

# What the Marine Strategy Framework Directive means for the fishing industry

Factsheet 4

March 2012

## Background

The UK is committed to genuine reform of fisheries management to achieve healthy fish and shellfish stocks, a prosperous fishing industry and a marine environment, which is 'clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse'<sup>1</sup>. This is consistent with the aims of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) which seeks to achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) in Europe's marine waters through sustainable use of our marine resources.

Fishing activities have been identified in Charting Progress 2<sup>2</sup> and the UK Initial Assessment as one of the main human activities which causes pressure on biodiversity, including extraction of species (both commercial and non-commercial) and damage to seafloor habitats.

Achieving GES will involve both ensuring that commercial fish and shellfish stocks are harvested sustainably (as set out in MSFD Descriptor 3), and ensuring that the

impacts of fishing activities on the wider marine ecosystem are sustainable (as set out in MSFD Descriptor 1, biodiversity, Descriptor 4, food webs and Descriptor 6, seafloor integrity). Objectives of MSFD for fisheries will be delivered through existing policies and management mechanisms, including the reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), existing mechanisms for national fisheries management, and the designation of marine protected areas.

## What is being proposed in this consultation and how does it link to existing policies and legislation?

This consultation sets out proposals for UK characteristics of GES and associated targets and indicators. The proposals are not regulatory in nature. Achievement of the proposed targets will be delivered through a range of measures, which the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations must put in place by 2016 at the latest. In relation to fisheries management measures, existing policies and mechanisms will be used to achieve the

<sup>1</sup> UK Marine Policy Statement  
<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/documents/interim2/marine-policy-statement.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://chartingprogress.defra.gov.uk/>

proposed targets, which are consistent with the UK's position on reform of the CFP. Specific GES targets and indicators are proposed for commercial fish and shellfish stocks. These are based on stocks reaching safe biological limit precautionary thresholds, whilst aiming, in the medium to long term, for the more ambitious stock specific targets for fishing at levels consistent with achieving Maximum Sustainable Yield. These targets are entirely consistent with the Government and Devolved Administrations' existing approach to fisheries management, where we have already committed to achieving sustainable fisheries with stocks fished within a species' Maximum Sustainable Yield<sup>3</sup>.

GES targets are also proposed in relation to protecting the wider marine ecosystem, including specific targets for the fish community as a whole (both exploited and non-exploited species) as well as targets for birds, marine mammals, pelagic and seafloor habitats. As far as possible these proposals are based on commitments already made under the Habitats and Wild Birds Directives, and the Water Framework Directive. However, because the MSFD aims to ensure sustainable use of the whole marine ecosystem, additional targets and indicators are being proposed in relation to those species and habitats which are not covered under existing legislation.

## What will this mean for the fishing industry?

The CFP will continue to be the principal legal mechanism for managing fish stocks in EU waters. We expect a reformed CFP to play a critical role in supporting the achievement of GES and ensuring

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<sup>3</sup> Convention on Biological Diversity 2010 biodiversity target included 'proportion of (fish) stocks within safe biological limits'

World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) contracting parties agrees to 'restrict fishing mortality rates to the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) by 2015'

consistency across European waters, promoting sustainable stocks and fishing practices. The kinds of measures which might be necessary to achieve this include technical measures on gear selectivity, eliminating discards, spatial restrictions and limits on landings. Many of these are already in place across our fisheries. These measures will be focussed both on achieving targets for Maximum Sustainable Yield in commercial fisheries where possible, and on achieving sustainable use of the marine environment outside the marine protected area network.

Stocks outside the CFP, including shellfish, will also be considered as part of the overall achievement of GES. The proposed targets will be applied and assessed across nationally important stocks based on socio-economic importance, rather than across all stocks which are commercially harvested. For many of these species there are currently no agreed exploitation rates due to limited availability of data on stocks. It is possible that some additional national or local measures may need to be taken to protect non-CFP stocks, including shellfish (except nephrops). Any additional measures would be delivered through relevant Government and Devolved Administration policies and local byelaws.

The UK marine protected area network (including designation at European level under the Habitats Directive and sites designated under national and devolved legislation) is expected to play a significant role in supporting the achievement of the proposed GES targets for biodiversity, food webs and seafloor integrity, particularly in relation to threatened, vulnerable and representative species and habitats. However, until we have completed the process for the designation of sites we cannot say to what extent this network will help achieve GES, and whether any additional measures may be needed to provide some protection to species and habitats outside the Marine Protected Area network (e.g. sediment habitats). As described above, any measures relating to

fisheries would be taken through the existing fisheries management mechanisms of the CFP, national and devolved measures or local byelaws as appropriate.

### **What assumptions did the MSFD Impact Assessment make in relation to the management of fishing activities to achieve GES?**

If the UK's position on CFP reform is achieved then the CFP would give the UK and other countries the necessary management tools to achieve healthy fish and shellfish stocks, a prosperous fishing industry and Good Environmental Status in the marine environment. For the Impact Assessment it has been assumed that, across Europe, the MSFD is at least one of the factors driving the CFP reform process and for that reason some of the costs and benefits associated with a reformed CFP have been attributed to MSFD.

### **What is happening in Europe to address the links between the MSFD and the reform of the CFP?**

The majority of Member States acknowledge that the reformed CFP is the mechanism for achieving GES under the MSFD, providing a robust framework for the sustainable management of marine biological resources and ensuring a level playing field in Community waters.

Significant efforts are being taken to ensure consistency across Europe. The International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES), with involvement from UK experts, has developed advice on the assessment of Descriptor 3 (Commercial fish and shellfish) and the UK has played a proactive role within The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR) to ensure consistency and harmonisation of targets and indicators under Descriptors 1, 4 and 6.

**You can find out more about the MSFD at:**  
[www.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/msfd/](http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/msfd/)

**If you have any questions, please contact:**  
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