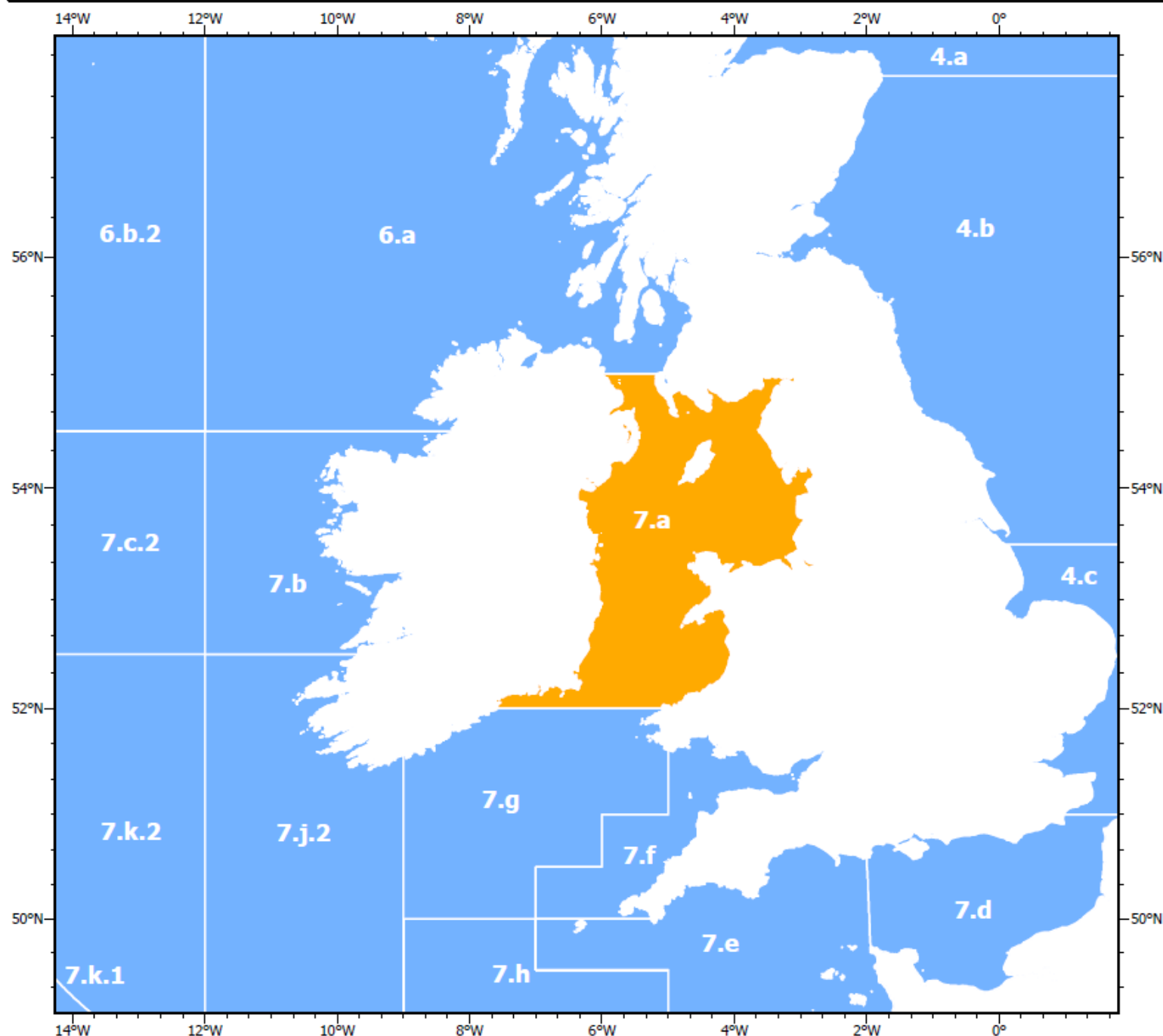
Fig.1 International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) Subarea 7.a



Department of
Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs

An Roinn
Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe

Department of
Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers



ICES Areas

- ICES 7.a Area
- ICES Areas



For illustrative purposes only. Correct at time of data issue, not maintained. Not prejudicial to delimitation.

Date of Publication: 05/06/2026

Coordinate System: WGS 1984 Web Mercator (Auxiliary Sphere)

Projection: Mercator (Auxiliary Sphere)

DAERA Reference: Marine_Data_and_Evidence\Fisheries Management

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, map compilation © Crown Copyright, 2026.

Source data: International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, ICES spatial framework data.

Basemap: Esri, TomTom, FAO, NOAA, USGS

NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION

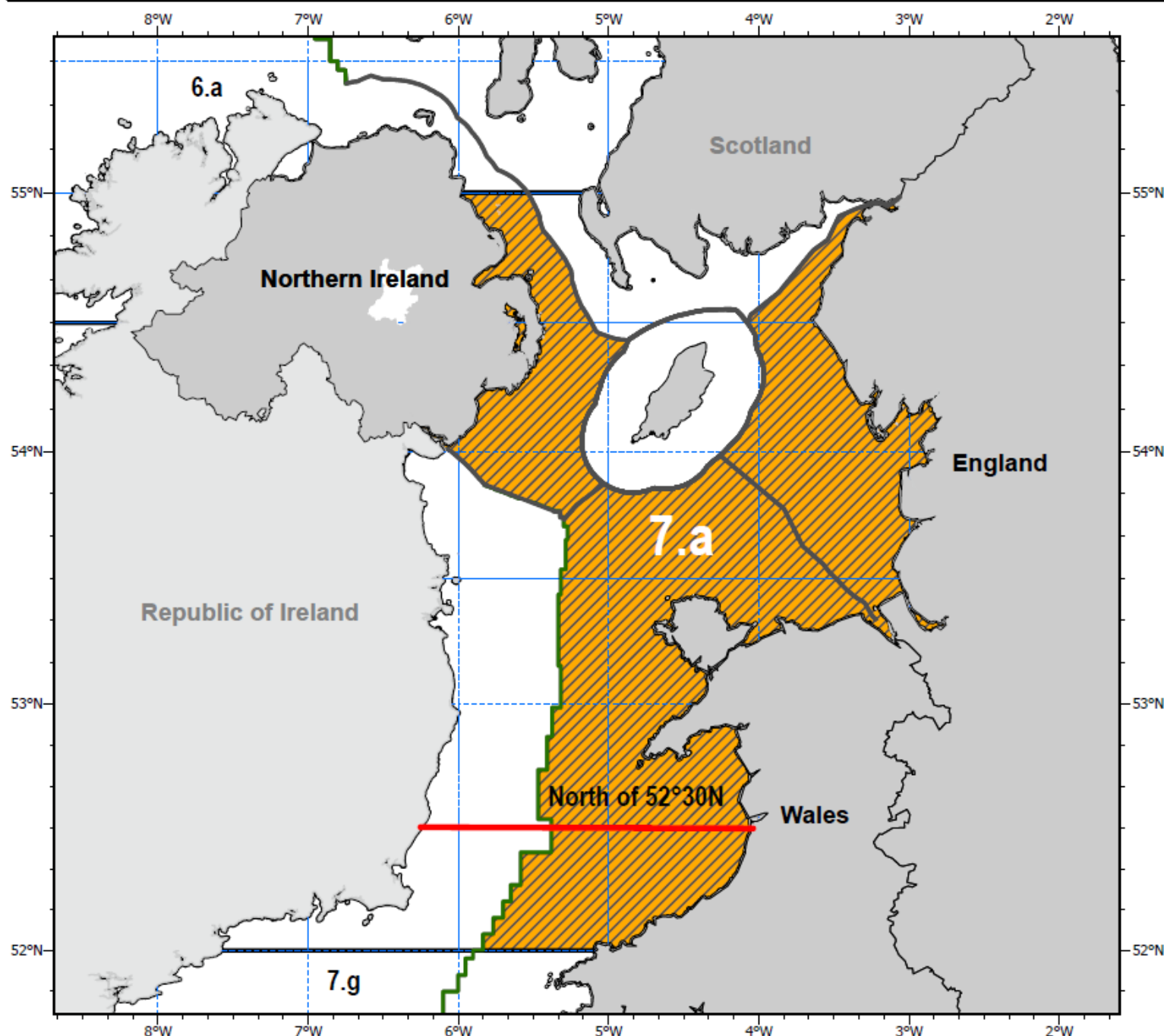
Fig.2 The Irish Sea Pelagic Fisheries Management Plan Area



Department of
Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs

An Roinn
Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe

Department of
Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers



Boundaries

- Maritime Boundaries and Limits
- UK Exclusive Economic Zone Limit
- ICES Areas
- FMP Area
- ICES Statistical Rectangles



For illustrative purposes only. Correct at time of data issue, not maintained. Not prejudicial to delimitation.

Date of Publication: 05/06/2026

Coordinate System: WGS 1984 Web Mercator (Auxiliary Sphere)

Projection: Mercator (Auxiliary Sphere)

DAERA Reference: Marine_Data_and_Evidence\Fisheries Management

NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, map compilation © Crown Copyright, 2026. Source data: United Kingdom, Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Limits and Boundaries Dataset, UK Hydrographic Office, 19 January 2023, licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. Office for National Statistics, Countries (December 2021) Boundaries GB BGC, contains Ordnance Survey and ONS Intellectual Property Rights. European Environment Agency, EEA coastline for analysis, polygon, version 3.0, March 2017, copyright and reuse subject to source terms. International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, relevant ICES spatial framework data. Basemap: Esri, TomTom, FAO, NOAA, USGS, United Kingdom Hydrographic Office customerservices@ukho.gov.uk

Stock Overview

Irish Sea herring (*Clupea harengus*) are thought to be part of a Malin Shelf stock complex (interconnected stock populations found in the Malin Sea region off the north-west coast of Ireland and south-west of Scotland), with a proportion of the Irish Sea herring stock migrating to the north of the Irish Sea during the summer feeding period.

Herring is a forage fish species belonging to the order Clupeiformes. Herring often move in large schools around fishing banks and near the coast, and are found particularly in shallow, temperate waters of the North Atlantic Ocean, including the Irish Sea.

Spawning takes place mainly between September and November in coastal waters east of the Northern Irish coast and east of the Isle of Man, in an area commonly referred to as the Douglas Bank (Figure 3). While the primary spawning grounds are widely identified, survey data, together with anecdotal information from the pelagic community, suggests that autumn spawning may be occurring later and that additional spawning events may occur at alternative times of the year (spring spawning from April to June).

It is known that spring spawning herring from the Celtic Sea and potentially other adjacent populations mix with the Irish Sea population during the autumn spawning period, but to date the level of mixing and subsequent catch from different populations is uncertain.

Recent genetic analyses of samples collected during the Irish Sea Acoustic Survey in 2021 and 2022 indicate mixing of populations primarily in an area along the 60 to 100m contours west of the Isle of Man. While it was initially assumed that mixing only occurred at the immature stages, recent analyses suggest that mixing occurs across all ages.

Additionally, there is an interannual variation in the proportion of spring and winter spawning herring in the Irish Sea, as well as variation in their distribution patterns.

Further, it remains uncertain whether spring-spawned fish originating from spawning sites in the Celtic Seas or other unknown spawning grounds will return to their spawning grounds or remain within the Irish Sea for spawning. Further research is needed to gain a better understanding of the population structure.

Interannual variation in herring migration patterns may result in the annual acoustic survey's timing occasionally being mismatched with the assumed migration pattern of the spawning stock from the Malin Shelf into the Irish Sea.

Stock sizes are naturally highly variable due to changing environmental conditions, such as temperature and prey availability, influencing survival during early life history.

Increasing marine anthropogenic activity and the potential impact on the Irish Sea spawning stock is a cause for concern. Gravel substratum is an essential habitat for

herring spawning and, therefore, the dumping of dredge spoil, the extraction of marine aggregates, including gravel and sand, and the erection of structures such as wind turbines in the vicinity of spawning grounds could all have a significant impact on the spawning success of herring (ICES).

The assessment for Irish Sea herring in Division 7.a North of 52°30'N is therefore performed on a mixed stock. Both the catches and acoustic survey indices may contain an unknown proportion of fish from other stocks. The consequences of this mixing will need to be further investigated for assessment, management and advice. At the WKIrish workshop (an ICES working group on the Irish Sea ecosystem), the latest available evidence on catches and catch composition, length, weight and maturity at age, natural mortality and fishing mortality was investigated, with further investigations ongoing. Figure 3 shows the location of the herring spawning grounds.

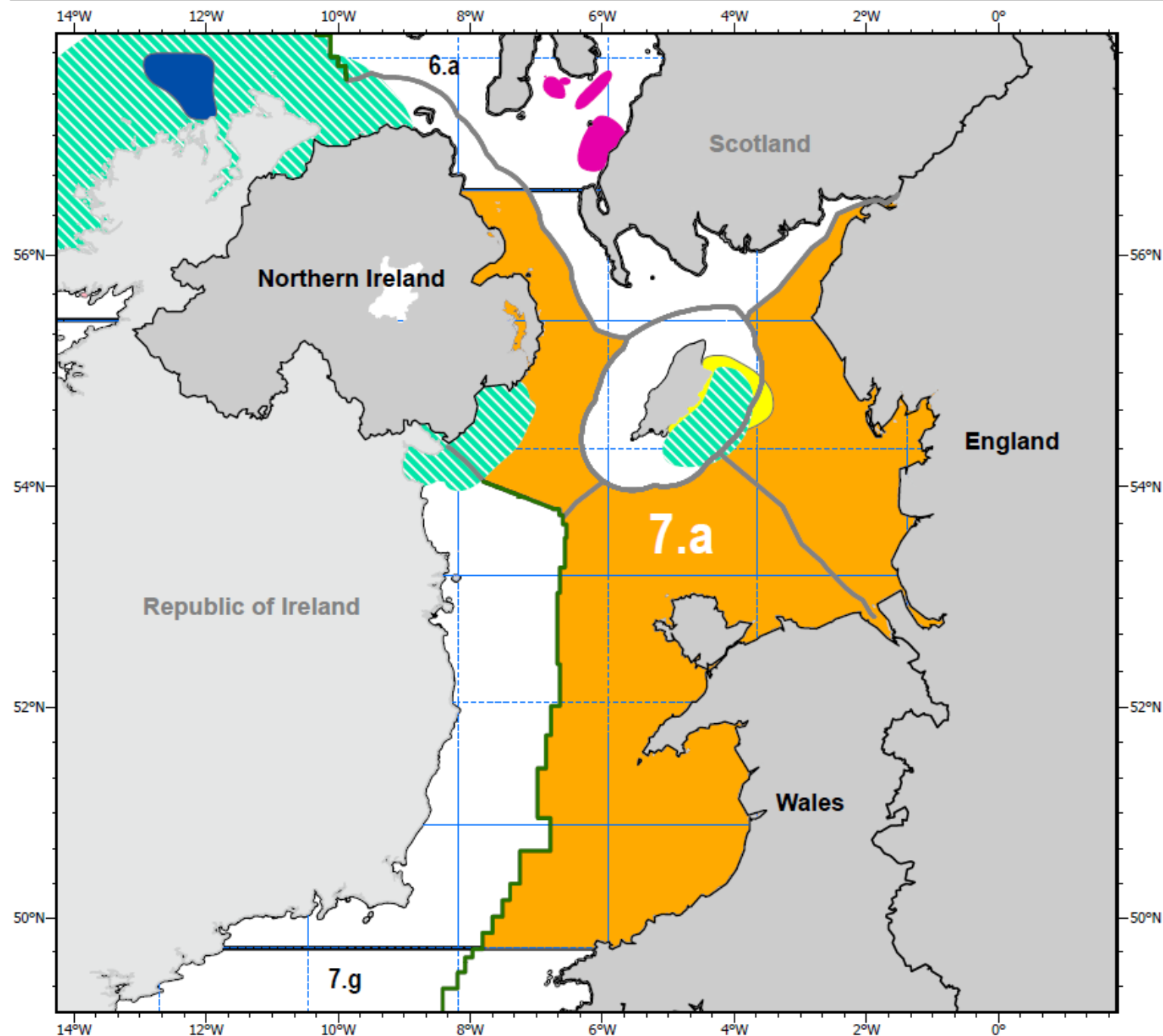
Fig.3 Herring Spawning Grounds



Department of
Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs

An Roinn
Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe

Department of
Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers



Boundaries

- UK Exclusive Economic Zone
- UKHO Maritime Boundaries and Limits
- FMP Area
- ICES Areas
- ICES Statistical Rectangles

Irish Sea Spawning Grounds

Season

- Autumn
- Autumn and winter
- Spring
- Summer and Autumn
- Winter
- ICES Statistical Rectangles

Figure adapted from Frost & Diele (2022). Known Herring Spawning Grounds Based on Occurrence of Spawning Herring ('Spring' and 'Autumn'), Herring Eggs (West Coast Clyde Area, 'Spring') and Herring Larvae ('Spring', 'Summer', 'Autumn'). Figure adapted from Frost & Diele (2022).



Date of Publication: 05/06/2026

Coordinate System: WGS 1984 Web Mercator (Auxiliary Sphere)

Projection: Mercator (Auxiliary Sphere)

DAERA Reference: Marine_Data_and_Evidence\Fisheries Management

NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, map compilation © Crown Copyright, 2026.

Source data: United Kingdom, Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Limits and Boundaries Dataset, UK Hydrographic Office, 19 January 2023, licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. Office for National Statistics, Countries (December 2021) Boundaries GB BGC, contains Ordnance Survey and ONS Intellectual Property Rights. European Environment Agency, EEA coastline for analysis, polygon, version 3.0, March 2017, copyright and reuse subject to source terms. International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, relevant ICES spatial framework data. Fisheries Research Services, Scotland. Cefas © Crown Copyright. Basemap: Esri, TomTom, FAO, NOAA, USGS, United Kingdom Hydrographic Office customerservices@ukho.gov.uk

Figure adapted from Frost & Diele (2022). Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries, 32(3), 721–744.

For illustrative purposes only. Correct at time of data issue, not maintained. Not prejudicial to delimitation.

Fishery

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland pelagic fleet is made up predominantly of three large vessels, which hold the majority of quota and catch and land most of the Irish Sea herring. Several smaller vessels also diversify to fish herring for short periods.

The Northern Ireland Pelagic Sustainability Group (NIPSG) comprises the two NI producer organisations, larger pelagic vessel owners and several pelagic processors. The NIPSG vessels fish a targeted fishery. The fish are identified using a combination of echo sonar and echo sounder, and the net is set away from the target and towed through it. Entry to the net is monitored, as is the net content, so hauling the net with catch can be done immediately once the trawl is complete. This ensures that the catch is in prime condition, while the highly selective method of fishing, through identifying individual schools and fishing in mid-water, off the seabed, minimises unwanted bycatch.

The trawls used by these vessels are designed and rigged to fish in midwater, including in the surface water. Large mesh in the wing-ends of the forward moving trawl herd the fish before tapering to finer meshes in the square, belly and eventually the cod end (minimum mesh size of 32 mm).

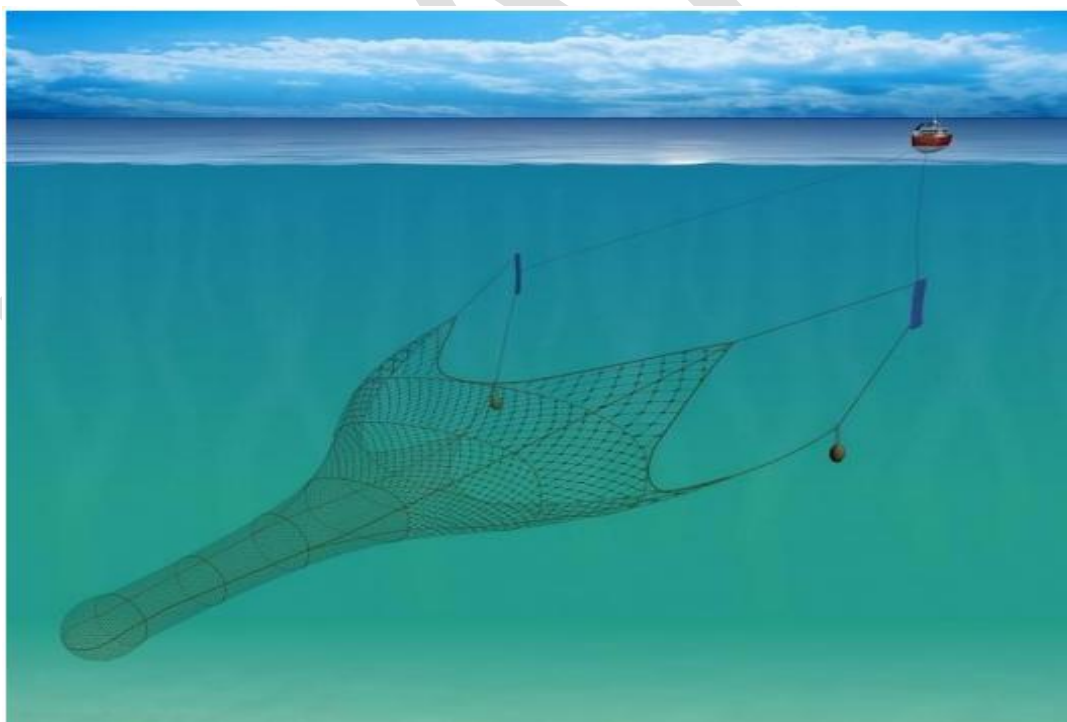


Figure 4 – A vessel towing a single pelagic trawl. Source: Seafish Gear Database

The depth at which the trawls are fished is controlled by the towing speed and warp length. When a single vessel is involved in trawling, pelagic trawl doors are used to

keep the mouth of the net open (see Figure 4), rather than each end of the net being towed in unison by two separate vessels (pair trawling).

Fish handling is highly automated, and fish are pumped on board from the net directly into large tanks containing refrigerated seawater (RSW). Previously, most fishing typically occurred at night, responding to the formation of herring shoals. However, in order to avoid spurdog bycatch, which has been increasing, vessels have begun carrying out more of their fishing during the day.

Although the vessels may fish for up to a week, the catch is regularly landed daily, as this maintains high quality. The catch size typically ranges between 50 and 100 tonnes, dependent on the requirements of the processing facilities. All three vessels land their catch from this zone primarily into Belfast, as this port is deep enough to accommodate the vessels. The catch is transported by lorry to three processing plants in Ardglass and Kilkeel, all of which are members of the NIPSG client group.

There has been no bycatch of marine mammals reported by observers from the fishery and non-targeted fish species bycatch is minimal. Occasionally sprat can mix with schooling herring, but this is generally within inshore waters and their incidence in the migratory schools upon which the fishery is set is rare. Recently spurdog has become more prevalent and has created difficulties for the fishery. Fishers try to avoid catching spurdog, as it can be detrimental to the quality of the herring catch.

The Irish Sea herring fishery has previously achieved Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) accreditation. This has lapsed in light of ongoing concerns over the ICES assessment.

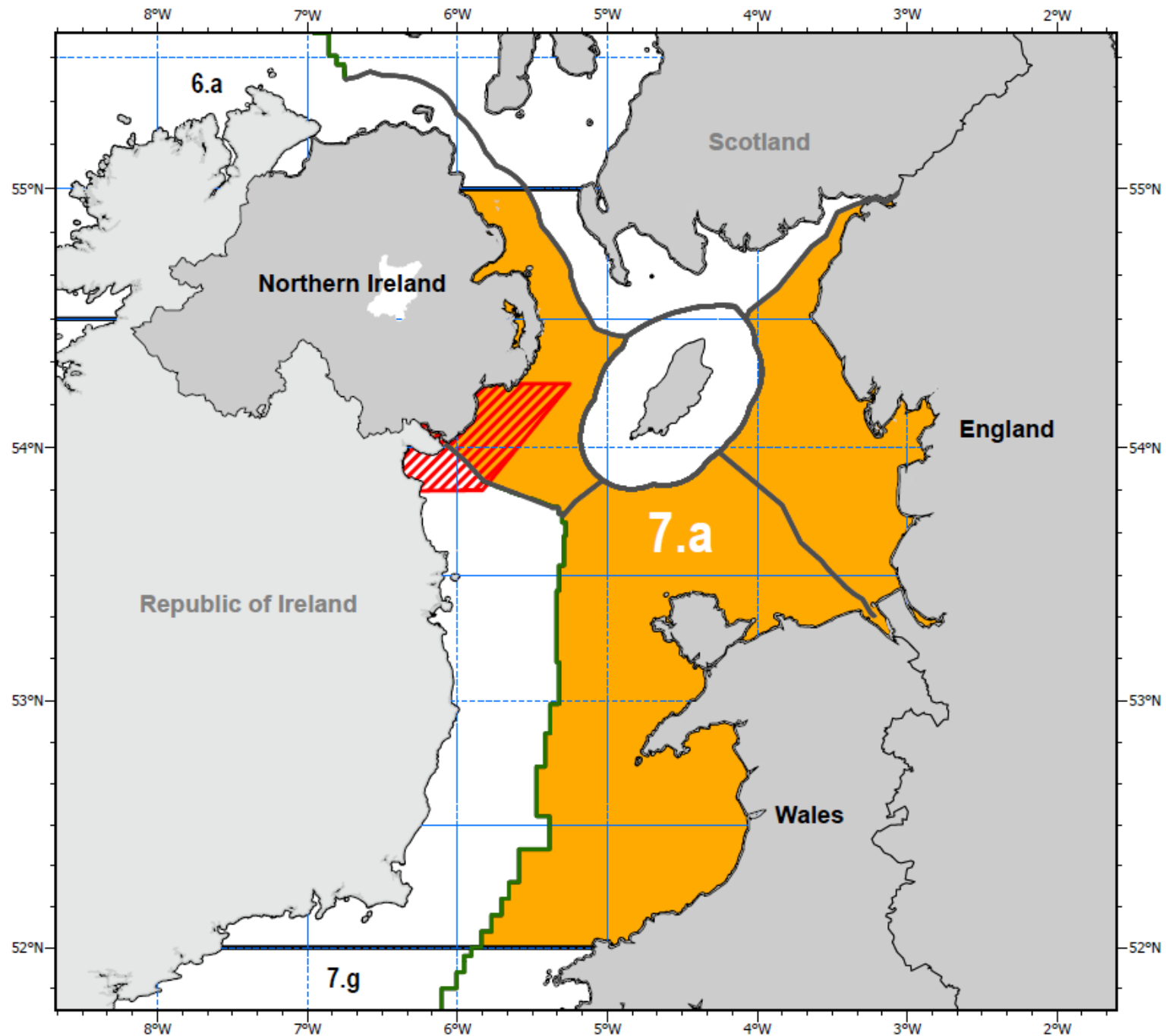
Mourne Inshore Fishery

There are important spawning grounds for herring off the Mourne coast, and fishing in this area is prohibited between 21 September and 31 December each year. The "Mourne Area" is that part of the Irish Sea bounded by the following co-ordinates:

- the east coast of NI at latitude 54° 15'N
- latitude 54° 15'N, longitude 5° 50'W
- latitude 53° 50'N, longitude 5° 50'W
- the east coast of Ireland at latitude 53° 50'N

This area was the basis for a historical fishery, targeting spawning aggregations. Access is still permitted to a limited fishery (approximately 50t). Fishing is historically restricted to boats not exceeding 40ft (12.2 metres) in overall length and they must use nets with a minimum mesh size of 54mm, as part of the licence conditions. Vessels must apply for a licence and meet the conditions set out in the licence. Figure 6 shows the closure area.

Fig.4 Mourne Closure Box



For illustrative purposes only. Correct at time of data issue, not maintained. Not prejudicial to delimitation.
 Date of Publication: 05/06/2026
 Coordinate System: WGS 1984 Web Mercator (Auxiliary Sphere)
 Projection: Mercator (Auxiliary Sphere)
 DAERA Reference: Marine_Data_and_Evidence\Fisheries Management

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, map compilation © Crown Copyright, 2026.
 Source data: United Kingdom, Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Limits and Boundaries Dataset, UK Hydrographic Office, 19 January 2023, licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. Office for National Statistics, Countries (December 2021) Boundaries GB BGC, contains Ordnance Survey and ONS Intellectual Property Rights. European Environment Agency, EEA coastline for analysis, polygon, version 3.0, March 2017, copyright and reuse subject to source terms. International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, relevant ICES spatial framework data. Basemap: Esri, TomTom, FAO, NOAA, USGS, United Kingdom Hydrographic Office customerservices@ukho.gov.uk

NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION

Other Northern Irish herring fisheries

Some smaller and mid-sized trawlers that are not part of the Northern Ireland Pelagic Sustainability Group expressed an interest in participating in this fishery for herring in the Irish Sea and have utilised additional quota to diversify. DAERA is responsible for ensuring that Northern Ireland's additional quota is allocated in line with the criteria set out in Section 25 of the Act.

England

Historically, there was a targeted herring fishery by this fleet in north-west England. However, herring is now predominantly a bycatch fishery in the north-west English fleet and is currently landed in very small quantities. A targeted fishery is unviable at this time, due to the quantities of herring currently being caught and the vessel size needed to make fishing profitable.

Wales

The fishery in Wales is artisanal in nature. Taking place in the autumn or winter months, it is very weather-dependent, and the fishers are those from the local crustacean fleet who diversify in pursuit of this stock. The method used is predominantly fixed bottom gill net, set over slack-water periods, inshore in bays where the fish move in on the tide. Catches and activity have fallen in recent years, not least because of the loss of a fresh market in Wales.

Scotland

Logan Bay in Scotland has a permanent closure to herring fishing to protect juvenile fish populations. This closure is part of broader regulations aimed at safeguarding spawning grounds and juvenile fish in the area.

Transboundary Areas

The Irish Sea herring fishery is managed by Total Allowable Catch (TAC) limits. TACs are split between the UK and EU, with Ireland holding the full EU share. ICES Division 7.a also includes Isle of Man (IoM) waters.

Isle of Man waters

The access of British fishing boats to the territorial sea of the Isle of Man is subject to an Isle of Man sea-fishing licence being granted by the Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture (DEFA). Fishing opportunities, such as catch quota, which are utilised in the territorial sea of the Isle of Man count concurrently towards the uptake of UK fishing opportunities. Specific technical conservation measures apply in the Isle of Man territorial sea under the Sea-Fisheries (Technical Measures) Byelaws 2000, which are made under the Fisheries Act 2012 (of Tynwald).

Byelaw 18² (Restrictions on fishing for herring) imposes a spawning closure (“Douglas Bank Herring Box”) annually between 21 September – 15 November. The area is defined as that part of the territorial sea bounded by the following coordinates:

- the east coast of the Island at latitude 54° 20' N,
- latitude 54° 20' N, longitude 3° 40' W,
- latitude 53° 50' N, longitude 3° 50' W,
- latitude 53° 50' N, longitude 4° 50' W
- the south-west coast of the Island at longitude 4° 50'W.

In 2023, the UK Secretary of State introduced a specific exception to the UK Quota Management Rules (QMR) to allow a portion of the UK's additional quota (AQ) to be allocated to the Isle of Man for the period 2023–2026. This exception, which is set out in Annex N of the UK QMR and was agreed by all Devolved Governments, ensures that the Isle of Man receives a share of the UK's AQ for Irish Sea herring (stock code: HER/07A/MM).

Under this arrangement, the Isle of Man was initially allocated 100 tonnes in 2023, with the allocation set to increase incrementally each year until 2026. This phased approach reflects a commitment to gradually enhancing the Isle of Man's access to herring resources within the Irish Sea while maintaining overall quota stability. The exception will be revisited in 2026.

In addition, a related exception was introduced for Northern Ireland, which provides an allocation of mackerel in proportion to the Isle of Man's herring allocation. This proportional arrangement operates at a 2:1 ratio, meaning that for every two tonnes of herring allocated to the Isle of Man, Northern Ireland receives one tonne of mackerel.

EU / Republic of Ireland

UK and EU shares of Irish Sea herring quota are set out in Annex 35 of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) and TACs are determined at the annual bilateral negotiations. Under the TCA, EU vessels fishing in UK waters must comply with UK measures, and likewise UK vessels fishing in EU waters must comply with EU measures.

Additionally, the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and Northern Ireland allow reciprocal access to some areas within each other's territorial waters in the Irish Sea 0–6 nm zones; this was known as the Voisinage arrangement. The Sea-Fisheries (Amendment) Act 2019 made this arrangement part of the ROI statute. The ROI RSW pelagic fleet holds a small percentage of the quota for herring in Division 7.a North of 52°30'N (Irish Sea) and uses similar technology to that of the NIPSG fleet.

² [Sea-Fisheries \(Technical Measures\) Bye-Laws 2000 \(gov.im\)](https://www.gov.im/legislation/byelaws/2000/18)

Bycatch

Bycatch in targeted pelagic fisheries is considered minimal and consists mainly of sprat and mackerel. It has been reported by fishers that the proliferation of spurdog is becoming an increasing problem for the Irish Sea herring fishery and can affect quality of catch. To address increasing spurdog numbers, ICES introduced TAC advice in 2023 which supports a commercial fishery for Western Spurdog that covers the Irish Sea. This quota is being carefully managed. Any future measures in relation to spurdog should align with the upcoming Elasmobranch Conservation Strategy. Representatives from the Northern Ireland Fishermen's Federation (NIFF) and DAERA are also involved in a UK spurdog stakeholder group through Cefas.

Recent Herring Catch Data

Table 1. Catches (tonnes) from the Irish Sea (7a) 'Defined Stock Area' and value (£) of herring by UK and non-UK vessels: 2020 to 2024.

Country of registration	Gear in use	Landings (t) and Value (£)					
		2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Totals
		(t/£)	(t/£)	(t/£)	(t/£)	(t/£)	(t/£)
England	Bottom Otter Trawl (single)					0.0 / £5	0.0 / £5
	Nephrops Trawl				0.0 / £8		0.0 / £8
Isle of Man	Handlines			0.0 / £4		0.0 / £0	0.0 / £4
	Hook and Line		0.0 / £27		0.0 / £3		0.0 / £30
	Bottom Otter Trawl (single)	0.0 / £2		0.1 / £49	100.4 / £63k	0.5 / £254	101.0 / £63k
	Midwater otter trawl					103.8 / £82k	103.8 / £82k
	Nephrops Trawl	0.0 / £4					0.0 / £4
Northern Ireland	Pots					2.5 / £1k	2.5 / £1k
	Gillnets-drift	33.4 / £4k	54.9 / £17k	43.2 / £15k	18.7 / £5k	20.5 / £10k	170.6 / £50k
	Bottom Otter Trawl (single)	0.0 / £0	40.4 / £12k	113.2 / £51k	43.8 / £18k	66.2 / £37k	263.6 / £119k
	Midwater otter trawl	1004.5 / £372k	1749.5 / £989k	1251.1 / £737k	49.5 / £25k	98.5 / £61k	4153.1 / £2,184k
	Bottom pair trawls				45.2 / £25k		45.2 / £25k
	Midwater pair trawl	4931.7 / £2,386k	4848.3 / £2,266k	6368.5 / £3,280k	6873.2 / £3,728k	6911.3 / £4,027k	29,933.1 / £15,687k
Wales	Gill net - unspecified				0.0 / £3	0.0 / £35	0.1 / £38
	Gill net - set					0.0 / £16	0.0 / £16
	Handlines					0.0 / £3	0.0 / £3
	Hook and Line			0.0 / £20		0.0 / £28	0.0 / £48
Ireland	Midwater otter trawl	28.6 / £6k	55.9 / £17k	0.3 / £0	54.9 / £31k	15.5 / £8k	155.1 / £61k
	Midwater pair trawl	1267.6 / £571k	532.8 / £160k	446.8 / £213k	265.6 / £114k	155.4 / £87k	2668.1 / £1,145k

Total	7266 / £3338k	7282 / £3461k	8223 / £4296k	7451 / £4009k	7374 / £4315k	37596 / £19,418k
-------	---------------	---------------	---------------	---------------	---------------	------------------

DRAFT

Stock Assessment and MSY

Scientific Advice

ICES provision of advice

The following evidence is collated from the most recent ICES herring Assessment Working Group Report, assessment and associated stock annex.

As set out in Section 3.2 of the JFS, the UK takes an evidence-based approach to fisheries management, making use of the best available scientific evidence. For the purpose of stock management and TAC setting, this tends to focus on the use of advice produced by ICES, although other sources of information, including data from the fishing industry, may also be used.

Further detail of the ICES assessment framework and process can be accessed here:

- [Technical Guidelines - Advisory process.](#)
- [Guide to ICES advisory framework and principles.](#)

ICES annual catch advice provides a recent history of the development of the stock which can be compared to scientifically determined biological indicators³, allowing its status to be classified. The advice summarises recent catches, provides an estimation of recent fishing mortality (F), the stock spawning biomass (SSB) and recruitment.

ICES provides annual advice for Irish Sea herring. ICES advice is organised according to categories, ranging from 1 (the most information available) to 6 (the least). For 2026 fisheries Irish Sea herring is a category 1 stock which means that it is considered to have full age- and size-structured data on which to base an assessment, and that MSY reference points are available to provide a framework for management action.

Benchmark exercises are a tool used by ICES to peer-review and incorporate new science or evidence into the stock assessment process. They are part of the process which ensures that ICES advice is based on the best available scientific evidence.

These assessments, stock annexes and related documents can be accessed on the ICES publication-sharing website, [International Council for the Exploration of the Sea research repository](#).

Stock annex (2017) [Item - Stock Annex: Herring \(*Clupea harengus*\) in Division 7.a North of 52°30'N \(Irish Sea\) - International Council for the Exploration of the Sea](#)

³ B_{LIM}, MSY B_{trigger} etc.

Recent ICES advice

The most recent ICES advice sheet, which provides advice on fishing opportunities in 2026⁴, estimates that fishing pressure on the stock is above the FMSY and F_{pa} reference points, and spawning-stock size is below MSY $B_{trigger}$ and B_{pa} , but above the Blim reference point.

The ICES assessment of this stock has now been revised twice outside the benchmark process to address errors within the assessment. This has led to the state of the stock being significantly revised, raising concerns that the stock is not being fished sustainably. These two separate in-year revisions of the ICES advice have resulted in reduced confidence in the current assessment model.

The key concern has been the recent errors in the survey index for the stock, which relates to how the acoustically derived estimates of the stock size are used by the assessment model. This has contributed to a downward revision of the catch advice in the last two years. The advice for 2026 remains a category 1 stock assessment. A benchmark is not expected to be undertaken until 2027.

ICES estimated catch has been lower than the catch corresponding to advice and agreed TACs until 2023. The advice on fishing opportunities was revised downwards in 2024, and the mid-year revision of the advice for 2025 was another downward revision. This means fishing opportunities have been set above scientific advice for the last two years.

Other Environmental / Ecosystem based advice

Herring is an important food source for a variety of other marine species including seabirds, such as diving birds like cormorants, gannets, and auks such as guillemots. Marine mammals including seals and cetaceans predate on herring, which aggregate seasonally in areas of the Irish Sea. Many species that rely on herring as a food source face cumulative pressures within the marine environment, from habitat degradation, marine pollution, disease, and the effects of climate change. To give them the best chance of survival and allow for recovery of depleted populations, it is vital they have sufficient food supply. It is therefore essential to maintain fishing at a sustainable level not only for human consumption but for species within the wider marine environment. ICES set a level of natural mortality within the assessment to account for predator/prey relationships. ICES advice does not provide for any specific management aim for predator species.

⁴ [Herring \(Clupea harengus\) in Division 7.a North of 52°30'N \(Irish Sea\). Replacing advice provided in June 2025 - International Council for the Exploration of the Sea](#)

Assessment of evidence

Despite concerns over the reliability of the model there remains a significant body of evidence for this stock, sufficient for the fisheries policy authorities to assess maximum sustainable yield (MSY).

Irish Sea herring continues to be assessed as a category 1 stock which means that it is considered to have full age and size-structured data on which to base an assessment, and that MSY reference points are available to provide a framework for management action.

While there remain questions over the robustness and certainty of the advice, following the scientific advice for 2026 means this stock cannot be considered to be fished at a level consistent with achieving MSY.

As a result, the policies within this FMP should seek to:

- restore and maintain the fishery above the level capable of producing MSY; and
- ensure that the stock is fished sustainably.

Fisheries Management

Management strategy for Irish Sea herring

The overarching aim of fisheries management in the UK is to preserve the long-term sustainable use of fisheries resources whilst minimising any potential negative environmental, social or economic impacts. The JFS also states that 'As part of being an independent coastal State, the fisheries policy authorities will work together to support a vibrant, profitable, and sustainable fishing and aquaculture sector supported by a healthy marine environment that is resilient to climate change'.

These ambitions are managed in line with numerous domestic and international policy drivers, which oblige action to consider and mitigate for the wider adverse environmental impacts of fishing activity. In UK waters this is managed in line with UK fisheries legislation (such as the Act, UK and devolved administration secondary legislation and former EU legislation which now forms part of assimilated law) and licence conditions where appropriate.

Setting of Total Allowable Catches

The Irish Sea herring fishery is a jointly managed stock with the EU. TACs are set through international negotiations guided by the best available scientific advice, balancing environmental, social, and economic factors.

Following the conclusion of annual negotiations with the EU, the UK's share of the TAC is determined as fishing opportunities for British boats by the Secretary of State

and published in a document under section 23 of the Act.⁵ Following this, the UK's quota is apportioned between the four UK fisheries policy authorities in line with the UK QMR. Each UK Fisheries Administration then allocates its share of apportioned quota to vessels/licences under their administration, in line with their quota management⁶ and Section 25 of the Act. Quotas are adaptable, for example they may be transferred between the management groups which represent UK fishing vessels or exchanged with the EU.

Current technical measures

All fishing activity in UK waters is managed through a range of Technical Conservation Measures (TCM), and include regulations on the size, construction and use of fishing gears, closures, fish retention sizes and discarding requirements.

The assimilated EU Technical Measures Framework (EU No.1241/2019) sets the baseline selectivity to be achieved in specific fisheries. Technical measures tend to apply to specific groupings of vessels, or types of fish, and as such can be very similar to those in place to manage other herring stocks.

Current technical measures in place to manage sustainable exploitation of the Irish Sea herring stock include:

- Minimum Conservation References Size (MCRS) (which prevents targeting of undersized fish by ensuring that only fish above the MCRS can be sold for human consumption).
 - Minimum conservation reference size: 20cm
- Minimum mesh sizes and structure of fishing nets (which set a minimum standard intended to reduce catches of fish below the MCRS and generally make fishing operations more efficient and effective),
 - Mesh size for the Mourne Closure area is a minimum of 54mm.
 - The pelagic fleet use large mesh in the wingends of the forward moving trawl before tapering to finer meshes in the square, belly and eventually the cod end (minimum mesh size of 32 mm).
- The Landing Obligation⁷ which stipulates that all catches of quota species, which includes herring and includes all catches below MCRS must be landed and counted against quota unless exemptions apply.

⁵ Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (2024) [Fishing opportunities for British fishing boats](#).

⁶ Quota management rules set by the [Scottish Government](#), [Defra](#), [Welsh Government](#) and [DAERA](#).

⁷ The Landing Obligation is set out in Article 15 of the assimilated EU law Regulation number 1380/2013 This can be accessed on [legislation.gov.uk](#) [here](#). Note, subsequent exemptions under the grounds of de minimis or high survivability are set out in supporting EU delegated Acts and UK statutory instruments.

- Seasonal closures - including the Mourne Shore area and in Isle of Man waters.

Further detail regarding technical measures can be found on the UK Government's Technical Conservation and Landing Obligation rules and regulations webpage⁸.

In relation to the landing obligation, steps are being taken across the UK to improve its operation, and actions relating to this are included within the actions section. Discards of unwanted (over quota or undersize) herring are considered to be negligible, and incidental catch of other non-target species (bycatch) is also considered negligible.

Northern Ireland

Mourne Shore: The Mourne Shore herring closure as described above prohibits the targeting of herring within a known spawning area. There is an exemption made for a historical small vessel fishery (under 12.2m) using drift nets. This fleet is limited to catches of approximately 50t annually.

Other technical measures: The larger pelagic vessels use eliminator trawl devices to minimise elasmobranch bycatch, as an additional voluntary measure.

England

Northwestern IFCA Byelaw 8: Small Mesh Nets. It is prohibited for any person to utilise a net with a mesh size smaller than 65 millimetres when fishing for shrimps, prawns, mackerel, herring, sprats, whitebait, or sand eels.

Wales

There are no specific herring stock-related regulations in Welsh waters. Alongside national regulations, a set of byelaws for inshore waters (0-6 miles) has been implemented by the Welsh Government. These byelaws include spatial and temporal restrictions on the use of fixed nets and drift nets, as well as specific minimum mesh sizes for herring fishing activities.

Monitoring, control and enforcement

Fisheries regulations serve a range of purposes, including preventing actions which adversely impact sustainability of the marine environment. Fisheries policy authorities are focused on reducing the main risks for non-compliance with those regulations, for example relating to non or inaccurate reporting, use of illegal fishing gear and fishing in areas where activity is restricted.

Fisheries (or Marine) Enforcement Officers are warranted to carry out enforcement of UK and EU fisheries legislation and associated control regulations that is intelligence-

⁸ UK Government (2024) [Technical Conservation and Landing Obligation rules and regulations from 2022 onwards](#).

led, risk-based or is required by the UK's international obligations to ensure the conservation and protection of various species of fish. Enforcement of the respective regulations, domestic and international, is in line with applicable guidelines for regulators.

Across the UK there are a range of assets to support this, including at sea inspections of fishing vessels by Fisheries Protection Vessels, timely and accurate reporting of fishing activities to the competent authorities and 24/7 satellite monitoring and reporting provided by UK Fisheries Monitoring Centre.

Fishing vessels over 12 metres are required to have fully operational satellite Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS), and electronic logbooks, enabling authorities to remotely monitor and control fishing activity and encourage higher compliance. VMS is also being planned to roll out across the under 12 metre fishing fleet and will form part of the monitoring and enforcement regime for all fishing vessels once this rollout is complete. Since 2022 all licensed under 12m vessels fishing in the Welsh zone have been required to have a functioning VMS system polling every 10 minutes.

Office based checks of fishing vessels are also required to ensure compliance and that fishing activities are being recorded accurately i.e. areas of capture and to provide assurances throughout the chain of traceability.

UK fisheries policy authorities apply a fishing vessel licensing regime along with control measures throughout the whole chain of traceability from catching to sale. These measures include requirements to record catch details whilst at sea, the weight of catch landed, transport and takeover documents once landed and sales notes from registered buyers. This comprehensive data set enables fisheries authorities to effectively monitor fishing activity and compliance with national and local regulations.

Additional control requirements within Northern Ireland

DAERA Sea Fisheries Inspectorate is empowered by existing primary legislation (i.e. the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966, and the Sea Fisheries Act 1968) along with subsequent Regulations and Byelaws to conserve, protect, promote, and develop commercial fisheries and aquaculture within its jurisdiction. In line with the Northern Ireland Windsor Framework Agreement (WFA) DAERA sea fishery inspectors must also consider any WFA requirements, for example application of the EU's Illegal Unreported Unregulated "IUU" requirements. They are also required to inspect and certify that captured fish entering NI meet sustainability tests required by the EU. DAERA enforces fisheries legislation and deals with those who breach the legislation in line with the DAERA Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group (EMFG) Enforcement policy.

Environmental Considerations

Conservation Advice

FMPs are subject to legal and environmental obligations arising from legislation such as the Habitats Regulations, the UK Marine Strategy (or the UK Marine Strategy Regulations 2010⁹) and the UK Marine Policy Statement, the Environment Act 2021, the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, and The Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013.

Alongside these requirements, FMPs seek to support a range of other existing environmental policies that focus on enhancing the health of our seas for future generations, restoring marine biodiversity, and tackling the causes and impacts of climate change.

To support the development of policies aimed at protecting the natural environment, conservation advice was sought by DAERA, Defra and Welsh Government from Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies including the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), Natural England and Natural Resources Wales. This advice includes input from DAERA's own conservation services. The evidence and advice that has been provided by SNCBs underpins the proposed policy goals and actions of this FMP. While the FMP provides an overview of this advice, details on the methods and data used by the SNCBs to identify risk levels can be found in the environmental report.

The advice considers the impact of this pelagic FMP on the Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) for Northern Ireland, English and Welsh waters and on the UK Marine Strategy descriptors of GES. In addition, advice was provided on the impact on Priority Marine Features (collective features) within the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (WANE).

The advice is based on a three-point risk rating, scaling from low to moderate to high and is intended to identify where the greatest impacts are likely to occur. The score is informed by the activity and the level of activity.

The conservation advice identifies that mid water pelagic fishing is not expected to physically impact the seabed, and assuming that the pelagic stock is managed to conservation objectives the advice focuses on impacts outside of the herring stock. The advice includes impacts from smaller fisheries in NI and Wales using drift nets and bottom set gill nets.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

The conservation advice reviewed by JNCC identifies that the Irish Sea Pelagic FMP has the potential to impact the designated features of MPAs in two primary ways:

⁹ [The Marine Strategy Regulations 2010](#)

- (i) through the bycatch of designated features of MPAs and
- (ii) through the direct (targeted) and indirect (bycatch) removal of prey species on which designated species depend.

These impacts can affect the designated features both inside and outside the boundaries of MPAs, particularly for mobile species. The main impacts identified for MPA features are therefore:

- A moderate risk of bycatch of mobile species (marine mammals, birds, and fish) that are designated features of MPAs in pelagic trawls.
- A moderate risk to the designated species of MPAs from reductions in their prey through the targeted herring fishery.

The advice highlighted a notable risk rating to bycatch of sensitive marine species in static nets, given the reliance of key marine species on these types of forage fish. It noted that more data on bycatch frequency and levels is needed, from which mitigating actions such as seabird and cetacean deterrents can then be determined. Some fishing for Irish Sea herring takes place with gill nets and would therefore be covered by this data requirement. These impacts are considered further in the relevant policy goal.

NRW were asked to provide risks-based nature conservation advice for Welsh waters in preparing the Irish Sea demersal FMP. The full advice can be seen in the Environmental Report accompanying this FMP.

When aggregating all gear types associated with medium or high-risk levels together, NRW have identified the following risk levels:

- There is a Medium risk inside the Northern Cardigan Bay and Liverpool Bay SPAs for the common scoter and red-throated diver features from visual and above water noise disturbance from fishing vessels.
- There is a Medium risk inside and outside MPAs from diving seabird bycatch.
- There is a High risk inside and outside MPAs from salmon bycatch.
- There is a Medium risk inside and outside MPAs from shad and lamprey bycatch.
- There is a Medium risk inside and outside of MPAs from the targeted removal of herring, part of the fish community assemblage of the Severn Estuary estuaries habitat feature.
- There is a High risk inside and outside of MPAs from the targeted removal of herring affecting harbour porpoise prey availability.

NRW advice surrounding the potential risks to sensitive Welsh MPA features from pelagic fisheries and fishing methods in Welsh waters was not provided in the context of feature vulnerability to the low levels of fishing activity associated with Welsh vessels. Any Welsh management measures which may be considered for implementation beyond the publication of this FMP will also consider the very limited

type, scale, frequency and duration of recorded Welsh pelagic fishing activity in determining the risks of fishery related impacts.

UK Marine Strategy Descriptors

The Marine Strategy Regulations 2010 (SI 2010/1627) require fishery bodies in the UK to take action to achieve or maintain GES in all UK waters. The UK Marine Strategy (UKMS) is a key pillar of marine policy in the UK, and the JFS is a cross-cutting measure which will help to deliver GES for commercial fisheries. Interactions are considered under a series of descriptors, as well as on priority features.

The conservation advice highlighted risks arising from fisheries to five UK MS descriptors (D1 Biodiversity, D3 Commercial Fish and Shellfish, D4 Food-webs, D6 Seafloor Integrity and D10 Marine Litter).

For NI waters

- There is a moderate risk to achieving GES for the biological diversity of cetaceans, seals, and birds, due to impacts from Pelagic fishing activities, Further consideration on the impact of prey species is suggested.
- There is a moderate risk to marine litter. More robust estimates are required.

For English Waters

- There is a moderate risk to D1, D4 cetaceans, D1, D4 seals, D1, D4 seabirds through bycatch in pelagic trawls, ringnets, purse seines and pelagic drift nets.
- There is a moderate risk to D1, D4 cetaceans, D1, D4 seals, D1, D4 seabirds through targeted removal of herring, an important prey species.
- There is a moderate risk to D10 marine litter from pelagic trawls and drift nets due to abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear.

For Welsh Waters

- There is a Moderate risk to achieving GES for cetaceans, seals, seabirds (D1 & D4) through bycatch in pelagic trawls;
- There is a High risk to achieving GES for harbour porpoise (D1 & D4) and a Moderate risk to achieving GES for all other cetaceans (D1 & D4) through bycatch in fixed nets and drift nets;
- There is a Moderate risk to achieving GES for seals and seabirds (D1 & D4) through bycatch in fixed nets and drift nets;
- There is a Moderate risk to achieving GES for fish (D1 & D4) due to targeted removal and bycatch in pelagic trawls, fixed nets, and drift nets;
- There is a High risk to achieving GES for harbour porpoise (D1 & D4) through targeted removal of herring, an important prey species in pelagic trawls, fixed nets, and drift nets; and

- There is a Moderate risk of achieving GES for marine litter (D10) from pelagic trawls, fixed nets, and drift nets.

Priority Features

Priority features, the collective term for those features listed within the WANE¹⁰ habitats and species lists, were considered. The advice notes:

For habitat priority features:

- Negligible risk from pelagic trawls (screened out).
- Low risk from drift and set gill nets, as operated over limited period and location.

For species:

- Low risk to low/limited mobility species of bycatch and reduction in prey availability.
- Moderate risk to priority features within the species list (marine mammals, seabirds and fish) through bycatch and forage food removal.
- Drift nets and gillnets pose a low risk to habitat priority features as the Welsh and Mourne herring fisheries operate over a small spatial and temporal scale using these gears (screened out).
- Low/limited mobility species are at low risk of bycatch and reduction in prey availability from pelagic trawls, drift nets, and gillnets.
- There is potential moderate risk from the Irish Sea pelagic fishery (pelagic trawls, drift nets, and gillnets) to various marine priority features within the Species category (specifically mobile species, marine mammals, seabirds, and fish) primarily through direct bycatch and forage food removal pathways.

The advice provides recommendations to improve targeted data collection and explore enhanced ecosystem-based approaches for stock management, including how dependant predators are assessed and managed, engagement of stakeholders and the need for an integrated and joined up approach. These issues are considered further in the policy goals section.

Climate Change

As with other sectors, the fisheries sector is facing climate change issues and there is a need to collectively address these and co-develop solutions. DAERA recognises that fishing can be a low-carbon protein source and will support industry in reducing

¹⁰ Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

emissions and creating a more sustainable system, ensuring high quality, nutritional food and maintaining and improving food security.

The impacts of climate change are already apparent in the marine environment. We are already seeing warm water species increasing in abundance in UK waters while some cold-water species have decreased, with these trends expected to continue in the future. For species such as herring, it is likely that habitat suitability for the species will change, resulting in less favourable conditions for the species to live in UK waters in the longer term.

The expected changes in species distribution will have consequences for commercial fisheries, and are likely to affect fishing behaviours, fishing quotas and require adaptive management. The evidence base has made significant progress in the last decade with much greater focus on climate change impacts, adaptation and mitigation both from policy and industry. However, there is a level of uncertainty in future projections, and it is currently proving difficult to produce a robust forecast.

The UK fishery policy authorities have different targets relating to climate change and are developing plans to support the drive towards net zero. To support delivery of the climate change objective in the Act, the fisheries policy authorities will continue to take management decisions and negotiating positions that are evidence-based, setting fishing limits that are informed by the best available scientific advice, to support the ongoing resilience of fish stocks and the fishing fleets which rely on them. As additional research and evidence on climate change becomes available, UK fisheries policy authorities will work with the fishing industry to help them adapt to the impacts of climate change on commercially important species.

In addition to the impacts of climate change on fisheries, and the need to adapt to these changes, it is also important to consider climate change mitigation and net zero targets in relation to fishing.

The Climate Change Act 2008 (amended in 2019) sets a legally binding target of achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions (GHGE) by 2050 across the UK, with an ambition of a 78% reduction by 2035. To support these targets, all sectors, including the UK seafood sector, must develop plans to reduce their GHGE and use alternative clean energy sources.

This FMP also aligns with the obligations set out in the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022. The Act includes the requirement for DAERA to develop and publish the Northern Ireland Climate Action Plan and a Fisheries Sectoral Plan to support the achievement of net zero emissions by 2050. The actions within this plan contribute to the sectoral response by promoting low carbon fishing practices, improving fuel efficiency, and enhancing resilience to climate impacts.

Any future changes in plankton are highly likely to impact productivity and recruitment. There is also evidence of regime shifts with sprat which seem to have widescale temperature dependent distribution changes.

The findings from WK Irish (Irish Sea Benchmark Working Group) indicate possible future impacts of climate change. Adaptation also needs to be addressed, if climate change might impact stocks, seasonal behaviour/migration patterns, or the condition of spawning grounds (e.g. changing erosion patterns as a result of storminess and sea level rise).

Policy Goals

In developing policies for this FMP, the fisheries policy authorities have considered associated policies, international agreements, conservation advice and ongoing developments. They have identified additional evidence and measures needed to support the vision of this FMP and its objectives. Most actions within this FMP directly link to the fisheries objectives outlined below. While FMPs help achieve these objectives, other policy tools are also available, and this FMP has been developed within the wider context of Marine Plans and in consideration of the objectives and principles outlined in the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

In most cases further policy development work will be required for any new actions, which could include further evidence gathering or public consultation, along with the completion of appropriate impact assessments. This will form part of the FMP implementation phase. It should also be noted that overall fishing opportunities will still be determined through annual international negotiation. The stock may also be subject to different management measures in different areas of the sea by individual governments.

Fishing opportunities for the Irish Sea herring relevant to this FMP have previously been set above ICES advice. The actions within this FMP reflect this and are focused on restoring the stock above MSY levels, continuing to deliver the existing management approach, and identifying and delivering improvements to management where this is needed to meet the fisheries objectives.

Policy Goal 1: Harvest Irish Sea herring sustainably with biomass restored and maintained above the level capable of producing MSY

Rationale

The primary aim of FMPs is to set out policies designed to restore or maintain fish stocks to sustainable levels or contribute to the restoration or maintenance at sustainable levels. This is in line with section 6(3)(a) of the Act. As part of this, the role of fisheries managers is to help ensure stocks are harvested sustainably, to protect the long-term viability of the stocks and the fisheries that prosecute them.

Our understanding of a stock's status will change over time, as evidence and assessments are developed and revised. This may include how the scientific advice adapts to meet developing concerns, such as the inclusion of ecosystem management requirements.

Our approach is to fish the stock sustainably and in a manner that supports rebuilding to or maintaining the stock above a level capable of producing MSY in the longer term. At the time this FMP was produced there were concerns over the assessment and status of the herring stock. Actions should support sustainable fishing in that, as per the Act, they are environmentally sustainable in the long term and managed to achieve economic, social and employment benefits and contribute to food supplies. This approach is applied in the setting of TACs.

Actions to achieve this policy goal.

- Action 1.1 Continue to take an approach to TAC setting that is sustainable, informed by the best available scientific advice, and in line with an MSY approach.
- Action 1.2 Continue to work with EU partners through international negotiations with the aim of maintaining the sustainable harvesting of the stock and appropriate access.
- Action 1.3 Consider implementing fisheries management measures, including spawning ground closures, and development of appropriate gear technology.

Relevant Fisheries Act objectives

The relevant Fisheries Act objectives are the:

- sustainability objective
- precautionary objective
- scientific objectives
- ecosystem objective

Policy Goal 2: Use the best available scientific evidence to support management decisions relating to the setting of sustainable fishing opportunities.

Rationale

The assessment for Irish Sea herring last underwent an ICES benchmarking process in 2012, with the model updated in 2017. Subsequent revisions of the assessment due to post publication corrections have resulted in a change in the perception of the stock and the in-year reissuing of advice in both 2024 and 2025. Despite resulting questions of confidence in the current ICES assessment, sufficient evidence remains to enable the fisheries policy authorities to assess MSY.

ICES advice has increasingly highlighted the unquantifiable amount of mixing of mature herring from the Irish Sea, and Celtic Sea and other stocks. Significant scientific work is needed to further understand the nature of the mixing in the northern Irish Sea and the management implications for adjacent stocks. Developing more

comprehensive data collection for the Irish Sea herring fishery is also crucial to support a reliable time series, ensuring robust and sustainable management. The actions below are focused on building on the current data collection and scientific approach. This will ensure longer-term improvements are based on robust evidence. Where appropriate, the fisheries policy authorities should work together on the collection of, and sharing of, such scientific data.

Actions to achieve this policy goal

- Action 2.1 Ensure the best scientific advice is available for management decisions by contributing to and participating in the international stock assessment process, notably through the provision of high-quality data.
- Action 2.2 Seek a benchmarking process for the Irish Sea herring assessment as a UK priority.
- Action 2.3 Improve the evidence base for herring stocks including supporting work to determine if and how exploitation of fish stocks outside of the FMP area is affecting the Irish Sea herring stock within the FMP area and vice versa.
- Action 2.4 Consider evaluating current data gathering protocols to identify means of improving data provision, consistency, and identifying any critical data and knowledge gaps. Explore further options for assessing stock(s) or exploitation status.
- Action 2.5 Build partnerships between stakeholders and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) institutes to ensure that:
- research is targeted at answering management questions,
 - research is peer reviewed,
 - industry is engaged with and consulted,
 - data is made available to support evidence-based fishery management, and
 - both fishery-dependent and independent data are fully utilised.
- Action 2.6 Regularly engage with representative groups (including NIFPO and ANIFPO) on how best to utilise scientific evidence published by ICES. Consult directly with fishermen on firsthand data to improve stock assessment and fisheries management accuracy.

Relevant Fisheries Act objectives

The relevant Fisheries Act objectives are the:

- sustainability objective
- scientific evidence objective

Policy Goal 3: Deliver wider sustainable management by taking steps to minimise the impact of Irish Sea herring fisheries on the marine ecosystem.

Rationale

All forms of fishing have an impact on the marine environment and marine ecosystems to varying degrees, whether through the removal of target fish species, incidental bycatch of non-target fish or other marine species, or seabed interaction. Understanding and minimising these impacts, where possible, is an important part of delivering an ecosystem-based approach.

To mitigate the impact of Irish Sea herring fisheries on the marine ecosystem, it is important to reduce incidental bycatches. All catches must be recorded, and incidental catches of sensitive species minimised or, where possible, eliminated. Enhanced monitoring and reporting would improve data on bycatch. The implementation of a catch recording scheme across larger vessels could facilitate bycatch monitoring and reduction measures. Observers already record bycatches in the herring fishery.

Fisheries policy authorities should extend bycatch monitoring and reporting across the UK Irish Sea herring fleet to support the implementation of the UK Bycatch Mitigation Initiative.

Fishing activities should be managed using an ecosystem-based approach to ensure that any negative impacts on marine ecosystems are avoided or where adverse effect is unavoidable, it is minimised, and where appropriate mitigated.

Spawning habitats are vulnerable to disturbance and measures should be taken to ensure they are not impacted by damaging activities. Abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear is associated with sensitive species entanglements and ghost fishing; therefore, reduction of marine litter is welcomed.

Short term actions to achieve this policy goal

- Action 3.1 Fisheries policy authorities will allocate additional quota in line with the requirements of the Act, paying due regard to the need to incentivise low impact fishing.
- Action 3.2 Continue to implement fisheries management measures for existing MPAs and consider the need for any new actions. Measures should complement the conservation objectives.
- Action 3.3 Continue to work with industry and other stakeholders on a range of management initiatives such as:

- Protecting spawning and nursery areas of the stocks,
- Monitoring and review of the Irish Sea herring fishery to improve environmental and economic sustainability, and
- Rollout of REM to key parts of the UK fishing fleet to improve data and monitoring of catch and interactions with sensitive marine species.

Action 3.4 Support data collection under the UK Bycatch Mitigation Initiative to improve understanding of risk and frequency of sensitive species interactions; the effectiveness of existing mitigation and avoidance measures; and implement improvements. This includes the addition of seabirds and mammals to observer data collection forms, supporting the Seabird Conservation Strategy and Action Plan.

Long term actions to achieve this policy goal

- Action 3.5 Explore avenues to protect and enable recovery of habitats identified as important to herring from the pressures that pose risks to them, including certain fishing practices and other marine activities.
- Action 3.6 Continue to support where possible research to deliver an increased understanding of benthic disturbance and impacts. For example, seafloor litter, surface litter and beach litter.
- Action 3.7 Support and encourage existing good practice within the fishing industry in relation to the handling of sensitive and/or vulnerable marine species and the returning of them to the sea unharmed.
- Action 3.8 Support ongoing research initiatives to support the reuse and repurpose of end-of-life fishing gear back into the fishing industry.
- Action 3.9 Fisheries policy authorities should continue to engage with the Isle of Man Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFA) on important spawning grounds within Isle of Man territorial waters to ensure continued protection.

Relevant Fisheries Act objectives

The relevant Fisheries Act objectives are the:

- sustainability objective
- ecosystem objective
- bycatch objective

Policy Goal 4: Support the fishing industry to deliver socio-economic and cultural benefits for rural and coastal communities.

Rationale

As set out in the JFS and the Act, the UK fisheries policy authorities hold an ambition to support a modern, resilient, and environmentally sustainable and responsible fishing industry. This includes managing our fisheries sustainably by balancing environmental, economic, and social considerations, and managing the capacity of fleets so they are economically viable, but do not overexploit marine stocks. The JFS notes that the scope of an FMP may be extended, as appropriate, to consider wider fisheries management issues covering environmental, social, and economic concerns.

Sustainable Irish Sea herring fisheries are an opportunity to produce a high-quality food, primarily for direct human consumption, and as such provide the optimal economic return for the fleets and on shore businesses.

Short term and ongoing actions to achieve this policy goal

- Action 4.1 Continue to take account of socio-economic factors as part of the international negotiations and setting of fishing opportunities.
- Action 4.2 Continue to gather evidence on economic aspects of the fishery to ensure management decisions are informed by the best available evidence.
- Action 4.3 Encourage and support where possible innovation and growth of the sector.
- Action 4.4 Incentivise sustainable practices through the allocation of additional quota where evidence supports a sustainable application.

Long term actions to achieve this policy goal

- Action 4.5 Monitor and assess the Irish Sea herring fisheries to better understand the social and economic value provided to the coastal communities within the FMP area where appropriate.
- Action 4.6 Consider other opportunities where possible that support pelagic fisheries in response to external pressures and other marine uses.

Relevant Fisheries Act objectives

The relevant Fisheries Act objectives are the:

- equal access objective
- national benefit objective
- sustainability objective

Policy Goal 5: Minimise the impact of fish activities on climate change and support the fishing industry to adapt to climate change

Rationale

In accordance with the climate change objective of the Act and the statutory duties under the Climate Change Act 2008 and the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, this FMP aims to reduce or avoid the adverse effects of fishing on the climate and to support the industry to adapt to environmental change.

Our understanding of how fishing affects the climate and how climate change will affect fish stocks, ecosystems, and coastal communities is still evolving. We need better evidence regarding:

- How to reduce carbon emissions from fishing operations in a sustainable way, and
- The likely impacts of climate change on stock distribution, size composition, spawning grounds, plankton productivity, food webs and marine carbon stores.

There may be changes to the distribution and size composition of the Irish Sea herring stock, and adjacent herring stocks, as a result of local climatic shifts in environmental conditions, but the overall extent and impacts are not yet fully understood.

We also know that fishing vessels need to reduce fuel emissions in the future, and research and development and pilots are underway elsewhere.

As we move towards net zero, fishing can provide a high-protein and low carbon method of food production and contribute to food security. Even though fishing vessel emissions are a minor component of GHG emissions at the UK level, UK pelagic fisheries are several magnitudes lower in emissions per kilogram of landed product than other fisheries.

The actions set out below are not unique to the Irish Sea herring fishery. However, as our evidence base grows, we will better understand the specific impacts of climate change on Irish Sea herring, and the scale of change required to support vessels fishing for herring to reduce their emissions. In doing so, we can also adapt to changes in the Irish Sea herring stock and adjacent herring stocks, and general fishing conditions. These actions are likely to change over time and become more refined.

Reducing emissions in this sector will be achieved through developing initiatives in collaboration with industry. In Northern Ireland the policy will be to initially invest in the necessary research and development to create the innovative solutions needed to reduce emissions from the fishing fleet and minimise any adverse effects of fishing on climate change.

The fisheries policy authorities will seek to support any ongoing measures but is not directly introducing or delivering additional mitigation measures.

Short term actions to achieve this policy goal

Action 5.1 Ensure that Irish Sea herring is considered as appropriate within wider iterative research to examine the likely impacts of climate change on

herring fisheries, spawning areas, food sources and their connective links within the wider ecosystem.

- Action 5.2 Collaboration across government, industry, and academic sectors on initiatives to reduce the environmental impact of Irish Sea herring fisheries, including reducing CO2 emissions, greater fuel efficiency and alternative vessel fuels.
- Action 5.3 Continue to gather and develop evidence of the impacts that Irish Sea herring fisheries have on the marine environment (including CO2 emissions) through collaborative studies.

Long term actions to achieve this policy goal

- Action 5.4 Evaluate the most appropriate mechanism for integrating information on the effects of climate change on FMP stocks and fisheries into fisheries management, including stock assessments and advice on fishing opportunities.
- Action 5.5 Build on the work carried out by WKIrish on the impacts of climate change on zooplankton and the large zooplankton index, which was identified as a key driver in supporting herring stocks.
- Action 5.6 Evaluate and support the roll-out of new technologies and practices to decarbonise the fleet and build resilience, in line with the carbon budgets established under the Climate Change Act.

Relevant Fisheries Act objectives

The relevant Fisheries Act objectives are the:

- sustainability objective
- climate change objective

Implementation, Monitoring and Review

Implementation

This FMP sets out a vision and goals for this fishery, together with the policies and management interventions necessary to achieve the policy goals. This FMP proposes new actions and measures but does not implement them. An implementation phase will take place, during which delivery options will be further identified and prioritised.

Delivery options can include voluntary measures, licence conditions, national and regional byelaws and statutory regulations. This implementation phase will build on the existing evidence base, any action taken throughout the FMP's development, and the options discussed with stakeholders.

Indicators for monitoring the effectiveness of the plan

This is the first version of this FMP and sets out the first steps and longer-term vision necessary for sustainable management of this fishery. These plans will take time to develop and implement. They are intended to allow an adaptive approach, with regular review and refinement as new evidence emerges. They will support collaboration with the fishing sector and wider interests to ensure the sustainable management of this fishery.

The key indicator will be the health of the stock, which is annually reviewed as part of the TAC setting cycle. ICES stock assessments assess how fish populations have changed over time and the effect that fishing pressure is having on stocks. Performance against the key biological indicators will be considered, i.e. against reference points for MSY, fishing pressure and spawning stock biomass as indicators of sustainable activity, or the uptake of fishing opportunities against agreed TACs.

Other action specific indicators will be developed as the plans are implemented. Appropriate monitoring will be put into place as these are implemented.

Review

As set out in the Act, this FMP must be reviewed when appropriate, and at least every six years. This formal review will assess how the FMP has performed in terms of meeting the objectives of the Act. The findings of these reviews will inform the development of subsequent versions of the FMP. Reviews can be taken sooner, for example, if an indicator identifies the need for review. The decision to review earlier will be taken by the fisheries policy authorities.

In addition, the report prepared and published every three years in relation to the JFS under section 11 of the Act will also report on the extent to which the policies contained in this FMP have been implemented and have affected the stock levels for the relevant FMP stocks.