



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# Call for Evidence on future management of Sandeels and Norway pout

22 October 2021



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
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Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**  
[www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

We are the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We're responsible for improving and protecting the environment, growing the green economy, sustaining thriving rural communities and supporting our world-class food, farming and fishing industries.

We work closely with our 33 agencies and arm's length bodies on our ambition to make our air purer, our water cleaner, our land greener and our food more sustainable. Our mission is to restore and enhance the environment for the next generation, and to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.



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## Foreword

The UK Marine Strategy and the Fisheries Act 2020 highlight the importance of taking an ecosystem-based approach to the management of fisheries and the wider marine environment.

Forage fish such as sandeels and Norway pout play a key role in the health of the wider marine ecosystem, acting as a food source for many commercial fish stocks and vulnerable marine species including seabirds, cetaceans and seals. For example, there is evidence that increased fishing pressure on certain North Sea sandeel stocks is linked to a reduction of breeding success of kittiwakes.

Sandeels are highly sensitive to changing environmental conditions and the increased effects of climate change is negatively impacting on the health of the North Sea sandeel stocks. This additional pressure combined with the continued removal of sandeels through industrial fishing methods could result in further declines of threatened and vulnerable species in the wider marine environment which rely on sandeels as a food source. For 2021 the UK has not allocated sandeel or Norway pout quotas.

Despite the introduction of management measures aimed at increasing the resilience to the stocks, there is limited evidence of either the recovery of the relevant stocks or the wider ecosystem as a result of these measures. This is hindering the UK's ability to reach Good Environmental Status of seabirds and marine food webs within the UK Marine Strategy. As a result, urgent action is required to protect stocks and the wider ecosystem from these increasing pressures.

As an independent coastal state, the UK Fisheries Administrations will consider new management measures such as fishing restrictions to provide additional resilience and protection for the North Sea sandeel and Norway pout stocks and the wider ecosystem. We want to gather further evidence to better understand the interaction between these stocks and the ecosystem, whether new measures (including restrictions on fishing these stocks) would be beneficial and if so, what the most appropriate measures would be.

You can respond to the Call for Evidence through Citizen Space. Alternatively, please submit your responses by email or post.

## Contact details

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## Executive summary

The UK Fisheries Administrations (Defra, Marine Scotland, Welsh Government and DAERA) are working together to seek evidence and analysis which will inform decision making on the future management of sandeels and Norway pout in UK waters. Evidence can come in many forms, including numerical data, case studies, literature reviews, personal experiences, or reports and documents - it can be new or historic. Please provide full references for any documentation discussed.

We are looking for advice on the following 4 areas:

- The value of sandeels and Norway pout to the marine ecosystem
- Ecological, Economic and Social impact of the sandeel and Norway pout fisheries
- Change of management approaches for sandeel and Norway pout stocks
- Ecological, Economic and Social impact of introduction of restrictions in these fisheries

This call for evidence is being conducted in line with the Cabinet Office [Consultation Principles](#).

If you have any comments or complaints about the process, please email [consultation.coordinator@defra.gov.uk](mailto:consultation.coordinator@defra.gov.uk).

## Confidentiality and data protection

A summary of responses to this consultation will be published on GOV.UK. An annex to the consultation summary will list all of the organisations that responded but will not include personal names, addresses or other contact details.

Defra may publish the content of your response to this consultation to make it available to the public without your personal name and private contact details (for example, home address or email address).

If you click on 'Yes' in response to the question asking if you would like anything in your response to be kept confidential, you are asked to state clearly what information you would like to be kept as confidential and explain your reasons for confidentiality. The reason for this is that information in responses to this consultation may be subject to release to the public or other parties in accordance with the access to information law (these are primarily the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs), the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA)). We have obligations, mainly under the EIRs, FOIA and DPA, to disclose information to particular recipients or to the public in certain circumstances. In view of this, your explanation of your reasons for requesting confidentiality for all or part of your response would help us balance these obligations for disclosure against any obligation of confidentiality. If we receive a request for the information that you have provided in your response to this consultation,

we will take full account of your reasons for requesting confidentiality of your response, but we cannot guarantee that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances.

If you click on 'No' in response to the question asking if you would like anything in your response to be kept confidential, we will be able to release the content of your response to the public, but we won't make your personal name and private contact details publicly available.

Responses will be shared in full with the Fisheries Administrations in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales. In addition, there may be occasions when Defra will share the information you provide in response to the consultation, including any personal data with external analysts. This is for the purposes of consultation response analysis and provision of a report of the summary of responses only.

Please find our latest privacy notice uploaded as a related document alongside our consultation document.

## Part 1: about you

**Question 1: What is your name?**

**Question 2: What is your email address?**

**Question 3: What is your organisation?**

If you're replying as an individual, please type 'individual'

Representative groups are asked to give a summary of the people and organisations they represent and where relevant who else they have consulted in formulating their responses.

**Question 4: Would you like your response to be confidential (required)?**

**If yes, please tell us why.**

## Section 1: Sandeels

### Part 1: The Ecological Value of Sandeels

Sandeels have been shown to play a crucial role in the marine food web<sup>1</sup>. The health and abundance of sandeel stocks has been linked to increased breeding success of seabirds, such

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<sup>1</sup> *Forage fish: From ecosystems to markets. Annual Review of environment and resources* (Alder et. al 2008)

as kittiwakes, and the health and abundance of other marine species including cetaceans and seals<sup>2</sup>.

Given the importance of sandeels to the wider ecosystem, the UK has not allocated sandeel quota this year and a large part of the sandeel fishing grounds within UK waters are already closed to fishing. We would like to gather further evidence in relation to the ecological value of sandeels in the marine environment in general, and in specific stock areas (for example, sandeel management area 4, sandeel management area 1r).

**Question 5: Please provide evidence on the role of sandeels:**

**a) in the marine environment.**

**b) in relation to other fish stocks (including as bycatch) and other marine species,**

**c) in the marine ecosystem generally.**

## Part 2: Sandeel fishing in UK waters

The fishing of North Sea sandeel stocks has been linked to reduced breeding success of kittiwakes and other seabirds<sup>3</sup>. The continued removal of sandeels by fishing from an ecosystem that relies on them could result in further declines to vulnerable species. We are seeking more evidence on how sandeel fishing affects sandeel stocks as well as the impact of sandeel fishing on the wider marine ecosystem.

**Question 6: Please provide evidence of the effect of sandeel fishing on the marine environment and ecosystem.**

## Part 3: The social and economic impacts of sandeel fishing

The fishing industry plays an important role in society and livelihoods in coastal communities. We are seeking further evidence to understand the social and economic role of sandeel fisheries in UK waters. This could include the impact of sandeel fisheries on the wider fishing industry, aquaculture, offshore wind development, processing plants, exporters and coastal communities as well as other sectors.

**Question 7: Identifying the sectors involved or impacted, please provide any evidence on the social and economic impacts of sandeel fishing.**

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<sup>2</sup> *Fishing mortality versus natural predation on diurnally migrating sandeels* (Englerhard, et.al 2014)

<sup>3</sup> *OSPAR Commission Background document for Black-legged kittiwakes* (OSPAR, 2009)

## Part 4: Future management of the sandeel fishery in UK waters

There are already a number of restrictions in place to protect sandeel stocks within UK waters. These include:

- a closure in UK waters of sandeel area 4
- the exclusion of waters within 6 nautical miles of the United Kingdom baselines at Shetland, Fair Isle and Foula
- a restriction on the mesh sizes that may be used in the fishery

We are seeking further evidence on the effects of these existing restrictions, and in particular the impact that they have on the marine ecosystem. We would like to understand both what has, and what has not been affected by these measures to inform future action on the fishery.

**Question 8a: Please provide any evidence you have on the effect of the current management measures in place to limit the sandeel fisheries in UK waters.**

Additional management measures to restrict sandeel fishing in the North Sea may be needed to improve the resilience of the North Sea sandeel stocks and the wider ecosystem, including various protected species such as kittiwakes. We are seeking to understand any benefits of further restrictions on fishing for sandeels within UK waters. In addition, considerations are currently being made around possible management measures in the Fisheries Administrations' own waters.

We are particularly looking for evidence in relation to different types of restriction, the geographical scope of restrictions and the timing of restrictions. For example, a ban on sandeel fishing in UK waters, a phased reduction in sandeel fishing in UK waters or additional area closures of the sandeel fisheries.

**Question 8b: Please provide evidence on what measures could be introduced to improve the resilience of North Sea sandeel stocks and the wider ecosystem.**

**Question 8c: Would measures to further limit or manage the sandeel fisheries in UK waters be beneficial? What would be the impacts of these measures on the wider marine ecosystem or coastal communities?**

**For example, which of these measures (such as spatial restrictions) would be most beneficial to the wider marine ecosystem?**

## Section 2: Norway pout

### Part 1: The ecological value of Norway pout

Similarly to sandeels, Norway pout is an important forage fish and component of the wider marine food web. It may also have a role to play in achieving Good Environmental Status under the UK Marine Strategy. We are seeking further evidence about the role of Norway pout in the marine ecosystem and the species which rely on Norway pout within their diet.



**Question 9: Please provide evidence on the role of Norway pout:**

- a) in the marine environment
- b) in relation to other fish stocks (including as bycatch) and other marine species
- c) in the marine ecosystem generally

## **Part 2: The Ecological impacts of Norway pout fishing**

Total Allowable Catches (TACs) are frequently set unilaterally for Norway pout, which often results in a TAC above the scientific assessment of Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY).

**Question 10: Please provide any evidence you have that demonstrates the ecological impact of Norway Pout fishing.**

## **Part 3: The social and economic impacts of Norway pout fishing in UK waters**

The fishing industry plays an important role in society and livelihoods in coastal communities. We are seeking further evidence to understand the social and economic impacts of Norway pout fisheries in UK waters. This could include the impact of Norway pout fisheries on the wider fishing industry, aquaculture, offshore wind development, processing plants, exporters and coastal communities as well as other sectors.

**Question 11: Identifying the sectors involved or impacted, please provide any evidence on the social and economic impacts of the Norway pout fishing.**

## **Part 4: Future management of the UK Norway pout fishery**

Based on their role as a forage fish in the marine ecosystem and large size of the Norway pout fishery, it would be useful to understand what measures/ limits could be considered for the fishery to ensure their value to the marine food web is protected.

**Question 12: Please provide any evidence on ecological benefits that could be delivered by new measures or limits on the Norway pout fishery in UK waters.**

**Question 13: Which forms of management could deliver the greatest ecological benefits? For example:**

- a) a ban on Norway pout fishing in UK waters
- b) a phased reduction of Norway pout fishing in UK waters
- c) area closures of the Norway pout fishery