



## **Rebuilding our Fisheries for Thriving Communities, Nature and Climate**

### **Future Fisheries Alliance Parliamentary Briefing on the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS), February 2022:**

#### **Summary:**

- On 18 January 2022, the UK Government and devolved administrations published the [draft Joint Fisheries Statement \(JFS\)](#) with the final JFS due to be published in November 2022, setting the future direction of UK fisheries management. It is a requirement of the Fisheries Act 2020 and aims to make sure that policies deliver a thriving, sustainable fishing industry and healthy marine environment.
- Following the requirements of The Fisheries Act 2020, the administrations have now specified a **scrutiny period for the UK parliaments and assemblies to consider the draft JFS (17 Jan - 25 Feb 2022)** as well as opened the draft for public consultation (17 Jan - 12 April 2022).
- Our UK seas are incredible. But they are in decline. Climate change, pollution and harmful human activities are putting enormous pressure on our marine ecosystems. Fisheries, both in terms of overfishing and damaging practices, continue to be the biggest direct cause of biodiversity loss in the ocean.
- As an independent coastal state, the UK has an unprecedented opportunity to chart a new course for our seas. If done right, new fisheries legislation and policies can set us on the path towards long-term sustainable fisheries, delivering food security, improving livelihoods, supporting coastal communities, increasing natural resilience and reducing climate risks.
- Securing an effective JFS text will be instrumental in ensuring that the Government meets its ambition to be a '*world-leading fisheries management nation and achieve fully sustainable fisheries*'.
- **This may be the only formal opportunity for parliamentarians to strengthen the current draft and raise the need for:**
  - 1) **Timebound commitments to recover depleted stocks and deliver environmentally sustainable fisheries and effective ecosystem-based management.**
  - 2) **Urgent and effective action to tackle wildlife bycatch in UK waters.**
  - 3) **A firm commitment to the roll out of Remote Electronic Monitoring with cameras (REM).**
  - 4) **A timebound commitment from all administrations to set out a climate-smart fisheries strategy.**

#### **How the JFS can deliver transformational changes for UK fisheries:**

Throughout the passage of the Fisheries Bill, the JFS and Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) were argued to be the toolbox that would contain the detail to deliver the real change needed on the water in order to meet the objectives set out in the [Fisheries Act](#). Positively it recognises that '*a healthy and resilient marine environment is the foundation for a prosperous seafood sector and thriving coastal communities*' and that '*sustainable use and conservation of the sea is central to the fisheries management approach*'. However, we are concerned that the JFS as currently drafted **lacks the necessary detail for it to have teeth, containing too many uncertainties around how the objectives of the Fisheries Act are going to be met**. Therefore, if left unchanged, it would fall short of achieving its ground-breaking aim and risk being open to interpretation.

In the current political context, there are high hopes for the UK Government's domestic levelling up agenda to transform opportunities for communities across the country, while globally it continues to hold the COP Presidency, and is expected to provide global leadership on the environment and drive forward the commitments made in Glasgow last year. The JFS, underpinned by effective financial support, presents a significant opportunity to contribute to these goals by delivering tangible benefits for coastal communities and transformational change to achieve a healthy marine environment. A forward-looking and unified approach to ecosystem-based fisheries management could provide additional benefits of [£440 million every year and support 6,600 new jobs](#), as well as deliver benefits for food security.

While we recognise the complexity presented by the devolved nature of fisheries in the UK, the lack of a comprehensive, co-developed, four-nation strategy, clearly outlining how objectives are going to be achieved, is a real concern. Further details are needed as to how consistency of approach will be applied across policy authorities, in order to ensure the highest common denominator across the UK.

**The FFA are calling for strong and timebound commitments within the JFS to achieve environmental sustainability, urgent action to tackle marine wildlife bycatch, and for UK fisheries management to be underpinned with the robust and verifiable data delivered via Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM), which would support well managed, accountable and climate-smart sustainable fisheries.**

#### **Addressing the gaps:**

##### **Timebound commitments to recover depleted stocks and deliver environmentally sustainable fisheries and effective ecosystem-based management:**

Environmental sustainability must be the basis of fisheries management, with the environmental pillar of sustainability underpinning socio-economic sustainability. Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) must provide practical and environmentally sustainable management through the development of stock and geographic level management plans, including spatial management measures. In order to reflect current global best practice, requirements for FMPs contained within the JFS should be much more comprehensive than currently drafted and include clear, timebound objectives to recover and maintain stocks within safe biological limits.

Wider marine environmental factors, including: primary habitats that fisheries rely upon; Biodiversity Action Plan habitats; Priority Marine Features; and key prey species for seabirds, seals, cetaceans and other species, must also be addressed within the FMPs. It is vital these are properly restored and protected through the implementation of an ecosystem-based approach to ensure our seas meet Good Environmental Status and other targets. The development of FMPs should also be transparent, inclusive and uses the most robust evidence upon which to base decisions to meet the Fisheries Act objectives.

##### **Urgent and effective action to tackle wildlife bycatch in UK waters:**

There remains a lack of meaningful progress by UK administrations to effectively tackle the issue of marine wildlife bycatch in UK waters. Each year thousands of seabirds, marine mammals, and other marine wildlife die unnecessarily in UK waters despite the fact that there are clear solutions to many of the problems. The JFS provides an opportunity to make real progress on this issue and to set urgent timebound targets to minimise and where possible eliminate sensitive species bycatch, as well as some of the key measures that are needed to further support this objective, including effective monitoring and mitigation.

##### **Urgent and effective action to tackle wildlife bycatch in UK waters:**

The JFS identifies the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI) as the place where such actions will be set out however this document is not yet in the public domain despite the expectation that would be published by the end of 2021. This lack of progress in both developing an effective strategy and, importantly, taking action to address preventable bycatch is highly concerning.

While we hope to see ambitious commitments outlined within the BMI and practical measures delivered, fisheries policy authorities are missing an opportunity to embed these within the JFS and outline clear actions that are needed to achieve the ecosystem objective.

##### **A firm commitment to the roll out of Remote Electronic Monitoring with cameras (REM):**

As the Fisheries Act made its way through Parliament in 2020, there were strong voices from [seafood businesses](#) and parliamentarians alike that Remote Electronic Monitoring with cameras (REM) was a robust and cost-effective tool that would support the sustainability and accountability of UK fisheries. Yet to date there are no clear timebound commitments from fisheries administrations on the introduction of REM with cameras.

The JFS notes only the commitment to further consider its use. We are concerned that this doesn't go far enough given the benefits that embracing this technology would bring in underpinning sustainable fisheries.

REM is a proven [fisheries management tool](#) already utilised by countries currently leading the way in sustainable fisheries management such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The JFS should set out how UK fisheries are going to match the application of other nations in effectively monitoring and collecting data on both target species and those caught accidentally (including marine wildlife). Not only would this provide a more accurate picture of the impact UK fisheries are having on the marine environment, allowing for better management, it would also improve transparency and accountability across the UK fleet, remove potential barriers to entering sustainable supply chains and support positive marketing of UK seafood.

**A timebound commitment from all administrations to set out a climate-smart fisheries strategy:**

We welcome the recognition that the protection, restoration, and sustainable management of blue carbon habitats provides a nature-based solution that can support adaptation and resilience to climate change, alongside benefits for carbon sequestration and biodiversity. However, there is little in terms of concrete commitments as to how and when this will be delivered. It would be in keeping with the UK's nature and climate commitments to commit to setting out, in collaboration with stakeholders, a clear timetable for the delivery of a climate-smart fisheries strategy.

**What parliamentarians can do to help:**

- Provide your written views on the draft JFS during the parliamentary scrutiny process by the 25<sup>th</sup> February deadline (although we understand feedback after this date may still be accepted).
- Engage with the Environment Secretary, Fisheries Minister and responsible Defra officials about the proposals, including any opportunities for further scrutiny concerning the publication of the final JFS text (expected November 2022).
- Attend the Future Fisheries Alliance JFS drop-in session on **Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 3-5pm** in Room M, Portcullis House.
- Request a personal meeting with the Future Fisheries Alliance to raise your questions or request any further support.

This briefing presents the collective views of the Future Fisheries Alliance (FFA), a partnership of the RSPB, WWF and Marine Conservation Society.

For more information on climate-smart fisheries, please refer to our [report](#) and [parliamentary briefing](#).

For further support, please contact [Alice Watson](#) (Public Affairs Officer, Marine Conservation Society) on behalf of:

- Kirsten Carter, Principal Policy Officer (Marine), RSPB
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