



The Northern Ireland Marine Taskforce (NIMTF) is a coalition of non-government environmental organisations – it includes RSPB, Ulster Wildlife, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, National Trust, Friends of the Earth, Marine Conservation Society, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, Surfers Against Sewage, Shark Trust, Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust and Northern Ireland Environment Link. The NIMTF has the support of approximately 100,000 local people. We are working towards healthy, productive and resilient seas for Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland Marine Task Force response to: [Call for Evidence on a Fisheries Action Plan for the UK - All Party Parliamentary Group on Fisheries](#)

Submitted: 20th May 2026

NIMTF thanks the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Fisheries for the opportunity to provide some information around the development of a Fisheries Action Plan for the UK. NIMTF is a coalition developing marine environmental policy development for the eNGO sector in NI and our relationship with the NI fishing sector has been strongly developed as a result. We want to thank the APPG for the opportunity to provide our perspective on what challenges and opportunities exist for specific areas in relation to cross-over with the fishing fleet and propose some policy direction which could be incorporated into a developing Action Plan. NIMTF would be happy to provide further comment if required by the APPG in terms of sustainability and current progress from our perspective.

Sustainable Management and Access

Challenges

For NI, Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) were first discussed within 2021¹ after the publication of the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS)², 5 years ago. Whilst this was tentatively welcomed by NIMTF, progression has been slow in the development of these and there was further delays in the process of development of the plans through the outcomes of the consultation on amendments to Annex A of the JFS in December 2024³, leading to an extension of the publication deadline for all of the FMPs and an expansion of the Periwinkle FMP to include other shellfish species such as blue mussels, native oysters, razorclams and cockles, etc. Whilst NIMTF understands the delays, we have made calls for stronger actions within the FMPs to make up for the 2-year delay in the publication of these much needed plans.

There are concerns that the NI fishing fleet has already been reduced down over the years through available resourcing and by prohibitions put in place for bottom trawling within 9 of the 48 marine protected areas (MPAs) and that these FMPs in 2023, known as The Marine Protected Areas (Prohibited Methods of Fishing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022⁴, however this has led to greater sustainability of the fishing sector within these nine MPAs. There are additional pressures alongside the development and issues of Offshore Renewable Energy Developments through the draft Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan (OREAP) and future marine spatial planning, however it

is important that we develop aligned FMPs with neighbouring jurisdictions which ensure an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management.

Under the UK Marine Strategy (UKMS)⁵ there are still challenges in achieving Good Environmental Status (GES) in terms of the following, related categories associated with fishing activity. NIMTF have highlighted within the Annex of our response to NI's Nature Recovery Strategy consultation⁶ what metrics of the updated UKMS should be used carrying forward to ensure marine recovery and would have useful metrics and indicators within this for the development of this Fisheries Action Plan for the UK. In particular, impacts to benthic habitats, food webs, pelagic habitats, commercial fish, contaminants in seafood and marine litter are of the greatest issues which would still need to be addressed for the next reporting cycle of the UKMS.

Opportunities

There are opportunities to improve on the sustainability of the fisheries within NI by implementing the FMPs which are outlined, and aligning with the objectives of the JFS. In addition, with regards to where fishing is still occurring within marine protected areas (MPAs), the new MPA Strategy for the Northern Ireland Inshore Region 2025 - 2030⁷ and the Blue Carbon Action Plan 2025 - 2030⁸ set out the precedence to better manage damaging activities to features and restore, manage and create habitats and species which contribute to mitigating the impacts of climate change. For NI, our offshore MPAs - South Rigg, Queenie's Corner and Pisces Reef Complex - are expecting to go out for consultation on fisheries management measures in summer 2026. This would be a demonstrable, management approach given the evidence of fishing intensity within these protected sites and the overlap with mud belts that support the burrows of nephrops - which heavily support the fishing sector in NI.

Support needed

To ensure that this Fisheries Action Plan can be implemented properly, there cannot be further delays in progressing pieces of legislation as we have seen with the current amendments to Annex A of the JFS⁹. FMPs must now be implemented within the intended timeframe and will need resources dedicated to them in terms of Departmental staff capacity and resourcing. We are aware that especially within NI that this is a small, dedicated team who are working on the development of FMPs whilst also dealing with the issue and risks of a lack of available enforcement officers. A greater allocation of funding towards the DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division would go a long way towards enforcement of proposed management measures alongside enabling productive conversations and ensuring meaningful engagement and formation of management plans.

1 <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/fisheries-management-plans>

2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-fisheries-statement-jfs>

3

<https://defrafmp.blog.gov.uk/2024/12/18/the-outcome-of-the-consultation-on-annex-a-of-the-jfs-has-been-published-today/>

4 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2022/292/contents>

5 <https://moat.cefas.co.uk/summary-of-progress-towards-good-environmental-status/>

Priority actions

- Align management measures to fishing intensity where interaction happens in MPAs and has been identified as a pressure where features are in declining condition.
- Maintain timely delivery and publication of the FMPs for NI and align these with the rest of the devolved nations to ensure collaborative sustainability of the sector.
- Implement the actions of the Offshore MPA consultation on fisheries measures following finalisation of the outcomes.

Fleet Modernisation, Infrastructure and Technology

Challenges

With the biodiversity and climate crisis being so closely intertwined, it is understandable that the fleet will be dealing with the issue of climate change not only on vessel modernisation, but also with the impacts that this has had on cod stocks in the Irish Sea for example. It is important that we move to a fleet that is capable of coinciding with the requirements of the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022¹⁰ and subsequent Climate Action Plans (draft 2023 - 2027¹¹ and future) to reduce their carbon emissions and limit the impacts of climate change on their own catch for the future. It will be a challenge for a historical industry to adjust to the fleet needing to be modernised and how the electrification of the sector will work - given the existing challenges around Inshore Vessel Monitoring Systems (I-VMS¹²), Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) roll-out¹³ and other methods of tracking.

Opportunities

There are statutory requirements and obligations under the Climate Change (NI) Act 2022¹⁰, Climate Action Plans¹¹, NI Climate Change Adaptation Programme¹⁴ (with NICCAP3 covering up to 2029¹⁵) and the Blue Carbon Action Plan 2025 - 2030⁸ to ensure that we are reducing impacts which would exacerbate the impacts of climate change. Our seas can be a bastion to ensure that we are mitigating those impacts by ensuring sustainable activities which do not damage marine features through the modernisation of technology, gear selection and electrification of the fleet. This can protect areas such as seagrasses, benthic reefs and mudflats - as is the case for the Offshore MPAs which have been shown to be climate refugia for the future and act as 'strongholds' for resiliency to climate impacts.

6 <https://nimtf.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/nature-recovery-strategy-2026-nimtf-response.pdf>

7

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-02/MPA%20Strategy%20for%20the%20Northern%20Ireland%20Inshore%20Region%202025-2030.pdf>

Support needed

Support will be required from Governmental Departments such as Economy, DAERA and Finance to help the NI fleet go through a just transition to ensure that they can modernise their fleet and move towards electrification. Approval for a just transition commission to oversee the implementation was approved by the NI Assembly in April 2026¹⁶ to ensure reductions in emissions by all stakeholders and sectors is carried out in a fair, inclusive and sustainable way. There are recommendations within the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022¹⁰ to be met, alongside co-ordinated efforts for the NICCAP and Blue Carbon Action Plans to coincide with one another. The recent Climate-Smart Analysis Report¹⁷, commissioned by Ulster Wildlife with assessment modelling carried out by Plymouth Marine Laboratory, showcases that the offshore MPA region will become climate refugia and become strongholds in a changing world for the future which will have impact on the current MPA designations for many features which are “at risk” to the effects of climate change. The Climate Change Committee have produced a “Well Adapted UK” Report¹⁸ which highlights:

- Further investigation is needed to assess the opportunities for fisheries and aquaculture across the UK in response to climate change
- More action needed to address the climate change risks to fisheries and aquaculture across the UK

It will be important that these links are fully explored to ensure that we can have thriving, sustainable fisheries across the UK which has been assessed through the lens of adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Priority actions

- Greater inclusion of the “Climate Change Objective” within the FMPs to gather greater information about the impacts.
- Building greater awareness of data available to understanding the impacts of climate change on commercial fish stocks relevant to NI.
- Alignment of the Blue Carbon Action Plan, NICCAP, Climate Action Plans with the developing FMPs for NI.
- Assessment on where target species will shift to as part of an impact-assessment towards understanding where species will shift as a result of a changing climate and how this will impact where fishing is taking place.
- Utilise recommendations by the UK Climate Change Committee within their “Well Adapted UK” Report 2026 to ensure the sustainability and survival of the fisheries sector across the UK

Policy and Governance

Challenges

Due to the history of political instability in NI, there have been delays and a bottleneck of policies and legislative developments forming into a backlog. Whilst NI is slowly progressing these with the return of the NI Executive, such as the developing FMPs which follow the same frameworks as the JFS which ensures there is compliance/adherence to the following objectives²:

- Sustainability Objective
- Precautionary Objective
- Climate Change Objective
- Scientific Evidence Objective
- Equal Access Objective
- National Benefit Objective
- Bycatch Objective
- Ecosystem Objective

Equally, there have been gaps within progress towards achieving GES and addressing the issue of Bycatch and Reduction of Impacts under the UKMS for the following categories: cetaceans and seals¹⁹, seabirds²⁰, fish²¹, pelagic habitats²², benthic habitats²³, commercial fish²⁴, food webs²⁵, contaminants in seafood (aside from shellfish)²⁶, marine litter (seabed and floating litter)²⁷. The latest Marine Litter Survey 2025²⁸ from Live Here, Love Here highlights that fishing gear had to be removed from an entangled seal pup at Ramore Head, Portrush - which we have attached alongside this response; whilst the Marine Conservation Society highlight that fishing and aquaculture gear was found on 93% of UK and Channel Island beaches surveyed between 2024 - 2025²⁹. Further work is needed to integrate GES into the development of the FMPs to contribute further to the overall national statutory objectives for the UK which are not currently being met. For further information on the work needed to progress GES, please see our response to the draft Nature Recovery Strategy for NI⁶ and our response to the consultation on the UKMS - Part One³⁰.

8

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-04/Northern%20Ireland%20Blue%20Carbon%20Action%20Plan%202025%20E2%80%93%202030.pdf>

9

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/joint-fisheries-statement-proposed-amendments-to-annex-a/outcome/summary-of-responses-and-government-response>

10 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2022/31/contents/enacted>

11 <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-irelands-draft-climate-action-plan-2023-2027>

12

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/DAERA%20Response%20to%20IVMS%20consultation.PDF>

13 <https://marinescience.blog.gov.uk/2024/10/03/early-adoption-of-remote-electronic-monitoring-on-uk-fishing-vessels/>

14 <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-climate-change-adaptation-programme>

Opportunities

NI are developing FMPs for the Non-Quota Shellfish (NQS), Pelagic and Demersal fisheries which take place in NI, with a separate one for Intertidal Hand-Gathering of Shellfish³¹. Whilst these are still in development, they are being co-designed with multiple sectors and different stakeholders to ensure that there is sufficient input to developments. NI is at a critical stage in the development of these, which will be out for consultation in 2026 and 2027 respectively. The original Fisheries Act (NI) 1966³² is being updated to the “Fisheries and Water Environment Bill” to account for the change in fisheries as well as account for the impact from water pollution onto fisheries such as commercial, recreational and aquaculture-related industries - with a synopsis of the consultation responses joined for both the fisheries and aquaculture alongside the water pollution³³. For further information, please see our responses to each component respectively^{34,35}.

Support needed

In the context of NI, it is understood that a proportion of public funding comes through the Barnett Formula to see allocations from central government to the NI Executive which can then be allocated up by different departments. It is understood that some of this funding also comes from the Irish Governments to provide mutual support akin to that of the UK Government. This support will continue to be needed to support the enforcement and adherence of legislative measures which are put in place.

There also needs to be a focus put onto our own NI Executive and the associated Assembly to ensure that Stormont does not collapse as has been the previous case historically. It is imperative that the NI Executive is maintained to ensure progression through the backlog of legislation needed to be developed and to ensure that current structures are developed to maintain progression.

Priority actions

- Continued progress on the development, publication and subsequent implementation of the FMPs for NI, aligned with those being developed with the rest of the UK
- Maintain a co-design approach throughout the development of the FMPs through developing working groups and forums such as Co-Fish which have had collaborative, knowledge sharing successes.
- Implement measures such as I-VMS for <10m vessels and explore the rollout of REM to better enforce and ensure accurate data is being captured in relation to vessel catch.
- Alignment of the Blue Carbon Action Plan, NICCAP, Climate Action Plans, Seabird and Elasmobranchs Conservation Strategies and the UKMS with the developing FMPs for NI.

Science and Knowledge

Challenges

Within the Intertidal Hand-Gathering of Shellfish FMP, there is minimal knowledge of how unregulated activity is currently taking place across Northern Ireland. Knowledge and available science is critical to better understand the impacts of creating closed seasons for specific location(s) would equate in terms of resulting activity dispersal across NI where this information is currently unknown and could potentially become exacerbated from disruption or prohibition in a singular area. Evidence was provided to the AERA Committee around this lack of available information³⁶.

A greater understanding of the impacts from climate change will be critical to assess how quotas will change as a result of flux within marine food webs within pelagic and benthic habitats, resulting in what types of species will have an increased likelihood of being caught within commercial fisheries, as well as the impacts to recreational fishers in the diversity and permit relevance to the species which can be caught through angling.

Opportunities

For NI, the Co-Fish forum was set up following the implementation of the prohibition of fishing activity within the inshore MPAs, allowing a collaborative forum to share knowledge within the sectors. This group has been co-chaired between the eNGO sector and fisheries sector, with DAERA as the governmental body secretariat. As has been highlighted in other areas of this response, this forum is key to ensuring shared knowledge and progressive, jointly understood actions to enable sustainable fisheries - specifically in NI and could act as a model for other areas in the UK.

Support needed

We need a greater understanding of implementing greater adaptive monitoring which permits the ability to enable feedback loops for management of fisheries based on the implications of climate change on stocks. It will be important to have a better understanding of the impacts of climate change, not only on stocks, but also on how certain stocks, or their food source might move around based on those changing sea temperatures. Reef species which provide shelter and home for commercial stocks such as shellfish reefs may also be in decline into the future, given the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification leading to smaller crustaceans, etc³⁷.

16 <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/news/assembly-approves-establishment-just-transition-commission>

17 Climate-Smart Analysis Report for Northern Ireland Marine Protected Areas (2026)

18 <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/a-well-adapted-uk/>

19 <https://moat.cefas.co.uk/biodiversity-food-webs-and-marine-protected-areas/marine-mammals/>

20 <https://moat.cefas.co.uk/biodiversity-food-webs-and-marine-protected-areas/marine-birds/>

21 <https://moat.cefas.co.uk/biodiversity-food-webs-and-marine-protected-areas/fish/>

22 <https://moat.cefas.co.uk/biodiversity-food-webs-and-marine-protected-areas/pelagic-habitats/>

23 <https://moat.cefas.co.uk/biodiversity-food-webs-and-marine-protected-areas/benthic-habitats/>

Priority actions

- Continued support for collaborative forums such as Co-Fish and the FMP Working Groups to enable adequate knowledge sharing to take place.
- Greater allocations of resources to ensure that monitoring can take place to gain greater collaborative understanding of data gaps to further improve the knowledge-base within the FMPs to ensure adaptive management.
- Assessment on where target species will shift to as part of an impact-assessment towards understanding where species will shift as a result of a changing climate and how this will impact where fishing is taking place.

Funding and Investment

Challenges

To date, the majority of funding available to support fisheries has been singular, in-year funding such as the Marine, Environment & Fisheries Fund (MEFF), released in 2024³⁸. The dates of exact release of this fund has left limited time for robust, effective management approaches as they require being spent by March of the respective financial year. This has led to most organisations being able to get limited funding for small-scale equipment as opposed to contributing to robust science and knowledge gaps. NIMTF has been advocating for long-term, multi-year funding which from 2026 it is hoped that this funding would become multi-year funding. Equally, the first multi-year draft budget issued by the Department for Finance has been issued for the period 2026-2029/30³⁹ which would be incredibly welcomed, as highlighted within our response⁴⁰.

Opportunities

By providing ring-fenced, long-term, multi-year funding will support the NI fishing sector to have a routemap to furthering sustainability. The Fisheries and Coastal Growth Fund sets out a 12-year funding commitment by the UK Government⁴¹, providing NI a pot of £10 million out of £360 million to support the fishing sector, allocated through the Barnett Formula. Equally MEFF being a multi-year fund from 2026 onwards and this funding coming out early within 2026 would enable greater application of the fund outside of the purchasing of equipment and allow for more meaningful practical applications to gain greater insights into sustainability challenges such as the limitations of selective gears in particular regions - e.g. creels and potting within offshore sites.

By implementing long-term, multi-year funding, a combination of both private and public investment, we can ensure that there is collaboration amongst the fishing sector, eNGOs and government bodies such as DAERA to ensure compliance and sustainability moving forward.

Support needed

Long-term, multi-year, ring-fenced funding support for gear trials, implementation of FMPs, I-VMS¹² and REM to ensure robust and effective management can be guaranteed. Roles such as the gear-trials in NI and the sustainability liaison roles for the Fishing sector are crucial to ensure effective collaboration between the eNGOs and the Fishing sector.

Priority actions

- MEFF funding to be multi-year, long-term and all successors to this funding to follow the same route.
- Successor to the Marine and Coastal Growth Fund to support sustainability and net-zero targets for fisheries after 12 years identified and implemented.

NIMTF thanks the APPG on Fisheries for the opportunity to feed into the development of this Fisheries Action Plan for the sustainability of UK fisheries. We will continue to work with DAERA and the fishing sector to ensure that the developing FMPs are sustainable, complete with ecosystem-based approaches throughout their proposed management measures.

For further information, please contact the NIMTF Officer, Robert Walsh on robert.walsh@nimtf.org.

24 <https://moat.cefas.co.uk/pressures-from-human-activities/commercial-fish-and-shellfish/>

25 <https://moat.cefas.co.uk/biodiversity-food-webs-and-marine-protected-areas/food-webs/>

26 <https://moat.cefas.co.uk/pressures-from-human-activities/contaminants-in-seafood/>

27 <https://moat.cefas.co.uk/pressures-from-human-activities/marine-litter/>

28 Live Here, Love Here Marine Litter Survey 2025

29

<https://www.mcsuk.org/what-you-can-do/join-a-beach-clean/beachwatch-2025-what-you-found/#what-did-the-uk-and-channel-islands-results-show>

30 <https://nimtf.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/uk-marine-strategy-part-one-nimtf-response.pdf>

31 <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/fisheries-policy>

32 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/apni/1966/17>

33

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/summary-responses-consultations-fisheries-and-water-environment-bill-and-protection-water-environment>

34 <https://nimtf.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/fisheries-and-water-environment-bill-nimtf-response.pdf>

35

<https://nimtf.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/final-fwtf-nimtf-fisheries-and-water-environment-bill-consultation-response-part-2.pdf>

36 <https://niassembly.tv/committee-for-agriculture-environment-and-rural-affairs-meeting-monday-2-february-2026/>

37 <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/77192/html/>

38 <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/marine-environment-and-fisheries-fund>

39 <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/consultations/draft-budget-2026-202930>

40 https://nimtf.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/draft-budget-2026-2029_30-finance-nimtf-response.pdf

41 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/fishing-and-coastal-growth-fund>