Title: Impact Assessment of Irish Sea demersal and pelagic Fisheries Management Plans.	**Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)**
	Date: February 2026
	Type of measure: Policy
Lead department or agency: **Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs**	**Stage:** Consultation
	Source of intervention: UK Regulation
Other departments or agencies: **Welsh Government** **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**	**Contact details:** Sea Fisheries Policy
	Rathkeltair House
	Downpatrick

Summary Intervention and Options

What is the problem under consideration? Why is government intervention necessary?

This RIA is in support of two proposed Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) for the Northern Irish, English and Welsh waters of the Irish Sea, one for a pelagic stock (herring) and one for demersal stocks. DAERA is the co-ordinating authority for these joint FMPs, developed in conjunction with Welsh Government and the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The fisheries covered by these management plans was worth some £20.9 million in 2024 at first point of sale. This is significant value for rural and coastal communities, supporting additional onshore services. Government intervention in the management of fisheries is considered necessary to avoid over-exploitation of a common pool resource. A lack of intervention is likely to result in the classic economic problem of 'the tragedy of the commons', individual fishers seek to maximise their catch without being able to address cumulative impacts on the stock health, leading to overexploitation of the stock. Many of the Irish Sea stocks are considered to be in a poor biological state increasing the risk of collapse.

Intervention through the FMP provides the framework to manage fishing activity sustainably and avoid this outcome. In addition, a healthy marine environment generates wider social and environmental benefits that are not captured by the market. Government action is therefore required to ensure that fishery resources are managed in a way that delivers optimal overall benefit to society. The Fisheries Act 2020 ('the Act') sets a requirement for and provides the framework to manage UK fisheries. Fisheries policy authorities must prepare and publish FMPs which will set out how each administration will support sustainable management of the public fishery resource.

What are the policy objectives and the intended effects?

The policy objective is to restore, and/or maintain the fish stocks at sustainable levels, and therefore support the intended effect of plans to achieving economic, social and employment benefits and contribute to the availability of food supplies.

The Fisheries Act 2020 section 6 (3) requires that each FMP must, following determination if there is sufficient scientific evidence to make an assessment of the fish stocks maximum sustainable yield, specify policies for restoring or maintaining the stock at sustainable levels. For the stocks in question there is sufficient scientific evidence to make this assessment, and this sets the overarching policy objective.

What policy options have been considered, including any alternatives to regulation? Please justify preferred option (further details in Evidence Base) (10 lines maximum) There is a legislative requirement to develop FMPs for the stocks and areas identified in the JFS. FMPs are plans and do not result in new legislation upon publication. The policies and measures within them must be implemented and may include both existing or new regulations, technical measures, or non-statutory actions such as research plans, voluntary agreements, or codes of conduct. On agreement of the plans policy goals any actions resulting measures will be developed further, FMPs as plans, have no direct monetised impacts. The implementation of specific individual measures, whether by statutory or non-statutory mechanisms, will have their own impact assessments completed separately At this stage only two options are considered – 1) Do nothing - Business as Usual - (no FMPs and co-ordinated management measures developed) or 2) Develop and implement FMPs. As the full actions are not yet determined the benefits and costs cannot be fully quantified.

Will the policy be reviewed? Yes	**If applicable, set review date:** Mandatory review every 6 yrs unless considered appropriate to do so sooner. Individual measures may warrant a shorter specific review period. The report prepared and published every 3 years in relation to the JFS under section 11 of the Fisheries Act 2020 will also report on the on the extent to which the policies contained in this FMP have been implemented.

Cost of Preferred (or more likely) Option		
Total outlay cost for business £m	**Total net cost to business per year** £m	**Annual cost for implementation by Regulator** £m
Unknown at this time	No cost at this time	No additional cost at this time

Does Implementation go beyond minimum EU requirements?			**YES** ☒	**NO** ☐
Is this measure likely to impact on trade and investment?			**YES** ☒	**NO** ☐
Are any of these organisations in scope?	**Micro** Yes ☒ No ☐	**Small** Yes ☒ No ☐	**Medium** Yes ☒ No ☐	**Large** Yes ☒ No ☐

The final RIA supporting legislation must be attached to the Explanatory Memorandum and published with it.

Approved by: Date:

Summary: Analysis and Evidence — Policy Option 1

Description: Option 1) **Do nothing – Business As Usual- Do not introduce FMPs for the Irish Sea**

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 1)

Costs (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Cost** (Present Value)
Low	Optional		Optional	Optional
High	Optional		Optional	Optional
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups'

Doing nothing would leave DAERA, and the other fisheries policy authorities in breach of the Fisheries Act 2020 and the Joint Fisheries Statement.

The absence of clear policies focused on sustainable fisheries will result in an increased risk of over exploitation of fish stocks and corresponding loss of fishing opportunities and resulting impacts on onshore businesses. Failure to actively adapt to changing socio-economic and environmental conditions could result in loss of public resources and negatively impact coastal communities and onshore businesses. The fisheries under these plans are currently valued at around £20.9 million per annum to the UK fleet at first point of landing, before value added processing.

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

Failure to adequately manage the fishing opportunities and support fleet adaption to changing socio-economic and environmental conditions would risk significant impacts to the fishery, onshore businesses, compromising long-term sustainability and health of the fish stocks with subsequent risks to any dependant coastal community.

In the absence of FMPs, and a clear policy direction or long term management plan there would be reduced evidence of Departmental policy and no collaborative approach to addressing the key management issues in the Irish Sea. Both would result in reputational

Benefits (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Benefit** (Present Value)
Low	Optional		Optional	Optional
High	Optional		Optional	Optional
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

Existing management resulted in landings of £19.4 million in 2024 by the UK fleet in the Irish Sea (from the stocks under consideration). This has not been maintained in 2026.

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

The lack of strengthened / new, evidence-based management would increase the likelihood of stocks being overexploited with insufficient protection for the wider marine environment and be legally non-compliant.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines There are uncertainties over the costs and benefits of a 'do nothing' approach - some fisheries may continue with no immediate impact, others will continue to be subject to large fluctuations (for example a £6 million estimated decrease in fishing opportunities in 2026 as a result of scientific advice on stock change) or long-term decline. Other fishery policies could be applied but would be more fragmented and a less coherent approach risks unequitable outcomes between the fleets concerned.				

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs: N/A	**Benefits: N/A**	**Net: unknown**		

Cross Border Issues (Option)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines Not introducing FMPs would be in consistent with other parts of the Uk were plans are already in place or under development. EU Fisheries management is based upon the Common Fisheries Policy and already includes a number of multi annual plans linked to stock development. ~~FMP fisheries are managed in line with UK fisheries legislation and former EU legislation which now forms part of assimilated law. Economic aims are less quantified.~~

Summary: Analysis and Evidence — Policy Option 2

Description: **Develop and implement FMPs**

ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Option 2)

Costs (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Cost** (Present Value)
Low	Optional		Optional	Optional
High	Optional		Optional	Optional
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

The FMPs by themselves do not introduce any direct costs but are the framework for developing and implementing actions. Once adopted the specific actions agreed within each FMP will need to be further costed and assessed prior to implementation. There may therefore be a cost in achieving compliance, or adoption at this stage.

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

The full costs (monetised and non-monetised) associated with implementing the FMP cannot be determined until the final policies and actions are determined. There may be other costs arising due to necessary changes in fishing behaviour that cannot be clarified fully at this time.

Benefits (£m)	**Total Transitional (Policy)** (constant price)	Years	**Average Annual (recurring)** (excl. transitional) (constant price)	**Total Benefit** (Present Value)
Low	Optional		Optional	Optional
High	Optional		Optional	Optional
Best Estimate				

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

The FMPs will support sustainable fishing and seek to restore and maintain stocks that are currently considered overfished. Realising forgone fishing opportunities would be expected to result in maintaining and supporting improving on the £20.9 million value (in 2025).

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups' Maximum 5 lines

Sustainable fisheries will support onshore businesses and maintain employment in the sector. Actions that aid adaption to climate change or support marine protected areas and the achievement of Good Environmental Status will also contribute to wider environmental goals.

Key Assumptions, Sensitivities, Risks Maximum 5 lines

Benefits can only be recognised if the policies developed within the FMP framework are correctly applied. To support implementation of the FMPs a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework is being developed. As noted above - in addition each FMP is subject to mandatory review (as a minimum, every 6 years)

BUSINESS ASSESSMENT (Option)

Direct Impact on business (Equivalent Annual) £m				
Costs:	**Benefits:**	**Net:**		

Cross Border Issues (Option)

How does this option compare to other UK regions and to other EU Member States (particularly Republic of Ireland) Maximum 3 lines.

The EU approach to the Common Fisheries Policy similarly supports adoption of long-term management plans for stocks and seeks to place fisheries management within an ecosystem-based context.

Evidence Base

Introduction

These two Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) under consideration are:

- The FMP for Irish Sea pelagic (Herring) for Northern Irish, English and Welsh waters, and

- The FMP for Irish Sea demersal stocks for Northern Irish, English and Welsh waters, which covers the stocks of cod, haddock, whiting, sole, plaice and the Functional Units of *Nephrops*[1] within the Irish Sea.

This RIA is part of the development of the FMPs for the Irish Sea, and is being undertaken alongside a public consultation on the content of each FMP. Any additional evidence identified will be reviewed prior to publication.

Policy Rationale and objective

These are two of the 43 FMPs set out in the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) as required by the Fisheries Act 2020 (the Act). The fisheries policy authorities have a statutory obligation to prepare and publish the FMPs in accordance with the timescales set out in the JFS.

Policies in an FMP set out both the short-term actions and longer-term vision for the management of the fishery. FMPs provide an obligatory framework for fisheries management and detail the policies to secure the long-term sustainability of our fish stocks for current and future generations.

The primary objective of the FMPs are to set out the policies and actions to restore or maintain the relevant fish stocks at sustainable levels. (Section 6 of the Act).

FMPs are required to specify whether there is sufficient evidence to assess a stock's MSY. Where there is insufficient evidence, the FMP must specify the steps (if any) that the relevant authority or authorities propose to take to obtain the scientific evidence necessary to enable an assessment of a stock's MSY. If no steps are proposed, the FMP will explain the reasons for that, and how sustainable limits or alternative proxies will be established.

The fisheries policy authorities prepared the list of FMPs in Annex A for the purposes of meeting the obligation set out in section 2(1)(b) of the Act.

The design and structure of FMPs directly relate to the sustainability, precautionary, scientific evidence, ecosystem and equal access fisheries objectives by delivering sustainable fisheries, the collection and use of scientific evidence and application to all vessels fishing in the area covered.

FMPs may also address wider issues in fisheries management depending upon the specific goals or targets of each plan and may contribute to one or more of the remaining fisheries objectives.

Fishing levels for the stocks within these two FMPs are set following international negotiations with the EU. Currently (based on the scientific advice for catches in 2026) the stocks of

[1] *Nephrops* is *Nephrops Norvegicus*, or Norway lobster

herring, haddock, cod, plaice, whiting and the western *Nephrops* stock are not fished within sustainable levels.

The FMPs must therefore set out the policies and actions that will seek to restore the stocks to sustainable levels and ensure viable and economically and historically important fisheries can be maintained.

In 2024, the Irish Sea pelagic fishery for herring had a first-sale value of £4.49 million. The demersal stocks covered by this plan—caught in the Irish Sea by UK vessels—were valued at approximately £15.1 million at first point of sale. These figures represent landings across the entire Irish Sea, including catches from Isle of Man and Irish territorial waters, with full details provided in the evidence sections of the respective FMPs.

From 2025 to 2026 there is a decrease in the overall fishing opportunities, which has been potentially estimated to be approximately £6 million, at the first point of sale based on average sale price. This represents some 30% of the overall value of the fishery previously. There are a number of causes for this year-on-year change, linked to overfishing, ongoing environmental changes and even issues with the scientific assessment (both process and evidence).

The policies developed within the FMPs are to be consistent with, and supportive of, the wider achievement of the fisheries objectives set out in the Act, the policies contained within the JFS and other legislative commitments. This means they will seek to achieve Maximum Sustainable Yield for the individual stocks, identify evidence gaps and consider research for the relevant species to enhance current management and support sustainable fishing. Policies will also consider evidence of the broader interactions between the operation of fisheries and the marine environment, again seeking to ensure sufficient data that will inform mitigation and management actions.

To ensure effective ongoing management of the pelagic and demersal fisheries in the Irish Sea, the FMPs identify five or six policies (see relevant FMP for details) focussed on key management priorities. These policies and the individual actions that sit under each policy, are the subject of the consultation and will be revised further prior to publication to ensure realistic and measurable outputs.

Options considered

While the FMPs will include a range of policies and actions, these will not be implemented until after publication of the FMP. The FMPs do not introduce any legislative changes by themselves. The specific measures will need to be further developed, including measure-specific implementation strategies. This may require further appropriate development including additional consultation, evidence and/or input from stakeholders and policymakers.

In the absence of regulation, or finalised policies and actions the RIA cannot at this time include monetised or fully quantified costs to businesses. Instead, only the key strategic outcomes have been presented.

As specific actions are implemented, further impact assessments (by all relevant authorities) will be completed that includes a more complete assessment of the monetised costs to business associated with that action.

The options to be considered for this Impact Assessment are therefore;

Option 1: Do nothing - Business as Usual - do not introduce FMPs; and
Option 2: Develop and implement FMPs

Option 1 – Do nothing - Business as usual- Do not introduce FMPs.

- DAERA and the other joint relevant authorities would fail to meet the legal obligations under the Fisheries Act. Both the plans under consideration here are a legislative requirement of the Act and the JFS, meaning that governments must act to introduce the FMPs or be legally non-compliant.

- The UK would also be seen to be neglecting their responsibilities (and commitments) to effectively manage this public resource and the wider marine environment.

- Fishing opportunities would continue to be set each year on the basis of scientific advice and negotiations. This process by itself offers inconsistent opportunity to consider social-economic needs.

- Ongoing risk of stocks being overexploited as there would be no proactive and systematic approaches to address gaps in the evidence, to improve the assessments, and to ensure the long-term sustainability (in line with the Act). of the fisheries.

- Failure to adapt to changing socio-economic and environmental conditions will result in increasing mismatch between fishing opportunities and fishing activity, reducing the sustainable use of a public resource and will negatively impact coastal communities and on-shore businesses.

- There would be no additional measures to improve environmental protection and develop ecosystem-based management of the fisheries.

- As a result of the above points there may be decreased consumer confidence in sustainable management of the fishery and potential loss of retail price. However it must be noted that FMPs do not provide for a sustainability accreditation by themselves.

- This approach would not result in any direct cost to businesses as a result of new legislation or other measures.

- This approach would at best maintain existing risks of overfishing and the subsequent foregoing of fishing opportunities from stocks being maintained in a poor biological status.

Option 2 – Develop and implement FMPs.

- Implementing FMPs will involve developing, in collaboration with stakeholders, policies aimed at maintaining or restoring fish stocks. These policies will ensure stocks are managed using an ecosystem based approach, supported by clear evidence and defined pathways for monitoring and improvement .

- This approach will support sustainable fishing and help secure long-term economic and social benefits. In particular, it is expected to enhance the long-term viability of fishing fleets, support on-shore businesses, and provide environmental safeguards through sustainable stock management.

- The FMPs take account of environmental impacts and management needs and are likely to generate environmental benefits, including the development of a stronger evidence base to inform future decisions.

- They will provide a structured basis for balancing short-term fleet viability with the longer-term need to protect and rebuild fish stocks.

- FMPs themselves will not introduce new regulatory measures at the point of publication and therefore will not impose immediate additional costs. However, future actions arising from the FMPs may carry costs. These will need to be assessed as measures are developed and their impacts become clearer prior to implementation.

- Further environmental benefits arising from maintaining resilient fish stocks and healthier marine habitats are anticipated, though these cannot be quantified at this stage.

Conclusion

The preferred option is Option 2 - to proceed to develop and implement Fisheries Management Plans.

Sectors/ Groups affected

The following sectors have been identified as groups who will be affected by the proposal:

- UK demersal fishing industry and the Northern Ireland pelagic fleet, this will include small and micro businesses.
- Wider UK and International demersal fishing fleets operating in UK waters.
- UK and ROI retailers.