

The Fisheries Bill: an opportunity for global leadership in sustainable UK fisheries management

Briefing for parliamentarians and policy makers
April 2018

Introduction

As we prepare to leave the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), the development of new domestic fisheries legislation is a once in a generation opportunity to establish the UK, including all its constituent nations, as world leaders in sustainable fisheries management. This is an aspiration behind which all stakeholders, including the fisheries sector, are united. The upcoming Fisheries Bill should be an important first step towards achieving the UK government's ambition to leave the natural environment in a better state.

The UK Marine Policy Statement confirms that the UK and devolved governments have a shared vision of "clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas". As the UK prepares to leave the EU, it is imperative that the governments work together to create new fisheries laws that deliver this vision and put sustainability at the heart of fisheries management.

Future fisheries legislation (whether developed by the UK government or devolved administrations) should fit within a framework of a wider marine policy that aims for recovered and biodiverse seas. Thriving fish stocks are critical for a profitable, sustainable and prosperous industry and, ultimately, fisheries are a common public resource and should be managed for the public benefit.

Greener UK's vision is for thriving, sustainable fisheries, set within a healthy marine environment, that support coastal communities and provide consumers with a high quality, sustainable product.

To achieve this, legislation must enable fisheries management to be:

1. Holistic

Fish should be managed as a public resource and an integral part of healthy ocean ecosystems, taking account of the cumulative impact of human activities on the environment.

2. Sustainable

All fish stocks should be restored and maintained above biomass levels capable of producing the maximum sustainable yield.

3. Science-led

The best available science should underpin fisheries management decisions.

4. Accountable

Fisheries should be fully transparent, with target and non-target catches fully

documented, infringements properly enforced and fisheries effectively held to account.

5. Fair

Fishing opportunities need to be allocated on the basis of transparent and objective environmental, social and economic criteria, in a way that encourages the most sustainable fishing.

6. Equivalent

The same high environmental standards should apply to all vessels fishing in UK waters.

The Fisheries Bill

The 2017 Queen's Speech confirmed that the UK government would introduce a Fisheries Bill with the limited aim "to control access to the UK's waters and set fishing quotas once we have left the EU". This leaves the remainder of the CFP, including environmental and sustainability legislation, to be transposed as part of the EU (Withdrawal) Bill. To seize this opportunity to create bespoke, fit for purpose fishing legislation and establish the UK as a global leader in sustainable fisheries management, the Fisheries Bill should be expanded to include a broad purpose of ecosystem based fisheries management.

A broad purpose should set out that:

Fish are a public resource and must be managed for long term sustainability, using precautionary and ecosystem based approaches to minimise and, where possible, eliminate the negative impacts of fishing on the marine environment in a way that is consistent with national and international legislation.

The UK government has promised a white paper to be laid prior to the Bill which, as we understand it, will seek to set a vision for the future of fisheries beyond the limited scope of the bill. Following a consultation period on the White Paper, it is likely there will be a short consultation specifically on the contents of the Fisheries Bill.

Throughout this consultation period, Greener UK will be calling for certain guiding principles to be included. We have prepared legally drafted amendments to support this, as it is our belief that the core principles of sustainable fisheries management must be addressed in primary rather than secondary legislation. There is a risk that the protection and management of our waters will continue to be subject to CFP rules, frozen in time or changed with limited parliamentary scrutiny via the Withdrawal Bill process. Enshrining these provisions should be a priority to ensure that the overarching direction for fisheries management will secure and rebuild healthy fish stocks and support a healthy marine environment.

How you can help

- Support Greener UK's proposals for sustainable fisheries and ensure that this once in a generation opportunity to embed principles of sustainable fisheries management into fisheries legislation is seized.
- Use the information given here to inform your speeches as the Fisheries Bill is debated through Parliament. We would be happy to provide more information (details below).
- Respond to the government's upcoming white paper.

For more information, please contact:

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Greener UK is a coalition of 13 major environmental organisations united in the belief that leaving the EU is a pivotal moment to restore and enhance the UK's environment.

Greener UK is also working with the Marine Conservation Society.



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