

Press release, EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 6<sup>th</sup> April 2022

## **New ratings for UK seafood from the Good Fish Guide shows desperate need to fix fisheries for healthy seas**

- **14 ratings, including monkfish from the North Sea & west of Scotland, some species of skates and rays, and some sources of crab and lobster, join the Good Fish Guide's Fish to Avoid list**
- **10 ratings are now Best Choice according to the Marine Conservation Society, including sardines from the southwest UK and North Sea herring**

The Marine Conservation Society's latest assessment of UK seafood illustrates an urgent need for more rigorous management and effective policies to create a sustainable fishing industry and a healthy ocean.

The charity's [Good Fish Guide](#) identifies which seafood is the most sustainable by using a traffic light system. Green is the Best Choice, amber is OK to eat but improvements are needed, and red indicates Fish to Avoid.

Right now, UK governments are consulting on a new legislative framework for managing local fisheries, known as the Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS), and introducing a number of Fishery Management Plans (FMPs). These will provide a new overarching policy direction for UK fisheries, and therefore are a crucial opportunity to make much needed improvements.

**Clara Johnston, Fisheries Policy Manager at the Marine Conservation Society**, said: "For a thriving industry, future food security and the health of our ocean, it's crucial that the UK governments seize the new opportunities posed by the Joint Fisheries Statement and Fisheries Management Plans to fix our fisheries.

"The latest Good Fish Guide ratings – where all new UK ratings are either amber or red rated – illustrate the urgent need for transparency and better management if we're to recover fish stocks in UK seas."

The Future Fisheries Alliance (FFA), a collaborative project between the Marine Conservation Society, WWF and the RSPB, is calling for the UK governments to strengthen the current draft of the JFS, which is due to be published at the end of the year. In the final JFS, the FFA wants to see:

- Time bound commitments to recover depleted stocks via effective ecosystem-based management
- A firm commitment to the roll out of Remote Electronic Monitoring with cameras (REM)
- Urgent and effective action to tackle wildlife bycatch in UK waters
- A time bound commitment from all administrations to set out a climate-smart fisheries strategy.

**Celtic Sea haddock, cod and whiting: a mixed fishery with mixed ratings**

Cod, whiting and haddock caught in the Celtic Sea, in the southwest UK, demonstrate the challenges facing UK species. Often, these species are caught together because they swim and feed together. However, Celtic cod and whiting populations are at dangerously low levels, affecting reproduction rates as a result. Scientists recommend that cod should not be caught at all in this area.

Celtic haddock populations are at healthy levels but catches are exceeding scientifically-recommended limits. What's more, the more haddock that is caught, the more cod and whiting are caught alongside it. Management and enforcement measures clearly need improvement to help all three species to reach or stay at healthy levels. Ecosystem-based management, looking at all species caught together, would address many of these issues, supported by Remote Electronic Monitoring with cameras, or REM.

REM could be used to inform management decisions by providing the data we need to understand the full impact of fishing activities, and can inform management to recover low populations.

### **Skates and rays are largely Fish to Avoid**

Most Good Fish Guide ratings for skates and rays put them on the Fish to Avoid list. There are currently no green rated options, and very few amber options. In some areas, there is one combined catch limit for different species. Grouping numerous species of skate and ray together means there is potential for catches of individual species to be too high. Management is therefore currently insufficient to protect them from overfishing.

**Charlotte Coombes, Good Fish Guide Manager** said, "The latest ratings on the Good Fish Guide highlight how better management of UK seas is needed to stop overfishing and protect wildlife.

"Currently, there are 656 ratings available on the Good Fish Guide, with 148 on the Best Choice list. However, there are 161 Fish to Avoid. With all new UK ratings to the Guide being either amber or red rated, it's clear that we need interventions to turn the fate of the UK's seas around."

### **UK brown crab and lobster – concern for bycatch**

The charity is also calling for urgent and effective action to tackle wildlife bycatch, which is a widespread issue in UK waters and, despite promises, progress has been too slow.

New ratings for Scottish brown crab and lobster have been added to the Good Fish Guide this year. Eight of the nine new ratings are either amber rated, or Fish to Avoid. Shetland brown crab is the only Best Choice, green rated option in the UK.

Crab and lobster populations are suffering as a result of poor management, and in some areas, there are concerns of entanglement of whales in the ropes attached to pots. There are potentially more incidents than previously thought and data is limited on how often and where they occur. Management measures that could prevent entanglements include limiting potting depending on migration patterns or supporting the use of innovations like rope-less pots to remove the risk entirely.

Crab and lobster fisheries in the UK must be properly managed, with scientific assessments to monitor populations, catch limits, and measures to prevent whale entanglement. Potting, the main method used to catch crab and lobster, can have minimal impact on the seabed when properly controlled. With the right management in place, this iconic UK fishery could be a sustainable local option.

### **Climate-smart fishing**

The FFA is also calling for all administrations to set out a climate-smart fisheries strategy for UK fisheries management, with timebound commitments to provide a clear path to climate recovery and reaching net-zero by 2050. This would see goals to reduce the UK fleet's carbon emissions, and protect blue carbon habitats from activities that damage them. You can read the report, from the Marine Conservation Society, WWF and RSPB, and guidance on climate smart fishing, [here](#).

Find the latest sustainable seafood options on the Good Fish Guide, downloadable straight to your phone from [Home | Good Fish Guide \(mcsuk.org\)](#).

-Ends-

### **Press Contacts**

Evie Martin, Good Fish Guide PR and Events Officer (evie.martin@mcsuk.org)

For more press releases and up-to-date information visit the charity's Media Centre.

### **Images**

Please find a selection of [high-res images here](#)

### **Notes to Editors**

201 ratings on the Good Fish Guide were updated in the latest period (October 2021 – January 2022). In addition to the above mentioned, please see list below.

- All farmed prawns reviewed and updated with latest information, but there were no changes to ratings which still range from Best Choice to a Fish to Avoid.
  - Most need improvement, including certified prawns. Best Choice is organic prawns and those farmed in recirculating aquaculture systems in the UK.
- Monkfish from the North Sea and west of Scotland moves onto the Fish to Avoid list as numbers have declined from a peak in 2017 to the lowest since 2013 (below the average for the last 16 years). Management is poor and fishing pressure is too high. Celtic Sea monkfish remains amber rated as an OK choice.
- Scampi and langoustine stays an Ok choice if trawled, and a Best Choice if pot caught.
- North Sea herring returns to the Best Choice list
  - The steep decline in population observed since 2017 has slowed down, and an updated stock assessment shows better numbers than previously thought
- Southern Celtic Seas and English Channel sardines have moved from Ok to a Best Choice due to healthy population levels.
- King and queen scallops on the Isle of Man are showing improvements thanks to good management. Queen scallops have moved off the Fish to Avoid list and are now amber rated.
- Mackerel stays green rated

### **Joint Fisheries Statement:**

The Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) is the policy statement written by the UK administrations providing a UK framework for the delivery of the 8 objectives within the [Fisheries Act](#). It sets out an overarching policy direction for fisheries management and how it will be developed by relevant fisheries policy authorities. It is central to the Government's ambition 'to be a world-leading fisheries management nation and achieve fully sustainable fisheries'.

### **Fisheries Management Plans:**

The development of Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) is required under the UK Fisheries Act and are documents which set out policies designed to manage one of more fish stock. Each UK administration will

decide which stocks within their waters should be subject to an FMP and set out the policy framework needed to secure the long-term sustainability of those stock/stocks.