

## The Fisheries Bill:

### A case for fish as a public resource and part of the wider marine ecosystem

**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.**

#### Fish as a public resource

There is a finite amount of fish available to catch each year and those who currently hold quota shares have developed a legitimate expectation that they will continue to have the same right to fish forever. However, this is a barrier to entry for new fishers and for allocating quota as an incentive for sustainable practices or other societal goals. Protecting the environment for future fishers, fishing communities and public benefit should be an essential component of fisheries management. The only way to ensure this is if the government declares that fisheries are a public resource. It should then reallocate fishing rights on a temporal basis rather than in perpetuity, while also ensuring a quota is set aside to be allocated specifically to those who meet socioeconomic and environmental criteria for the benefit of society.

#### Fisheries and marine ecosystems

Some fishing activities continue to have a negative impact on marine ecosystems, whether through damage to seabed habitats, bycatch of non-target protected species, such as whales, dolphins and seabirds or changes to food webs resulting from over exploitation. But examples from around the world show that fisheries and conservation management measures can combat these pressures, with benefits to both people and wildlife.

Remedial measures include:

#### Spatial management of fisheries

Sensitive habitats can be protected by excluding damaging fishing activities.

A key spatial measure for habitat protection is the designation and management of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Detailed studies in Lyme Bay (Dorset) have shown seabed community recovery following a reduction in fishing pressure.

Protecting areas important for commercial fish species, especially spawning grounds and nursery areas, can deliver fisheries benefits. The 'Trevose Box' off the north coast of Cornwall protects spawning grounds from fishing for key months of the year.

Effective spatial management of fisheries requires the following:

- **completion of the MPA network** around the UK, together with assessment of fishing impacts and effective management put in place;
- development of criteria for **identifying and protecting essential fish habitats**, integrating these with MPAs to create a single habitat protection network;

- effective **integration of fisheries into sea use planning**

### Eliminating bycatch of non-target species

UK-wide, it is estimated that around 1,500 dolphins and porpoises die annually as bycatch, and many others suffer traumatic injury. For seabirds, coastal gill-nets and the baited hooks of longlines pose the greatest hazard. Elsewhere in the world, however, such bycatch has been dramatically reduced or even eliminated with mitigation measures, through simple technical adaptations of fishing gear. With the UK leaving the EU, a demonstrable act of global leadership would be to draw up an effective bycatch strategy that applies this best practice and caters for all protected species by:

- having a strong objective to minimise and, where possible, eliminate bycatch;
- requiring vessels to adopt the mitigation measures needed to achieve this goal;
- ensuring funding for research to develop and tailor measures to the needs of the fleets; and
- ensuring that bycatch is scientifically monitored and reported across all relevant fleets, both in domestic waters and abroad on the UK's Overseas Territories.

### Risk

We all rely on healthy marine ecosystems. **Fish are an integral part of the marine environment and the damaging impacts of fishing activity should be addressed where they occur.** This is vital to ensure the future of the very system upon which a thriving fishing industry depends. The effects of overfishing are easy to see, its impacts on the wider ecosystem less so. But we are already seeing important seabed habitats destroyed, whales and dolphins killed in nets and the balance of food webs shifted.

**We must consider the impacts of fisheries management on the whole of the marine environment before it is too late.**

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