

AIFCA CHIEF OFFICERS REPORT

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OEP launches investigation into a suspected failure by Defra to take the necessary measures to achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) of marine waters.



The Office for Environmental Protection has launched an investigation into Defra in relation to a suspected failure to take the necessary measures to achieve or maintain Good Environmental Status (GES) of marine waters by the statutory deadline.

Under the Marine Strategy Regulations 2010, the statutory deadline for GES to be achieved was 31 December 2020. The OEP believes that the available evidence indicates that this key target was not met.

Helen Venn, the OEP's Chief Regulatory Officer, said: "Most recently, the deadline for an updated report on the UK Marine Strategy passed on 20 December 2024, with no update appearing.

"Therefore, Defra has not yet set out its formal assessment confirming whether or not the 2020 deadline has been missed. If this deadline was missed, we have seen no clear plan to ensure that GES is achieved as soon as possible.

"Our investigation seeks to ensure accountability for the suspected failure to take the necessary measures to achieve GES of marine waters by 31 December 2020, and if that failure has occurred, ensure that it is addressed as soon as possible through the introduction and implementation of an evidenced, resourced and timebound delivery plan."

APPG Fisheries.



The Chief officer has been appointed the APPG on fisheries. An All-Party Parliamentary Group is a politically neutral cross-party group of Parliamentarians concerned about a particular issue - in this case the UK fisheries industry.

The Expert Panel is responsible for providing expert input into the APPG's activities, to ensure that the APPG remains an authoritative source of sector-relevant information and is responsive to the key issues and debates within the fisheries sector. The Expert Panel has an advisory role that sits alongside the formal governance structures of the APPG on Fisheries that operate in line with Rules on APPGs as published by UK Parliament.

Expert Panel members work collectively to support the APPG on Fisheries' overarching goal of our founding MPs and Peers to promote and support the UK fishing industry, whilst exploring key questions for the future of fishing, processing, coastal communities, and the marine environment. Expert Panel members have no explicit decision-making capacity over the actions of the APPG or the APPG Secretariat. The role is strictly advisory, and all input will be carefully considered by the Secretariat and APPG Members.

Environment, Science and Conservation Course.

For the first time the IFCA training group delivered the IFCA “Environment, Science and Conservation” (ESC). The course, held in Brixham, was run in tandem with the IFCA enforcement course and shared certain common parts, before branching out into the specialist areas of training. Nine students from six IFCAs attended the ESC course. There was a diversity of experience represented in the trainees. The course was led by Alex Aitken from Northumberland IFCA and Colin Trundle from Isles of Scilly & Cornwall IFCAs. The training sessions included external experts on the Habitat Regulation Assessment process, gear technology (Seafish) and Law (Andrew Oliver) and internal experts from Eastern IFCA and Devon & Severn IFCA who provided additional information on fish identification and gear, habitat interactions. I delivered lessons on Fisheries Management Plans, Harvest Control Rules and Governance and Decision Making. Alongside these course materials I have been developing a course manual. If anyone would like to assist with peer reviewing this manual, please do let me know!



ICES has published its Roadmap on Marine Recreational Fisheries.

ensuring that the impact of marine recreational fisheries is included as a vital part of sustainable fisheries management.



Marine recreational fishing has an impact on fish stocks, communities, and economies. By including MRF in stock assessments, we can ensure better advice and conservation measures. Collaboration is key—scientists and fishers need to work together for sustainability!

Kieran Hyder “It is great to see ICES recognise the importance of marine recreational fisheries and the need to embed it in their advice. The roadmap highlights the practical steps and new science required to achieve this. We have a lot of work ahead, but I'm looking forward to working with both ICES and angling communities to make this a reality”.

Learn more about the need for the inclusion of marine recreational fisheries data <https://lnkd.in/euFan6s9>, Read ICES Roadmap on Marine Recreational Fisheries <https://www.ices.dk/news-and-events/news-archive/news/Pages/RoadmapMRF.aspx>

Fisheries and the marine environment - Inquiry – Open Call for Evidence.



As it strives to deliver its energy, environmental and growth commitments, balancing the pressures on the marine environment will be a challenge for the Government. Following the UK's exit from the EU, the UK takes part in several different international fisheries negotiations as an independent coastal state to agree total allowable catches (TACs) and quotas for fish stocks shared with other coastal states. The Committee will scrutinise the outcomes of these negotiations, as well as other outstanding issues around domestic fisheries management and EU-UK fisheries cooperation. The fisheries and the marine environment inquiry will provide consistent scrutiny of the issues and competing challenges facing the fishing sector and the UK's marine environment. It will focus on fishers, seafood processors, consumers, environmental advocates, scientists, and coastal communities, and seek to engage with these stakeholders in formal calls for evidence, public evidence sessions, visits, engagement events and consultation.

The Committee will call for evidence on a regular basis. The Committee will produce iterative and focused reports throughout the inquiry.

Topics for scrutiny will include, but are not limited to:

- international fisheries negotiations;
- UK/EU quotas and access to waters from July 2026;
- management of protected areas;
- competing spatial pressures on the marine environment;
- implementing post-Brexit fisheries policy, including the adequacy of Fisheries Management Plans;
- marine conservation, including protection of marine mammals and seabird species;
- access to labour; and
- food security.

This inquiry will engage the Committee's cross-cutting work on supporting rural and coastal communities and weather and climate resilience, as well as its inquiry into fairness in the food supply chain.

If you have information or evidence which may be of interest to the Committee, please contact: efracom@parliament.uk

More information [here](#)

[Defra to designate new MPAs to compensate for environmental effects of offshore wind.](#)



The Minister for Water and Flooding, Emma Hardy MP confirmed the Government's position on [accelerating offshore wind growth](#) while announcing new proposals to protect and enhance the marine environment alongside energy development. She reiterated the point that the nature and climate change crises are of equal importance, and must be addressed together.

Designating new MPAs and extending existing MPAs

In her statement the Minister said: 'Today I am announcing an action that my Department will take to help accelerate and de-risk the consent of offshore wind projects whilst continuing to protect the marine environment.

Multiple offshore wind projects are at risk because there are currently no ecologically effective options that developers can deliver themselves to compensate for their unavoidable impacts on seabed habitats within Special Areas of Conservation and Marine Conservation Zones. Without suitable measures, these projects cannot be delivered.

Defra commits to designating new MPAs and/or extending existing MPAs in Secretary of State waters to deliver sufficient strategic compensation to compensate for likely environmental effects of offshore wind development.

In all cases, MPA designations will be delivered by Defra. We anticipate that the total area of new and/or extended MPAs required to compensate for the predicted impacts of offshore wind projects will be small in comparison to the tranches of MPAs previously designated in Secretary of State waters. We will be looking to protect a range of benthic habitats.'

'Marine spatial tensions'

The Minister continued, 'We recognise that accelerating development of marine activities, and environmental protection and restoration measures such as the designation of new MPAs, is increasing marine spatial tensions. Though not caused by their actions, these competing priorities and demands for space present a challenge for the fishing industry, particularly as it is unlikely that it will be possible to avoid causing an impact on fishing activities in all cases.

Government will ensure that the [fishing] sector is supported to adapt to increased pressure on space. We will work with the industry to maintain its viability into the future and ensure it continues to make a significant contribution to coastal communities. The Government is committed to finding ways for different industries to co-exist and benefit from our marine space. We will also work with The Crown Estate and other relevant stakeholders to see how they can help in this process. Food security is national security, and a sustainable fishing industry is an important part of that.'

MPA network review

The Minister continued, 'Alongside designating MPAs for benthic compensation, we will be undertaking a wider review of the MPA network and we will be keeping delivery of the MPA target under review with the aim of future-proofing the network, for example in terms of climate change adaptation and mitigation, while allowing us to still meet our international commitment to effectively protect 30% of our seas by 2030. A wider network review will also look to provide higher certainty for the fishing industry on the future MPA network.'

Environmental Improvement Package

In her statement, Minister Hardy said her department would implement an offshore wind environmental improvement package, of which recent and upcoming milestones include:

- underlining our commitment to use the powers conferred in the Energy Act 2023 to ensure that compensatory measures for unavoidable environmental impacts to Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) can be delivered strategically.
- publication of an updated [Joint Position Statement](#) on Unexploded Ordnance which sets out that low noise clearance should be the default in the marine environment.
- consulting on an offshore wind piling noise limit in the first half of 2025, followed by a pilot programme in 2025 and 2026.
- consulting in spring 2025 on reforms to the environmental compensation requirements for offshore wind projects with the aim to bring in legislation by Autumn 2025.
- the launch of a [Marine Recovery Fund](#) in late 2025 to provide an optional mechanism for developers to fund delivery of strategic compensatory measures.

Coastal Futures 2025 Conference.



I spoke on the panel of the Future Fisheries panel of the Coastal Futures Conference, held at the Royal Geographical Society in London. The topic was 'How will future fishing be balanced with restoration efforts & space for renewable energy?' and panel members illustrated the impacts of energy, climate, and nature recovery targets on fisheries and how the transition to new fisheries management measures will help or hinder a sustainable future. My talk was particularly keen to ensure we should all recognise and harness the national benefit of sustainable fisheries across the UK. Presenting the outputs of the workshops held by the AIFCA and its partners demonstrating the decline in the fleet and the priorities for recovery.

Panel chair was Daniel Owen of Fenner's Chambers, and the panel included an independent small-scale fisherman, Ashley Mullenger. Panel members alongside Rob were Mike Cohen, CEO, National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, Joe Richards, Blue Marine Foundation, Alistair Bally Philp, Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation and Claire L. Szostek from Plymouth Marine Lab. **[More information is here.](#)**

End.