

Wild-Capture Ratings Methodology

Version 3



Document control

This document sets out how the Marine Conservation Society assesses wild capture fisheries for the Good Fish Guide. It explains the evidence, scoring approach and decision rules used to assign ratings, including how uncertainty, data limitations and management performance are considered.

Item	Detail		
Document title	Good Fish Guide Wild-Capture Ratings Methodology		
Document owner	Marine Conservation Society		
Responsible team	Good Fish Guide		
Primary contact	ratings@mcsuk.org		
Version History			
Version	Publication Date	Status	Summary
Version 1	2002	Superseded	Original version of the Good Fish Guide Wild-Capture Ratings Methodology.
Version 2	2018	Superseded	Revised methodology used as the basis for Good Fish Guide wild-capture ratings until the introduction of Version 3.
Version 3	2026	Current	Updated methodology introducing equal weighting across the three sustainability criteria, expanded management scoring and an additional ecosystem and trophic-web impacts element.

Table of Contents

DOCUMENT CONTROL	1
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	2
TABLE OF FIGURES	3
TABLE OF TABLES	4
ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	5
1. INTRODUCTION	10
2. OVERVIEW OF THE RATINGS PROCESS	11
2.1 UNIT OF ASSESSMENT	11
2.2 SUMMARY OF DEFAULT OR CRITICAL-FAIL RATINGS.....	14
2.3 FISHERY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (FIP) RECOGNITION.....	14
2.4 REFERENCES.....	16
3. CRITERION 1: STOCK OR SPECIES STATUS	17
3.1 ROUTE 1: STOCK STATUS	18
3.1.1 <i>Stock status detailed descriptors for Route 1</i>	18
3.2 ROUTE 2: DATA-LIMITED STOCK STATUS.....	21
3.3 REFERENCES.....	22
4. CRITERION 2: MANAGEMENT.....	24
4.1 MANAGEMENT DETAILED ELEMENTS.....	24
4.1.1 <i>Management of the target stock</i>	25
4.1.2 <i>Alignment with scientific advice and catch controls</i>	27
4.1.3 <i>Monitoring, control and surveillance effectiveness</i>	29
4.2 REFERENCES.....	31
5. CRITERION 3: CAPTURE METHOD & ECOLOGICAL EFFECTS	32
5.1 CAPTURE METHOD AND ECOLOGICAL EFFECTS DETAILED DESCRIPTORS.....	33
5.1.1 <i>Habitat impacts</i>	33
5.1.2 <i>Bycatch impacts</i>	35
5.1.3 <i>Vulnerable or ETP species impacts</i>	38
5.1.4 <i>Impact on ecosystems and trophic webs</i>	39
5.2 REFERENCES.....	41
6. APPENDICES	43
APPENDIX I: EXTERNAL REVIEW PROCESS	43
APPENDIX II: GOOD FISH GUIDE UPDATE SCHEDULE.....	44
APPENDIX III. RECOGNISED CERTIFICATION PROGRAMMES	45
APPENDIX IV: GLOSSARY	46
APPENDIX V. ICES STOCK ASSESSMENT CATEGORY DEFINITIONS.....	49
APPENDIX VI. HABITAT SCORING IN MPAS	50
<i>Guidance for seafood businesses</i>	50

Table of Figures

FIGURE 1. OVERVIEW OF WILD-CAPTURE RATINGS PROCESS	11
FIGURE 2. MATRIX FOR DETERMINING STOCK STATUS SCORE USING VALUES FOR BIOMASS (B) AND FISHING MORTALITY (F)	21
FIGURE 3. DATA-LIMITED DESCRIPTORS, RESILIENCE AND SCORING MATRIX	21

Table of Tables

TABLE 1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMBINED SCORE AND OVERALL RATING	12
TABLE 2. WEIGHTING OF SUSTAINABILITY CRITERIA	12
TABLE 3. SUSTAINABILITY CRITERIA AND SCORING ELEMENTS	13
TABLE 4. SUMMARY OF DEFAULT RATINGS	14
TABLE 5. CATEGORY DESCRIPTORS AND WEIGHTING FOR STOCK STATUS UNDER ROUTE 1	18
TABLE 6. CATEGORY DESCRIPTOR DETAIL FOR STOCK STATUS – BIOMASS (B)	19
TABLE 7. CATEGORY DESCRIPTOR DETAIL FOR STOCK STATUS – FISHING MORTALITY (PRESSURE) (F)	20
TABLE 8. CATEGORY DESCRIPTORS FOR MANAGEMENT OF THE TARGET STOCK	26
TABLE 9. EXAMPLES OF MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR A WELL-MANAGED TARGET STOCK	27
TABLE 10. CATEGORY DESCRIPTORS FOR ALIGNMENT WITH SCIENTIFIC ADVICE AND CATCH CONTROLS.....	28
TABLE 11. USER GUIDANCE ON MANAGEMENT MEASURES APPROPRIATE TO A WELL-MANAGED FISHERY	29
TABLE 12. CATEGORY DESCRIPTORS FOR MONITORING, CONTROL AND SURVEILLANCE EFFECTIVENESS.....	30
TABLE 13. USER GUIDANCE ON MANAGEMENT MEASURES APPROPRIATE TO A WELL-MANAGED FISHERY	31
TABLE 14. GEAR AND HABITAT IMPACT SCORES.....	34
TABLE 15. EXAMPLES OF MEASURES TO REDUCE GEAR IMPACTS ON HABITATS	35
TABLE 16. IMPACT ON NON-TARGET (BYCATCH) SPECIES	37
TABLE 17. EXAMPLES OF MEASURES TO REDUCE GEAR IMPACTS ON BYCATCH.....	37
TABLE 18. CATEGORY DESCRIPTORS FOR IMPACTS ON VULNERABLE OR ETP SPECIES	38
TABLE 19. EXAMPLES OF MEASURES TO REDUCE GEAR IMPACTS ON VULNERABLE OR ETP SPECIES	39
TABLE 20. IMPACT ON ECOSYSTEMS AND TROPHIC WEBS	40
TABLE 21. EXAMPLES OF MEASURES TO REDUCE GEAR IMPACTS ON ECOSYSTEMS AND TROPHIC WEBS.....	40

Acronyms and abbreviations

The following table lists the acronyms, abbreviations and reference points used throughout the Wild-Capture Methodology. Full definitions of technical terms are provided in Appendix IV.

Acronym	Name	Definition
AIS	Automatic Identification System	A vessel-tracking system that broadcasts a vessel's identity, position, course and speed.
B	Biomass	The total weight of a fish stock in a given area, often expressed as spawning stock biomass (SSB) when assessing reproductive capacity.
Blim	Biomass limit reference point	The spawning stock biomass limit reference point below which there is a high risk of reduced reproductive capacity or impaired recruitment.
Bmp	Biomass management plan reference point	A biomass reference point specified in a management plan and used operationally to guide management action, particularly where full analytical reference points are uncertain.
BMSY	Biomass at Maximum Sustainable Yield	The long-term average biomass, usually expressed as spawning stock biomass, expected when fishing at FMSY. It represents the biomass that can support maximum sustainable yield under prevailing environmental conditions.
Bpa	Precautionary biomass reference point	A precautionary spawning stock biomass reference point set above Blim to reduce the risk of the stock falling below the limit reference point.
BRD(s)	Bycatch Reduction Device(s)	Gear modifications designed to reduce the capture of non-target species.
CASS	Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions	An alliance that publishes guidance on credible Fishery Improvement Projects.
CCTV	Closed-circuit television	Onboard camera systems used to monitor fishing activity, catch handling and compliance.
CPUE	Catch per unit effort	A measure of catch relative to fishing effort, often used as an indicator of stock abundance.

ETP Endangered, threatened, or protected species

Species that are endangered, threatened or protected under relevant national, regional or international legislation, agreements or conservation listings. The term includes species protected because of conservation status, legal status or recognised vulnerability to fishing impacts.

F Fishing mortality

The rate at which fish are removed from a population due to fishing. It is usually expressed as the proportion of fish dying from fishing in one year, or as an instantaneous rate. It can range from 0, where there is no fishing, to high values such as 1.5 or 2, which can occur in short-lived, fast-growing species such as anchovies.

FAD Fish aggregating device

A floating or anchored human-made object used to attract and aggregate fish, commonly used in tuna fisheries.

FAO Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

A United Nations specialised agency that provides global guidance and data on food, agriculture, fisheries, and aquaculture. FAO Major Fishing Areas are statistical areas used for reporting fishery catches.

FDF Fish Discarding Factor

A measure or consideration related to the amount of catch discarded rather than landed.

FIP Fishery Improvement Project

A multi-stakeholder initiative with a time-bound work plan to improve a fishery's environmental performance and move it towards sustainability.

Flim Fishing mortality limit reference point

The upper limit reference point for fishing mortality, above which there is a serious risk to stock sustainability.

Fmp Fishing mortality management plan reference point

A fishing mortality reference point specified in a management plan and used operationally to guide management decisions.

FMSY	Fishing mortality at Maximum Sustainable Yield	The fishing mortality rate that achieves maximum sustainable yield. It represents the highest level of fishing mortality that, when sustained over time, leads to a stock size at BMSY.
Fpa	Precautionary fishing mortality reference point	A precautionary fishing mortality reference point set below Flim to reduce the risk of fishing mortality exceeding the limit reference point.
GFG	Good Fish Guide	A seafood sustainability rating system produced by the Marine Conservation Society.
GSSI	Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative	An initiative that benchmarks seafood certification schemes against recognised criteria.
HPMA(s)	Highly Protected Marine Area(s)	Marine areas where extractive, destructive and depositional activities are prohibited, subject to the relevant designation.
ICES	International Council for the Exploration of the Sea	An intergovernmental marine science organisation that provides scientific advice on marine ecosystems and fisheries, especially in the North Atlantic.
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature	An international organisation that assesses the global conservation status of species, including through the IUCN Red List.
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing	Fishing that breaches applicable laws, is not reported or is misreported, or occurs where effective conservation and management measures are absent or not applied.
JNCC	Joint Nature Conservation Committee	The UK statutory nature adviser that provides evidence and advice on marine conservation.
LTL	Low trophic level	Species that feed low in the food web, such as plankton feeders and small pelagic fish, and often play an important role as prey for higher trophic levels.
MCRS	Minimum Conservation Reference Size	The minimum size at which fish can be legally retained, intended to help ensure individuals have the opportunity to reproduce.

MLS	Minimum Landing Size	A former or alternative term for the minimum size at which a species may be landed or sold. In many UK and EU contexts, Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) is now the preferred conservation term.
MCS	Marine Conservation Society	The UK charity that produces the Good Fish Guide. In fisheries management sections, MCS may also refer to Monitoring, Control and Surveillance.
MCS	Monitoring, Control and Surveillance	A fisheries management framework used to verify compliance with fisheries rules, including data collection, vessel tracking, inspections and enforcement.
MCZ	Marine Conservation Zone	A type of Marine Protected Area designated in UK waters to protect habitats, species and geological features.
MMO	Marine Management Organisation	A UK government body responsible for marine planning, licensing and fisheries management in English waters.
MPA	Marine Protected Area	A designated marine area managed to protect ecosystems, habitats, species or geological features. Activities may be restricted depending on the site objectives and legal framework.
MSC	Marine Stewardship Council	An organisation that certifies fisheries against the MSC Fisheries Standard.
MSY	Maximum Sustainable Yield	The maximum long-term average catch that can be taken from a stock under prevailing environmental conditions while maintaining stock productivity.
MSY Btrigger	Biomass trigger point for Maximum Sustainable Yield	A biomass trigger reference point, usually based on spawning stock biomass, below which management action, such as reducing fishing pressure, is triggered to support recovery towards MSY levels.

PBR	Potential Biological Removal	The maximum number of individuals, excluding natural mortality, that may be removed from a marine mammal population through human activities while allowing the population to remain at, or recover to, its optimum sustainable population level.
REM	Remote Electronic Monitoring	The use of onboard cameras, sensors and associated data systems to monitor fishing activity, catch handling, discards and compliance.
SSB	Spawning Stock Biomass	The total weight of all sexually mature individuals in a fish stock that are capable of reproducing.
TAC(s)	Total Allowable Catch(es)	The total quantity of fish that may legally be caught or landed from a stock over a specified period, usually annually. TACs are often allocated among countries or fleets as quotas.
TEDs	Turtle Excluder Devices	Technical gear modifications used in trawl fisheries to allow turtles and other large animals to escape while retaining target catch.
UoA	Unit of Assessment	The specific fishery unit being assessed, usually defined by species or stock, area, capture method and relevant management context.
VME	Vulnerable Marine Ecosystem	Marine ecosystems, often involving benthic habitats, species or features such as corals, sponges and seamounts, that are particularly sensitive to disturbance and vulnerable to significant adverse impacts from human activities, especially bottom-contact fishing.
VMS	Vessel Monitoring System	A satellite-based system that transmits fishing vessel position and activity data to support monitoring, control and enforcement.

1. Introduction

Since 2018, when Version 2 (V2) of the Wild-Capture Methodology was released, the Marine Conservation Society has gathered feedback from a range of stakeholders, including seafood businesses and other professionals, on the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology. The methodology was subsequently reviewed by external consultants, who provided recommendations for improvement. A decision and validation workshop was then held with the Good Fish Guide (GFG) team to agree the updates included in Version 3 (V3).

This document sets out Version 3 of the Wild-Capture Methodology. It is intended for internal assessors and staff, consultants, seafood businesses, and other professionals requiring a thorough understanding of the Wild-Capture Methodology and ratings.

The Marine Conservation Society is committed to promoting sustainable fisheries in the UK, with particular emphasis on supporting small-scale, low-impact, locally caught seafood.

See the introduction to Good Fish Guide ratings and the Good Fish Guide Aquaculture Methodology, [here](#).

If you have any questions about Good Fish Guide seafood ratings, or you would like to comment on or contribute information to the Good Fish Guide, please contact the Marine Conservation Society at ratings@mcsuk.org.

2. Overview of the ratings process

2.1 Unit of assessment

The Unit of Assessment (UoA) for a Good Fish Guide Wild-Capture assessment is defined by the species or stock assessed, the geographic area, the relevant management framework and the capture method. Where appropriate, and where credible information and assessment capacity allow, finer-scale assessments may also be conducted.

An overview of the ratings process for each fishery, or for each combination of species, area, and capture method that we assess, is presented in Figure 1 below.

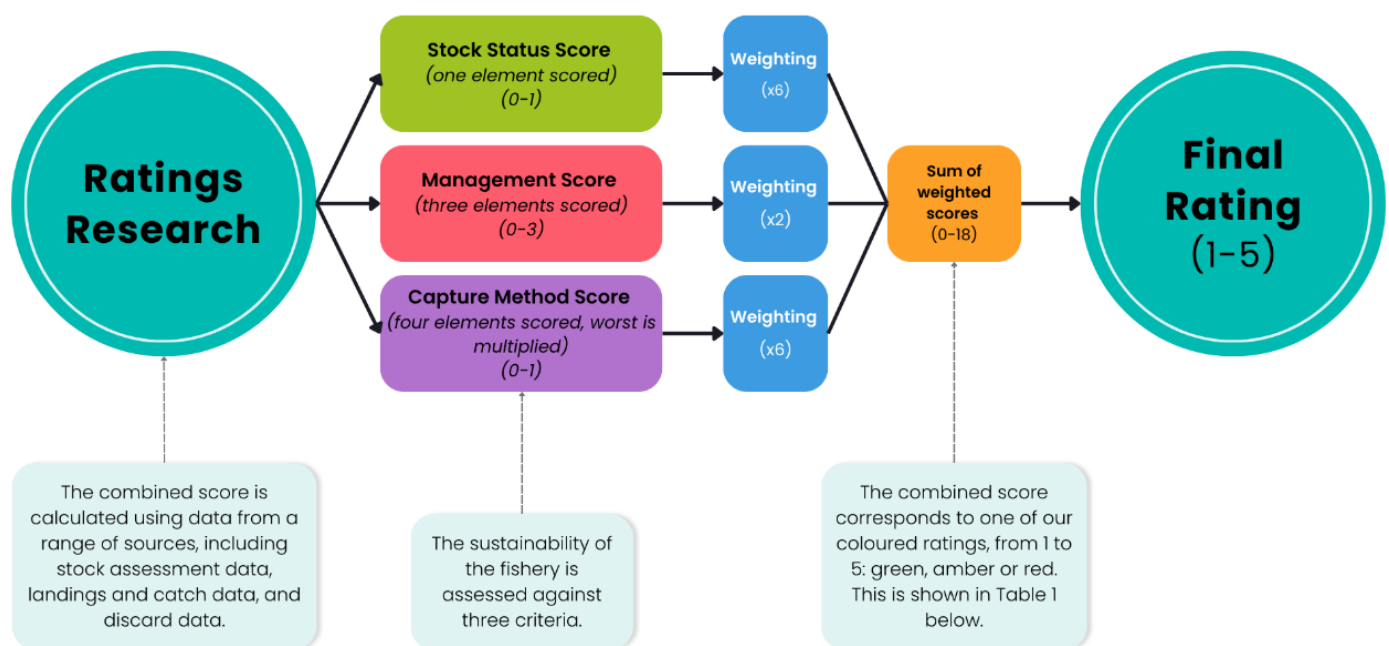


Figure 1. Overview of Wild-Capture ratings process

The criteria against which we measure sustainability are:

- **Stock or species status**, the state of the stock, including stock size, which is usually measured as the total weight of mature or breeding adults, and fishing pressure measured against recommended safe levels or reference points.
- **Management**, an evaluation of the management measures in place to maintain the stock sustainably and ensure catch controls are aligned with scientific advice. This includes an assessment of the monitoring, control and surveillance systems used to verify the effectiveness of these measures, including enforcement and compliance.

- **Capture method and ecological effects**, an assessment of the impacts of the capture method on habitats, non-target catch (bycatch), vulnerable or Endangered, Threatened or Protected (ETP) species, and wider ecosystem and trophic-web function.

The relationship between the combined criteria scores and the overall rating is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Relationship between combined score and overall rating

Combined criteria score	Rating			
0 – 2.9		Dark Green	→	Best Choice
3 – 5.9		Light Green	→	Good Choice
6 – 8.9		Yellow	→	OK Choice
9 – 11.9		Orange	→	Not a Good Choice, Improvement Needed
12 – 18		Red	→	Fish to Avoid

As different elements are assessed within each criterion, a weighted system is used, see Table 2, to ensure that stock status, management, and capture method are considered equally important in evaluating fishery sustainability. The weighting factors ensure that each of the three criteria contributes a maximum score of 6: 1 × 6 for stock status, 3 × 2 for management, and 1 × 6 for capture method. The weighting multipliers are designed to ensure a minimum total combined criteria score of 0 and a maximum score of 18.

Table 2. Weighting of sustainability criteria

Sustainability Criterion	Weighting multiplier
Stock or species status (one element)	X value by 6
Management (three elements)	X value by 2
Capture method and ecological effects (four elements, with worst score multiplied)	X value by 6

A score of 0, 0.25, 0.5, 0.75 or 1 is allocated to each scored element within a criterion. The scoring elements are shown in Table 3. Each element score is then multiplied by the weighting assigned to its criterion, as shown in Figure 1 and Table 2, to obtain the criterion score. Higher scores indicate lower sustainability, with a maximum combined score of 18. The complexity of the methodology lies in collecting sufficient evidence to justify each element score and applying the category descriptors consistently.

Table 3. Sustainability criteria and scoring elements

Sustainability Criterion	Elements	Weighting multiplier
Stock or species status	Biomass and fishing mortality are assessed and combined in a single scored element.	X value by 6
Management	Three elements scored: • Management of the target stock • Alignment with scientific advice and catch controls (including mixed fishery considerations, Total Allowable Catches (TACs), and non-target catches) • Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) system and the level of compliance/enforcement in the fishery.	X value by 2
Capture method & ecological effects	Four elements scored, with the worst then multiplied: • Impacts on habitats • Impacts on non-target species (bycatch), retained or discarded, and their removal • Impacts on Vulnerable and Endangered, Threatened and Protected species, retained or discarded, and their removal • Impacts on the ecosystem and trophic-webs.	X value by 6

To allow for precise allocation of scores within each criterion, and to help the assessor determine the most appropriate score for the fishery under assessment, each category description is supported by detailed descriptors. This is an essential component of the methodology and helps ensure that each rating is robust and transparent. It also helps to reduce individual interpretation and ambiguity. It is important to note that some category descriptors include an ‘if applicable’ section, meaning that only the relevant items within that list should be considered when assigning the score.

2.2 Summary of default or critical-fail ratings

The Marine Conservation Society applies default or critical-fail ratings, summarised in Table 4 below, for the three criteria in the following situations.

Table 4. Summary of default ratings

Criterion	Situation	Default rating
Stock or species status	- Scientific advice from ICES or equivalent authorities recommends zero catch or prohibits any targeted fishery for this stock, and this advice is not being followed. - Biomass (B) is at or below Blim (see Glossary) and no precautionary recovery plan is in place for the stock. - A species is listed as Endangered or Critically Endangered by IUCN or equivalent for the sea area e.g. FAO 27 North East Atlantic in which the fishery is taking place, and the assessment report is still considered relevant, meaning it is current and represents the best available assessment of species status. - For Low Trophic Level (LTL) species, where there is evidence that their status is significantly affecting the status of other species through food-web links.	5
Management	- There is no appropriate or relevant management system or regulatory framework in place. - There are no measures to address critical issues, for example intrinsic and widespread IUU fishing.	5
Capture method & ecological effects	The fishing method is: - Causing substantial or long-lasting damage, for example unmanaged deep-sea trawling. - Causing heavy damage to protected features of MPAs. - Illegal, for example dynamite fishing. - Bottom trawling below 600m (deep sea fishing) without robust regulation in place.	5

2.3 Fishery Improvement Project (FIP) recognition

The following section outlines how the Marine Conservation Society defines a Fishery Improvement Project (FIP) and the criteria used to determine whether a FIP is credible and should be recognised within the certification section of the corresponding rating.

According to the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions (CASS), a Fishery Improvement Project is ‘a multi-stakeholder effort to address challenges in a fishery. These projects use the power of the private sector to incentivize improvements in the fishery and seek to make these changes endure through policy change. FIPs always include goals related to environmental sustainability. In recent

years, many FIPs have also begun to address other issues, such as human rights, social responsibility, and even financial sustainability.’ The Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP) notes that ‘each FIP presents a different challenge, but the common thread is that the supply chain plays a crucial role in helping a fishery on the journey toward sustainability.’

SFP emphasises that FIPs are a practical mechanism for using market incentives to support fisheries on a journey towards sustainability, while CASS frames them as a structured route towards a level of performance consistent with an unconditional pass under the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Fisheries Standard.

For a FIP to be recognised by the Marine Conservation Society in its ratings assessments, the following general criteria should apply:

- An independent observer or facilitator, for example an NGO.
- Evidence of relevant stakeholder participation.
- Identification of, and action to address, key environmental issues in the fishery.
- A public work plan with SMART-style actions, timelines, and responsibilities.
- Public accountability.
- Evidence that actions are linked to the key issues driving poor fishery performance, rather than peripheral activities.
- Movement beyond planning into implementation, management change, and ultimately verifiable on-the-water outcomes.

In addition to the above, for a FIP to be considered within Marine Conservation Society ratings, it should have reached a stage where it is demonstrating measurable progress against the indicators and timelines set out in its work plan and delivering tangible improvements in the management or operation of the fishery to address key environmental concerns. This aligns with Stage 4 or higher of the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions (CASS) Fisheries Improvement Guidelines, or an equivalent standard.

In cases where a FIP has been publicly launched and a work plan agreed, but has not yet begun to deliver measurable improvements in management or practices, i.e. CASS Stage 3, it may be recognised but would not meet the threshold for full consideration.

FIP progress will be monitored using publicly available information from organisations and platforms that assess alignment with the core credibility principles outlined in the CASS FIP guidelines.

FIPs registered under the Marine Stewardship Council Fisheries Improvement Program will receive an MSC Improvement Program designation from the point of entry into the programme. The Marine Conservation Society FIP label should only be applied once the project meets the recognition criteria described above.

Retention of these labels will be dependent on continued progress and the achievement of agreed goals and objectives.

2.4 References

Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions (CASS), 2022. *Guidelines for Supporting Fishery Improvement Projects: Revised July 2022*. Available at: <https://solutionsforseafood.org/our-resources/fishery-improvement-projects-guidelines/> [Accessed on 09.06.2026].

Marine Stewardship Council, n.d. *The MSC Improvement Program*. Available at: <https://www.msc.org/what-we-are-doing/improvement-program> [Accessed on 09.06.2026].

Sustainable Fisheries Partnership, 2014. *The Seafood Industry Guide to FIPs*. Available at: <https://sustainablefish.org/industry-leadership/seafood-producers/fishery-and-aquaculture-improvement-efforts/fishery-improvement-projects/> [Accessed on 09.06.2026].

3. Criterion 1: Stock or species status

A stock is a group of individuals of the same species that occupies a well-defined spatial range and is largely independent of other stocks of that species. A stock will form the basis of a distinct fishery defined in terms of season and area. It is the population from which catches are taken in a fishery.

Fisheries directly affect fish stocks through catches. For a stock or population to be maintained at a sustainable level, fishing must be controlled so that catches can continue over the long term without compromising stock productivity. This is achieved by identifying target or limit reference values for biomass and fishing pressure. Biomass should not fall below safe or target levels, and fishing pressure should not exceed recommended limits.

Biomass (B) is the total weight of a resource or stock, usually measured as the weight of mature breeding fish in a stock. Fishing mortality (F) is a measure of fishing pressure and represents the proportion of fish in a specific year class or cohort, i.e. all fish born in the same year, that are taken by a fishery each year.

Regular scientific assessment of a stock is required to determine stock status in terms of biomass and fishing pressure, and to provide advice to fisheries managers on sustainable fishing levels.

Depending on the available information and the type of stock assessment for the target species in question, either Route 1 or Route 2 is followed. Please see Appendix V for definitions of ICES stock assessment categories.

- **Route 1** is typically used for stocks for which an analytical or survey-based assessment is available for both indicators: Biomass (B) and Fishing Mortality (F).
- **Route 2** is used for stocks where data are limited or unknown for biomass and/or fishing mortality, i.e. where reference points are not defined for one or both indicators. It is also used where an assessment, if available, is no longer considered relevant, for example because it is out of date.

Where ICES or equivalent scientific advice recommends zero catch or no directed fishery and that advice is not followed, the fishery is rated 5 by default. A default rating of 5 also applies where biomass (B) is at or below Blim and no precautionary recovery plan is in place, or where the target species is listed as Endangered or Critically Endangered by the IUCN or an equivalent authority for the relevant sea area and the assessment remains current and represents the best available assessment of species status. For Low Trophic Level species, a default rating of 5 also applies where there is evidence that stock status is significantly affecting other species through food-web links. See Table 4.

3.1 Route 1: Stock status

The criterion score for stock status under Route 1 is obtained by completing the matrix in Figure 2 using the scores obtained separately for biomass, Table 6, and fishing mortality, Table 7. The resulting score is then multiplied by the weighting multiplier to obtain the criterion score. The category descriptions and weighting for Route 1 are summarised in Table 5 below and supported by the more detailed descriptors outlined in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 5. Category descriptors and weighting for stock status under Route 1

Category description	Score	Weighting Multiplier	Criterion Score	Sustainability levels
Stock underfished and harvested within sustainable limits	0	X 6	= 0	 High
Stock fully fished and harvested within sustainable limits	0.25	X 6	= 1.5	
Stock level below biomass at maximum sustainable yield (BMSY) but harvested within sustainable limits	0.5	X 6	= 3	
Concern for stock and fishing level and/ or stock at increased risk	0.75	X 6	= 4.5	
Stock outside biological and/or safe fishing limits, has reduced reproductive capacity or is depleted and/or harvested unsustainably	1	X 6	= 6	
				Low

3.1.1 Stock status detailed descriptors for Route 1

The stock status descriptors for biomass and fishing mortality are set out in Tables 6 and 7 below to allow for more precise allocation of a score to the situation for biomass and fishing pressure for the stock being assessed.

Table 6. Category descriptor detail for Stock Status – Biomass (B)

Category Description	Associated descriptors
Underfished	- Biomass is above B_{MSY} or other appropriate reference point or surrogate with similar intent. This corresponds to approximately 1.4 $MSY B_{Trigger}$ (= B high) or above. - Includes ICES assessed stocks for which a full assessment and catch options are provided, i.e., data-rich stocks, where Biomass is at or fluctuating around or above B_{MSY} (not trigger) reference point. - Includes outcomes from stock assessments which indicate with high probability that the stock is not in an overfished state.
Fully Fished	- Biomass is at or below B_{MSY} but above $MSY B_{Trigger}$ or other appropriate reference point or surrogate with similar intent. - Includes ICES assessed stocks for which a full assessment and catch options are provided, i.e., data-rich stocks, where Biomass is at or fluctuating around or above $MSY B_{Trigger}$ reference point. - Biomass is fluctuating around B_{MSY} or above B_{MSY} but trending downwards/approaching B_{MSY} and no precautionary reference point or $MSY B_{Trigger}$ in place. - Includes anadromous species such as salmon from rivers assessed as <i>Not at Risk</i>. - Includes outcomes from stock assessments which suggest stock is not in an overfished state, but there is considerable uncertainty.
Stock Level below B_{MSY} or full assessment not available	- Biomass is below $MSY B_{Trigger}$ but within precautionary limits or other appropriate reference point or surrogate with similar intent. This corresponds to: $0.5 (MSY B_{Trigger} + B_{lim}) < B \leq MSY B_{Trigger}$ (Where $B_{Trigger}$ or precautionary limits aren't defined, B_{MSY} is used as the trigger value) - Includes ICES assessed stocks for which a full assessment and catch options are provided, i.e., data-rich stocks where Biomass is below $MSY B_{Trigger}$ but above or at Precautionary Limits (B_{PA}) (i.e. full reproductive capacity). - Includes anadromous species such as salmon from rivers assessed as <i>Probably not at risk</i>.
Concern for Stock Level Or At increased risk	- Biomass is considerably below $MSY B_{Trigger}$ but above B_{lim} or other appropriate reference point or surrogate with similar intent. This corresponds to: $B_{lim} < B \leq 0.5 (MSY B_{Trigger} + B_{lim})$ (Where $B_{Trigger}$ or precautionary limits aren't defined, B_{MSY} is used as the trigger value) - Includes ICES assessed stocks for which a full assessment and catch options are provided, i.e., data-rich stocks where Biomass is below B_{MSY} and B_{PA} but above B_{lim} i.e. the stock is at increased risk of suffering reduced reproductive capacity. - Includes anadromous species such as salmon from rivers assessed as <i>Probably at risk</i>.
Stock Outside Safe Biological Limits Or Reduced Reproductive Capacity Or Depleted	- Biomass is likely below B_{lim} or surrogate with similar intent and recruitment may be impaired, or B is equal to 20% of unfished state, or $0.5 B_{MSY}$ - Includes ICES assessed stocks i.e. those for which a full assessment and catch options are provided i.e. Data-rich stocks where Biomass is likely at or below (in vicinity of) B_{lim} i.e. the stock has or is suffering Reduced Reproductive Capacity. - Includes anadromous species such as salmon from rivers assessed as <i>At risk</i>.

Table 7. Category descriptor detail for Stock Status – Fishing mortality (pressure) (F)

Category Description	Associated descriptors
Harvested sustainably	- Fishing mortality is below fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield (F_{MSY}) or other appropriate reference point or surrogate with similar intent, i.e. $F < F_{MSY}$ - Includes ICES assessed stocks for which a full assessment and catch options are provided, i.e., data-rich stocks where fishing mortality is below or at or fluctuating around F_{MSY} reference point.
Fishing above MSY	- Fishing mortality is around or equal to F_{MSY} or other appropriate reference point or surrogate with similar intent, i.e. $F_{MSY} \leq F < 1.1 F_{MSY}$ - Includes outcomes from assessments or evaluations which indicate that overfishing is not believed to be occurring, but there is considerable uncertainty. - Includes outcomes where F is fluctuating around F_{MSY}, or if F has been consistently below F_{MSY} and has just recently (in the latest assessment) increased above F_{MSY} (potentially due to management error or a new stock assessment and the consequence of adjustment to reference points or estimates).
Concern for fishing level Or At increased risk	- Fishing mortality is somewhat above F_{MSY} but within precautionary limits or other appropriate reference point or surrogate with similar intent i.e. $1.1 F_{MSY} \leq F < 1.25 F_{MSY}$ - Includes ICES assessed stocks for which a full assessment and catch options are provided, i.e., data-rich stocks where fishing mortality is above F_{MSY} but below or at Precautionary Limits (F_{PA}).
Outside Safe Fishing Limits Or Harvested unsustainably	- Fishing mortality is considerably above F_{MSY} but below F_{lim} or other appropriate reference point or surrogate with similar intent, i.e. $1.25 F_{MSY} \leq F < 1.40 F_{MSY}$ - Includes ICES assessed stocks for which a full assessment and catch options are provided, i.e., data-rich stocks where fishing mortality is above F_{MSY} and F_{PA} but below F_{lim} i.e. At increased risk of being harvested unsustainably.
	- Includes stocks that are likely being heavily overfished and where F is above or at F_{lim} or other appropriate reference point or surrogate with similar intent, i.e. $F \geq 1.40 F_{MSY}$ - Includes ICES assessed stocks for which a full assessment and catch options are provided, i.e., data-rich stocks where fishing mortality is above or at or in the vicinity of F_{lim} i.e. Harvested unsustainably.

The scoring matrix

Use Figure 2 with the biomass and fishing-mortality values obtained from Tables 6 and 7 to determine the Route 1 element score. Multiply this score by the weighting multiplier in Table 2 to obtain the criterion score.

		Biomass				
		Under Fished	Fully Fished	Stock level below B_{MSY}	Concern for stock level	Stock depleted
Mortality		$> B_{MSY}$	$B_{MSY} - MSY$ $B_{trigger}$	MSY $B_{trigger} - B_{pa}$	$B_{pa} - B_{lim}$	$< B_{lim}$
 Harvested sustainably	$< F_{MSY}$	0	0	0.25	0.5	0.75
 Harvested sustainably	$= F_{MSY} - 1.1 F_{MSY}$	0	0.25	0.5	0.75	0.75
 Fishing level above F_{MSY}	$1.1 F_{MSY} - F_{pa}$	0.25	0.5	0.75	0.75	1
 Concern for fishing level	$F_{pa} - F_{lim}$	0.5	0.75	1	1	1
 Outside safe fishing limits	$> F_{lim}$	0.75	1	1	1	1

Figure 2. Matrix for determining Stock Status score using values for Biomass (B) and Fishing Mortality (F)

3.2 Route 2: Data-limited stock status

The criterion score for stock status under Route 2 is obtained by completing the matrix in Figure 3. The resulting score is then multiplied by the weighting multiplier to obtain the criterion score.

Species Resilience	High	Medium	Low	Very Low
Species vulnerability	0 – 0.24	0.25 – 0.49	0.50 – 0.74	0.75 – 1.0
No concern for F, No concern for B	0.25	0.25	0.5	0.5
No concern for F, Concern for B	0.5	0.5	0.75	1
Concern for F, No Concern for B	0.5	0.75	0.75	1
Concern for F, Concern for B	0.75	1	1	1

Figure 3. Data-limited descriptors, resilience and scoring matrix

No concern for F: Fishing mortality is unknown in relation to reference points, but the catch index is below the long-term average, stable, or increasing at a low level. Fishing pressure is not considered to be of concern.

Concern for F: Fishing mortality is unknown in relation to reference points, but the catch index is stable or increasing at a high level, increasing above the long-term average, or there is concern about fishing pressure. This category may also apply where information is conflicting or unavailable¹.

No concern for B: Biomass is unknown in relation to reference points, but biomass is declining from a high level, stable at or above the long-term average, or the biomass level is not considered to be of concern.

Concern for B: Biomass is unknown in relation to reference points, but biomass is stable at low levels, declining below the long-term average, or there is concern about the biomass level. This category may also apply where information is conflicting or unavailable.

In Figure 3, species resilience, or vulnerability if resilience is not available, is obtained from FishBase² for fish, SeaLifeBase³ for invertebrates, or CephBase⁴ for cephalopods. In the absence of information from these resources, simple species life-history characteristics are used. Species are considered to have very low resilience if two or more of the following apply, or if no resilience information is available:

- Age at first maturity is six or more years.
- Longevity is 20 years or greater.
- Growth rate or parameter k is ≤ 0.15 .

If fewer than two of these criteria apply, the species is considered to have medium resilience.

3.3 References

Caveen, A.J., Lart, W., Duggan, H. and Pickerell, T., 2017. The risk assessment for sourcing seafood (RASS): Empowering businesses to buy responsibly. *Marine Policy*, 75, 1–10. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309291881_The_Risk_Assessment_for_Sourcing_Seafood_RASS_Empowering_businesses_to_buy_responsibly [Accessed on 04.02.2026].

¹ In this context, “no information” refers to situations where there is no assessment and where information on exploitation or abundance is lacking and where there is no scientific advice or interpretation of available data in relation to fishing mortality or biomass.

² www.fishbase.org

³ <https://www.sealifebase.ca/search.php>

⁴ <http://cephbase.eol.org/>

- Caveen, A.J. and Lart, W., 2024. *The UK Sea Fish Industry Authority's Risk Assessment for Sourcing Seafood (RASS) Scoring Guidance*. 2nd edition, Version 2, revised April 2024. Available at: <https://www.seafish.org/document/?id=35309> [Accessed on 04.02.2026].
- International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), 2015. *General context of ICES Advice*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.18667646>.
- Marine Stewardship Council, 2019. *Guide to the MSC Fishery Assessment Process*. 105 pp. Available at: https://www.msc.org/docs/default-source/na-files/getcertified_fisheries_-feb-2019_spread.pdf?sfvrsn=6091c853_4 [Accessed on 04.02.2026].
- Marine Stewardship Council, 2024. *MSC Fisheries Certification Process: Version 3.1*. Updated 22 July 2024. Available at: https://www.msc.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/for-business/program-documents/fisheries-program-documents/msc-fisheries-certification-process-version3.1.pdf?sfvrsn=af98fad3_8 [Accessed on 04.02.2026].
- Marine Stewardship Council, 2024. *MSC Fisheries Standard and Guidance: Version 3.1*. Updated 22 July 2024. Available at: <https://www.msc.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/for-business/program-documents/fisheries-program-documents/msc-fisheries-standard-and-guidance-version3.1.pdf> [Accessed on 04.02.2026].
- Seafood Watch, 2020. *Seafood Watch Standard for Fisheries*. Version F4. Available at: <https://www.seafoodwatch.org/globalassets/sfw/pdf/standards/fisheries/seafood-watch-fisheries-standard-version-f4.pdf> [Accessed on 04.02.2026].

4. Criterion 2: Management

This criterion considers the management framework and objectives in place for the fishery. Where no appropriate and proportionate management system is in place, including measures to address critical issues such as intrinsic and widespread illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, the fishery receives a default rating of 5 (see Table 4).

The assessment of management measures in a fishery is typically conducted at the stock level. However, the spatial scale of the stock, and therefore the management measures required, can vary considerably. For example, the regulatory framework for an Orkney crab fishery will differ substantially from that required for Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna. Despite these differences, the minimum management requirements for any fishery are:

- Proportionate measures to assess and protect the stock.
- Management measures that respond to scientific advice and are adapted where necessary to support the long-term sustainability of the stock.
- Adequate monitoring, control and surveillance, supported by effective compliance and enforcement.

Version 3 therefore evaluates three separate elements under the management criterion:

- **Management of the target stock** – This element assesses whether effective and appropriate measures are in place for the target stock. It considers how scientific advice is generated, how it is incorporated into management and whether management responds appropriately to changes in stock status.
- **Alignment with scientific advice and catch controls** – This element assesses whether catch limits are set in line with scientific advice and whether total catches are effectively controlled. It also considers mixed-fishery and group TAC constraints, as well as the management of non-target catch through measures such as discard rules and the Landing Obligation.
- **Monitoring, control and surveillance effectiveness** – This element assesses the overall monitoring, control and surveillance framework, including the use of vessel monitoring systems, observer coverage, compliance and enforcement.

Each element is scored from 0 to 1. The three element scores are added together and multiplied by a weighting factor of 2, producing an overall management criterion score between 0 and 6. This score contributes to the final Good Fish Guide rating.

4.1 Management detailed elements

The three elements assessed under the management criterion are described in more detail in the following sections.

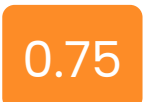
4.1.1 Management of the target stock

This element evaluates whether effective and appropriate management measures are in place for the target stock. It considers stock biomass, fishing pressure, the quality of scientific advice and the extent to which this advice is incorporated into and implemented through management measures. It also assesses whether management responds appropriately to changes in stock status and whether measures are applied in a timely and precautionary manner.

This element is linked to the stock status criterion, as stock status is a primary indicator of whether management is achieving its objectives. It is used to assess the effectiveness of existing measures and whether the stock is on track to support a sustainable fishery. A score other than 0 indicates that management is not yet fully effective and may reflect either the need for more appropriate measures or the time required for existing measures to support recovery and long-term sustainability.

This element is scored on a five-step scale ranging from 0 to 1. The descriptors for each score are presented in Table 8. Table 9 provides examples of measures that may be appropriate for a well-managed target stock.

Table 8. Category descriptors for management of the target stock

Category Description & Score	Associated descriptors
Comprehensive & effective management 	All appropriate management measures are in place and are highly effective. And, if applicable: • The stock is well above target and limit reference points, sustainably harvested and shows resilience. • Where a management plan is in place, F is below Fmp and B is above Bmp. • Management is precautionary and adaptive, with scientific advice integrated into management decisions, ensuring sustainable outcomes. • The spatial scale of management aligns with the biological stock area.
Largely effective management with minor gaps 	Some appropriate management measures are in place and largely effective. And, if applicable: • The stock is well above target and limit reference points, sustainably harvested and shows resilience. • Where a management plan is in place, F is below Fmp and B is above Bmp. • Or, where a recovery plan is in place, the stock is recovering as expected within the agreed timeframe. • Management is informed by and adaptive to scientific advice. • The spatial scale of management aligns with the biological stock area.
Partially effective management 	Some, but not all, appropriate management measures are in place, but they appear to have little effect, are insufficient or inadequate, or have not been in place long enough for their effect to have been assessed. And, if applicable: • The stock is at or within target levels or a defined range. • Where a management plan is in place, F and/or B are at or within the relevant Fmp and/or Bmp target or defined range. • Or, where a recovery plan is in place, the stock is recovering, but not necessarily within the agreed timeframe. • Scientific advice is only partially integrated into management. • There is some mismatch between the spatial scale of management and the biological stock area.
Limited or largely ineffective management 	Few appropriate management measures are in place and they appear to have limited effect. And, if applicable: • The stock is below target levels and potentially approaching limit reference points. • A management plan is in place, but F is above Fmp and B is below Bmp. • Or, the stock is subject to overfishing and insufficient measures are in place to recover the stock. • Scientific advice is not followed or integrated into management. • There is a substantial mismatch between the spatial scale of management and the biological stock area.
No appropriate or effective management 	No appropriate management measures are in place. And, if applicable: • The stock is depleted, below safe levels and overfished. • No management plan is in place. • The stock is at or below, or in the vicinity of, Blim, with no recovery plan in place. • Scientific advice is lacking and is not followed or integrated into management. • Management is significantly misaligned with the biological stock area.

The examples in Table 9 are indicative and should be applied proportionately, taking account of the scale, characteristics and management needs of the fishery.

Table 9. Examples of management measures for a well-managed target stock

Measure	Description
Catch or harvest control rule	An agreed management response to changes in stock status.
Effort or access controls	Effective effort controls, for example limits on days at sea, spatial or temporal closures, limited entry through restrictive licensing or permits, and transferable access rights.
Regular & robust stock assessment, or appropriate assessment of data-limited stocks	Appropriate reference points and precautionary management to mitigate uncertainty where the stock is data-limited. Regular monitoring, for example catch per unit effort, size and age structure, and good knowledge of species biology. A reliable stock assessment should be conducted regularly, reflect the needs of the fishery and be no more than five years old.
Measures to reduce discarding & unwanted catch	The Landing Obligation or other measures in place specifically to reduce discarding and waste, for example selectivity and avoidance measures and limits on discard rates.
Protection of juveniles & spawning stock	Measures may include byelaws to protect spawning sites or berried crustaceans, for example making it illegal to land berried crustaceans or target spawning adults, as well as seasonal, spatial or temporal closures.
Voluntary codes of conduct or practice	A code of conduct or practice that is publicly available.

4.1.2 Alignment with scientific advice and catch controls

This element evaluates how effectively scientific advice is incorporated into management decisions through the setting of Total Allowable Catches (TACs), quotas and other catch controls. It considers whether catch limits and total removals are consistent with the best available scientific advice, and whether catches remain within those limits. Where ICES advice is available, the headline advice, typically based on the maximum sustainable yield or precautionary approach, will normally be used because it provides the clearest route to stock growth and long-term sustainability. ICES also provides alternative advice scenarios, which may be considered where they still support stock growth and offer a better fit with management objectives or the specific circumstances of the stock, for example in mixed fisheries.

It also assesses how mixed-fishery and group TAC constraints are addressed, including whether management accounts for the needs of the most limiting stock. The management of unwanted and non-target catch is also considered through measures such as bycatch mitigation, compliance with discard rules and implementation of the Landing Obligation or equivalent requirements. Undersized or juvenile individuals of the target species may also be considered where their capture creates an additional management concern.

This element is scored on a five-step scale ranging from 0 to 1. The descriptors for each score are presented in Table 10. Table 11 provides examples of measures that may support alignment with scientific advice and effective control of catches.

Table 10. Category descriptors for alignment with scientific advice and catch controls

Category Description & Score	Associated descriptors
Management fully aligns with scientific advice & effectively controls total catches 	Management fully aligns with scientific advice, with robust control of TACs, catches, landings, discards and bycatch/non-target species. And, if applicable: • TACs or quotas are set in line with or below scientific advice, and catches remain at or below these limits. • Mixed-fishery or group TAC constraints are explicitly considered, with precautionary allowances applied for the most limiting, that is, the most impaired, stock. • Impacts on non-target species are recognised and managed through measures such as mitigating bycatch risk, adherence to the Landing Obligation and compliance with discard rules.
Management largely aligns with scientific advice, with minor implementation gaps 	Management largely aligns with scientific advice, and small shortcomings exist in TAC, catch, discard or bycatch management. And, if applicable: • Catches have remained in line with or below advice for at least the past five years, but TACs may be set above advice. • Mixed-fishery or group TAC constraints are acknowledged, and management attempts to address them, though implementation may be uneven. • Impacts on non-target species are recognised, with measures such as bycatch mitigation, adherence to the Landing Obligation and compliance with discard rules, though coverage or consistency may vary.
Partial integration of scientific advice & inconsistent control of total catches 	Management partially integrates scientific advice, and catch, landing, discard and bycatch controls are inconsistently applied or insufficient. Or Few management measures exist and no advised catch limits are set, but there is no evidence of concern regarding fishing pressure or biomass. And, if applicable: • Catches have occasionally exceeded advice in the last five years, not including the most recent year. • Mixed-fishery or group TAC issues are recognised, but responses are inconsistent and do not reliably protect the most limiting stock. • Bycatch and non-target species measures exist but are partial, incompletely applied or not reliably effective.
Limited integration of scientific advice & inadequate control of catches & bycatch 	Management shows limited integration of scientific advice, and TAC, discard and bycatch controls are inadequate. Or Few management measures are in place and no advised catch limits exist, and there is evidence of concern regarding either fishing pressure or biomass, but not both. And, if applicable: • Catches have occasionally exceeded advice in the last five years, including the most recent year. • Mixed-fishery or group TAC constraints are largely overlooked, increasing the risk of choke scenarios or catch overshoots for the most limiting stock. • Bycatch and non-target species impacts are poorly managed.
Scientific advice is not integrated & total catches are not effectively controlled 	Scientific advice is not integrated, and TAC setting and bycatch or discard controls are ineffective. Or Few management measures are in place and no advised catch limits exist, and there is evidence of concern regarding both fishing pressure and biomass. And, if applicable: • Catches have consistently exceeded advice in the last five years, including the most recent year. • Mixed-fishery and group TAC dynamics are disregarded, with no precautionary allowances for the most limiting stock. • Bycatch and non-target species impacts are unmanaged, with no effective measures.

Examples of measures that support alignment with scientific advice and effective catch controls are provided in Table 11. These measures should be considered where applicable to the fishery under assessment.

Table 11. User guidance on management measures appropriate to a well-managed fishery

Measure	Description
Compliance with best available scientific advice	TACs or quotas are set in line with recommendations from the latest stock assessment or scientific advice.
Compliance with management	Landings or catches adhere to established management measures or the requirements of an approved recovery plan.
Industry-led initiatives	Voluntary actions taken by industry that support sustainable catch levels, reduce unwanted catch or improve adherence to TACs, such as seasonal adjustments, voluntary closures or catch-handling improvements.
Choke species mitigation	Evidence that management anticipates and prevents choke scenarios through flexibilities, targeted closures, adjusted effort or other precautionary mechanisms.
Bycatch and non-target species mitigation	Measures to recognise and manage impacts on non-target species, including bycatch mitigation practices, technical gear measures, adherence to the Landing Obligation and compliance with discard rules to limit unintended catch.

4.1.3 Monitoring, control and surveillance effectiveness

This element assesses the overall effectiveness of the monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) framework applicable to the fishery. National or regional legislation and regulatory systems provide important evidence, but the assessment considers how effectively the framework operates for the fishery under assessment.

It considers the extent to which MCS frameworks mandate and support the use and coverage of tools such as VMS, AIS, observers, CCTV, logbooks and at-sea or dockside inspections. It also evaluates the robustness of enforcement provisions, including patrols, the transparent handling of violations and the implementation of measures such as discard bans. In addition, it examines whether these systems are effectively designed and implemented to detect and deter illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

This element also recognises traceability efforts within the fishery. Traceability may provide supporting context but does not determine the score on its own.

As with the previous two management elements, monitoring, control and surveillance effectiveness is evaluated using a five-point scale ranging from 0 to 1. Each step is described in Table 12. Examples of monitoring, control and surveillance measures are provided in Table 13.

Table 12. Category descriptors for monitoring, control and surveillance effectiveness

Category Description & Score	Associated descriptors
Fully comprehensive monitoring, control & surveillance with highly effective enforcement and negligible IUU fishing activity 0	The national or regional Monitoring, Control and Surveillance framework applicable to the fishery is fully comprehensive and highly effective, supported by strong enforcement, with violations promptly and transparently addressed and very low levels of IUU activity. • Comprehensive Monitoring, Control and Surveillance measures are in place (VMS, observers, CCTV and patrols). • Extensive logbook, observer and electronic monitoring coverage. • High compliance, including compliance with voluntary measures. • Negligible IUU fishing. • Discard bans fully enforced. • Digital traceability within the fishery. Or • The fishery is certified to a recognised standard, indicating greater traceability within the fishery, for example the Marine Stewardship Council. Certification will normally support a score of 0. However, a higher score may be applied where conditions are attached to the certification or where monitoring, enforcement or other measures are considered inadequate or ineffective.
Well-developed monitoring & enforcement systems with good coverage and low levels of IUU activity 0.25	The national or regional Monitoring, Control and Surveillance framework applicable to the fishery is well developed and effective, with reliable enforcement and low levels of IUU activity. • Broad Monitoring, Control and Surveillance coverage (for example, VMS, observers and CCTV). • Regular monitoring and complete logbook reporting. • Generally high compliance. • Low IUU risk. • Discard bans usually enforced.
Adequate monitoring and enforcement in place, though coverage gaps and occasional IUU concerns remain 0.5	The national or regional Monitoring, Control and Surveillance framework applicable to the fishery is adequate, although coverage gaps and variable enforcement reduce its overall effectiveness. Some IUU activity may occur. • Partial Monitoring, Control and Surveillance coverage (for example, VMS, observers and CCTV) is in place. • Monitoring is present but inconsistent. • Compliance is moderate but inconsistent. • Occasional IUU concerns. • Discard bans inconsistently implemented.
Limited monitoring and weak enforcement, with insufficient coverage and notable risk of IUU activity 0.75	The national or regional Monitoring, Control and Surveillance framework applicable to the fishery is limited, with irregular coverage and weak deterrence. IUU activity is a notable risk. • Minimal Monitoring, Control and Surveillance coverage (for example, VMS, observers and CCTV) is in place. • Irregular monitoring and concerns about logbook reliability. • Low or inconsistent compliance. • Notable risk of IUU activity. • Discard bans rarely enforced.
Minimal or absent monitoring & enforcement, with widespread or likely IUU activity 1	The national or regional Monitoring, Control and Surveillance framework applicable to the fishery lacks meaningful monitoring and enforcement, with widespread or likely IUU activity and little evidence of compliance. • Little or no Monitoring, Control and Surveillance coverage. • Monitoring largely absent. • Very low compliance. • High levels of IUU activity. • Discard bans not enforced.

Examples of measures that support adequate monitoring, control and surveillance, and effective enforcement are provided in Table 13.

Table 13. User guidance on management measures appropriate to a well-managed fishery

Measure	Description
Monitoring, control and surveillance	Regular patrols and enforcement, including a fisheries inspectorate, port controls, fines and VMS, as well as observer and/or CCTV coverage and a ban on discarding target species.
Enforcement	Measures to avoid or reduce IUU fishing, including logbooks, observers at sea, fines, a fully documented fishery and the registration of buyers and sellers, or equivalent measures.
Illegal, unreported and unregulated activity	The prevalence of IUU activity, the penalties regime, awareness of the consequences of non-compliance and patrols (on shore and at sea). Where IUU fishing is suspected to be significant, intrinsic and widespread, a default score of 1 applies to the fishery.

4.2 References

- Fishery Progress, 2025. *Fishery improvement project progress tracking database and tools*. Available at: <https://fisheryprogress.org/> [Accessed on 05.03.2026].
- Melnychuk, M.C., Peterson, E., Elliot, M. and Hilborn, R., 2016. Fisheries management impacts on target species status. *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.*, 114(1), 178–183. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1609915114>.
- Sustainable Fisheries Partnership, 2026. *FIP toolkit and resources*. Available at: <https://sustainablefish.org/industry-leadership/seafood-producers/fishery-and-aquaculture-improvement-efforts/fishery-improvement-projects/> [Accessed on 05.03.2026].

5. Criterion 3: Capture method & ecological effects

The criterion for capture method and ecological effects considers the impacts associated with the capture or fishing method on habitats, including vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) such as seamounts, cold-water corals, biogenic reefs and seagrass; target and non-target species, in terms of discards and non-target catch (bycatch), whether retained or discarded; vulnerable or Endangered, Threatened or Protected (ETP) species; and the broader impacts on the ecosystem as a whole.

The impacts on the marine environment vary depending on the fishing gear used. Active gear types, such as trawls, generally have more direct environmental impacts than passive gear types, but these impacts are heavily dependent on fishing intensity, site vulnerability and the target species. Towed and encircling gears, including beam trawls, otter trawls, dredges, seines and purse seines, can also generate significant levels of bycatch across a range of species. These may include other commercial fish species and non-commercial species, such as ETP species, cetaceans and invertebrates. However, modifications can be used with many of these gear types to reduce discards and bycatch.

Dive-caught, pole-and-line, handline, pot or creel, trap and set-net fishing methods tend to have a low impact on the marine environment because they are not towed along the seabed and therefore have a limited area of impact. Similarly, while longline fishing may result in significant shark or seabird bycatch, it has little or no contact with the seabed and therefore does not have a significant benthic impact.

Where a fishing method causes significant impacts on species or habitats, involves illegal activity, heavily damages designated Marine Protected Area (MPA) features, or involves bottom trawling below 600 m without robust regulation in place, the fishery receives a default rating of 5.

Many bottom-trawling gears will need to be assessed for potential damage to seabed features where Special Areas of Conservation, Scottish nature conservation MPAs or English Marine Conservation Zones have been designated to protect those features.

The capture method and ecological effects criterion assesses the impacts of the fishing gear across four elements:

- Habitat impacts.
- Non-target species (bycatch), including retained or discarded catch and associated removals.
- Vulnerable or Endangered, Threatened or Protected species, including retained or discarded catch and associated removals.
- Ecosystem and trophic-web impacts.

Measures used to reduce the impacts of the fishing gear are considered when assigning the individual element scores. Examples of these measures are provided alongside the detailed descriptors for each element.

The final score for this criterion is determined by selecting the highest-scoring, and therefore worst-performing, of the four elements. This score is then multiplied by the weighting multiplier of 6 to produce the overall criterion score. The remaining element scores will also be displayed on the Good Fish Guide webpage to provide additional context and improve transparency.

Using the highest element score prevents significant ecological impacts from being diluted by stronger performance in other areas. For example, benthic damage associated with bottom-towed gears or elevated bycatch levels should not be minimised by lower impacts in the other elements. Individual element scores will remain visible, but stronger performance in one area will not offset the fishery's most significant ecological impact.

This approach applies only to capture method impacts because the potential for mitigation can be constrained by the design and operation of the fishing gear. Certain gear types may continue to pose high risks despite mitigation measures. Management elements are assessed cumulatively because management performance is more context-dependent and can continue to improve through appropriate interventions.

5.1 Capture method and ecological effects detailed descriptors

The four elements assessed under this criterion are described in more detail in the following sections.

5.1.1 Habitat impacts

Table 14 considers the impact of fishing gear on the seabed and other habitats, such as coral, seagrass and seamounts.

The fishing gears listed in Table 14 are not exhaustive but represent the main gear types used in commercial UK and European fisheries. Gear types that are not listed are assessed on their own merits, including where modifications have been made to reduce benthic impacts.

Table 14. Gear and habitat impact scores

Gear Type	Habitat				
	Fine mobile sand	Mud and/or gravel	Bedrock, boulder &/or cobble	Biogenic reef, seagrass, maerl, corals	Deep sea, seamounts
Manual					
Dive caught	0	0.25	0.25	0.25	NA
Hand gathering or rake	0	0	0.25	0.75	NA
Pole & line, jig, troll	0	0	0	0	NA
Hook and line, handline*	0	0	0	0	NA
Spear or harpoon	0	0	0	0	NA
Static					
Bottom longline	0	0	0.25	0.75	0.75
Pelagic longline	0	0	0	0	NA
Coastal drift net	0	0	0	0	NA
Fixed or gill net	0	0	0.75	0.75	Restricted below 600m in EU
Pot, creel or trap	0	0	0.25	0.75	NA
Suction dredge	0	0.75	1	1	NA
Towed Pelagic					
Mid water or pelagic trawl	0	0	0	0	NA
Pair trawl	0	0	0	0	NA
Towed Bottom					
Beam trawl	0.25	0.75	0.75	1	NA
Demersal otter trawl	0.25	0.75	0.75	1	1
Dredge	0.25	0.75	1	1	NA
Encircling					
Purse seine	0	0	0	0	NA
Benthic seine net	0.25	0.25	0.75	1	NA
Explosives, chemical or illegal**	1	1	1	1	1
SCORE 1 0.75 0.5 0.25 0					

*if fished on sea floor, otherwise NA

**e.g. high seas drift net and electrical fishing

For guidance on habitat impacts, we refer to risk ratings produced by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) in June 2014, which assess the likelihood that different fishing gear types and activities will damage protected features of European Marine Sites, initially Special Areas of Conservation.

This guidance is also used by English regulators to manage the impacts of different fishing activities within Marine Conservation Zones and Special Areas of Conservation.

Habitat maps may be used to determine sediment types across different waters. Where appropriate, information on the preferred substrate types of species at different stages of their life history may also be considered.

For fisheries that overlap with Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), the assessment will consider the designated feature(s) of the MPA, how fishing activity interacts with those features, the level of protection in place, and the current condition of the features (see Appendix VI).

Table 15. Examples of measures to reduce gear impacts on habitats

Fishing Method	Measure Type	Mitigation Measures or Selective Devices
Demersal trawl (single, pair, or multi-rig)	Technical gear measure	Lighter ground gear, for example rollers instead of hoppers, suspended or semi-suspended trawl doors, and raised footropes to reduce seabed contact.
Beam trawl	Technical gear measure	Replacement of skids with wheels or use of SumWing gear.
Mechanical dredge	Technical gear measure	Restrictions on gear design and the number of dredges.
Dredge (hydraulic or suction)	Technical gear measure	Restrictions relating to solids pump dredges, grid spacing and delivery pipe type.
Any applicable fishing method	Spatial or management measure	Spatial or temporal closures, MPAs, MCZs and protection of VMEs.
Any applicable fishing method	Management approach	Application of a precautionary approach in vulnerable habitats.
Any applicable fishing method	Technical or operational measure	Real-time 'move-on' rules to avoid sensitive habitats.

5.1.2 Bycatch impacts

This element assesses the impact of fishing gear on non-target species, often referred to as bycatch, which may be retained or discarded. While many fisheries target multiple species, the 'target' species referred to in this assessment is the species being rated.

Bycatch can include other commercially valuable species, non-fish organisms and undersized or juvenile individuals of the target species. The extent of this impact depends on several factors, including the target species, location and timing of the fishing activity.

When assessing the likelihood of impacts on non-target species, the score is determined by the most vulnerable or overexploited non-target species regularly associated with the fishery. This ensures that the assessment remains precautionary and reflects the highest level of ecological risk within the bycatch assemblage. This approach also applies when the rated species is retained as part of a mixed fishery (see Glossary, Appendix IV), in which case a minimum of six species must be considered. Where a bycatch species is commonly discarded, associated discard rates are also taken into account.

Note: Where the assessed species is generally recognised as a bycatch species, for example yellow or tub gurnard, the following scores may be applied:

- Where the stock status score is 0, a score of 0 may be awarded for this element.
- Where the stock status score is 0.25 or 0.5, a score of 0.25 may be awarded for this element.
- Where the stock status score is 0.75 or 1, a score of 0.5 may be awarded for this element.

These adjusted scores reflect the continued occurrence of unnecessary mortality of the assessed species when caught as bycatch, as well as the broader risk posed to other bycaught species. However, where the assessed species forms part of a wider depleted fishery, a higher score of 0.75 or 1 may be appropriate for this element.

This element is scored on a five-step scale ranging from 0 to 1. The descriptors for each score are presented in Table 16. Where bycatch includes a high-risk species, for example a species subject to zero-catch advice, the proportion of that species in the catch should also be considered. Very low bycatch rates may not directly contribute to population decline and may not warrant a score of 1. However, any removals hinder recovery and rebuilding, so a score of 0.5 or higher is likely to be justified.

Table 16. Impact on non-target (bycatch) species

Score	Descriptors
0	The fishery is associated with a low or negligible impact on non-target species.
0.25	The fishery is unlikely to be overexploiting non-target species.
0.5	The fishery may be overexploiting non-target species.
0.75	The fishery is likely to be overexploiting non-target species and contributing to population decline.
1	The fishery is causing non-target species to fall to critical levels, for example where stock biomass is below Blim.

Table 17. Examples of measures to reduce gear impacts on bycatch

Fishing Method	Measure Type	Mitigation Measures or Selective Devices
Any applicable	Monitoring & control	Use of BRDs, REM, FDF and onboard observers.
Any applicable	Management measure	Bycatch quotas, full catch recording and avoidance measures.
Any applicable	Spatial management measure	Restrictions or closures in bycatch hotspots and bans on damaging practices.
Any applicable	Governance or management measure	Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs).
Longline (pelagic or demersal)	Technical or operational measure	Hook type changes, including circle hooks, bait modification, night setting, bird scarers, weighted lines and offal management
Gill, fixed or drift nets	Technical gear measure	Acoustic deterrents, measures to improve net visibility, including dyes or colour, soak-time limits and mesh-size limits.
Pot, creel or trap	Technical gear measure	Escape gaps and restrictions on trap type.
Midwater trawl	Technical gear measure	Excluder panels for marine mammals or large fish.
Purse seine	Operational measure	Avoidance of sets in high-risk areas or on vulnerable aggregations.

5.1.3 Vulnerable or ETP species impacts

This element assesses the impact of the fishery on vulnerable species and Endangered, Threatened or Protected (ETP) species. ETP species are species that are endangered, threatened or protected under relevant national, regional or international legislation, agreements or conservation listings. Vulnerable or ETP species may include certain fish species, including elasmobranchs, as well as non-fish organisms such as cetaceans, marine reptiles, seabirds and benthic fauna.

The Marine Conservation Society recognises that it is often difficult to demonstrate population-level impacts from incidental catch. In some fisheries, even where bycatch of ETP species is significant, removals may fall below relevant sustainability thresholds, such as Potential Biological Removal (PBR) for some marine mammals, and may not result in measurable population effects. However, continued efforts are needed to reduce incidental capture of ETP species to as close to zero as possible, particularly where animal welfare concerns exist.

This element is scored on a five-step scale ranging from 0 to 1. The descriptors for each score are presented in Table 18.

Table 18. Category descriptors for impacts on vulnerable or ETP species

Score	Descriptors
0	The fishery is associated with negligible bycatch of vulnerable or ETP species.
0.25	Bycatch levels are unlikely to cause populations to decline.
0.5	Bycatch levels may contribute to population decline, prevent recovery or indicate that the fishing method is associated with significant bycatch issues.
0.75	Bycatch levels are likely to cause populations to decline or prevent their recovery.
1	Bycatch levels are very likely to cause populations to decline or prevent their recovery.

Table 19. Examples of measures to reduce gear impacts on vulnerable or ETP species

Fishing Method	Measure Type	Mitigation Measures or Selective Devices
Any applicable	Monitoring and control	Catch monitoring, including REM, FDF and observers.
Demersal trawl	Technical gear measure	Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) and BRDs.
Midwater or pelagic trawl	Technical gear measure	Sorting grids, for example a Nordmøre grid, and TEDs.
Seine nets	Technical gear measure	Selective panels.
Troll	Operational measure	Visible hooks and setting lines below seabird feeding ranges.
Purse seine	Technical or operational measure	Dolphin-safe methods, including the Medina panel and backdown procedure, and restrictions on sets around cetaceans or whale sharks.
Purse seine (FAD)	Technical or management measure	Non-entangling FADs, limits on FAD use and restrictions around ETP species.
Longline (pelagic or demersal)	Technical or operational measure	Bird scarers, dyed bait, night setting, weighted lines, hook changes and magnets to deter sharks.

5.1.4 Impact on ecosystems and trophic webs

This element assesses how the fishery may affect the broader ecosystem and the structure of trophic webs. Ecosystems and trophic webs refer to the interconnected relationships among species and the flow of energy through different feeding levels. Disruptions to these relationships, such as the removal of key predators or prey, can alter ecosystem functioning, reduce ecological stability and trigger cascading effects that may compromise the long-term health and resilience of marine environments.

A precautionary approach may be applied when scoring this element, particularly in data-limited fisheries or for data-limited species. Higher impacts are assumed where removals are substantial, involve high-level predators, forage or key prey species, or keystone species, or where more damaging fishing gears are used. Lower impacts are associated with smaller removals, mid-trophic species, more resilient and well-connected food webs, and less damaging fishing gears.

This element is scored on a five-step scale ranging from 0 to 1. The descriptors for each score are presented in Table 20.

Table 20. Impact on ecosystems and trophic webs

Score	Descriptors
0	The fishery has a low or negligible impact on ecosystem function or trophic-web structure.
0.25	The fishery is unlikely to alter ecosystem function or trophic-web structure.
0.5	The fishery may alter ecosystem function or trophic-web structure.
0.75	There is evidence that the fishery is likely to cause long-term changes to ecosystem function or trophic-web structure.
1	The fishery is very likely to cause significant changes to ecosystem function or trophic-web structure.

Examples of measures that may reduce fishing gear impacts on ecosystems and trophic webs are provided in Table 21. These measures should be considered where applicable to the fishery under assessment.

Table 21. Examples of measures to reduce gear impacts on ecosystems and trophic webs

Fishing Method	Measure Type	Mitigation Measures or Selective Devices
Any applicable	Monitoring and control	Catch monitoring, including REM, FDF and observers.
Any applicable	Spatial management measure	MPAs, MCZs, protection of VMEs and spatial or temporal closures.
Any applicable	Management measure	Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) and maximum size limits, where applicable.
Any applicable	Management approach	Quotas and catch controls to maintain trophic balance.
Purse seine (FAD)	Technical or management measure	Limits on the number and density of FADs, non-entangling designs and restrictions on debris or log-associated sets.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/310811/matrix.xls [Accessed on 12.03.2026].

Seafish, 2026. *Fishing Gear Database*. Available at: <https://www.seafish.org/responsible-sourcing/fishing-gear-database/> [Accessed on 05.03.2026].

Seafish, MSC, FCI and SAGB, 2013. *Project inshore MSC pre-assessment database*. Available at: <http://msc.solidproject.co.uk/msc-project-inshore.aspx> [Accessed on 01.06.2017].

Seitz, R.D., Wennhage, H., Bergström, U., Lipcius, R.N. and Ysebaert, T., 2014. Ecological value of coastal habitats for commercially and ecologically important species. *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, 71(3), 648–665. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fst152>.

Szostek, C.L., Hiddink, J.G., Sciberras, M., Shepperson, J.L., Thompson, S., Hormbrey, S., Caveen, A., Lart, W., Rodmell, D. and Kaiser, M.J., 2022. A tool to estimate the contribution of fishing gear modifications to reduce benthic impact. *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, 26(6), 1858–1870. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jiec.13366>.

Thurstan, R., Brockington, S. and Roberts, C., 2010. The effects of 118 years of industrial fishing on UK bottom trawl fisheries. *Nat Commun*, 1, 15. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1038/ncomms1013>.

van der Reijden, K.J., Eigaard, O.R., Bastardie, F., van Denderen, P.D. and O'Neill, F.G., 2025. A gear component approach to trawling impact and sediment mobilization assessments. *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, 82(7). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fsaf106>.

6. Appendices

Appendix I. External review process

As part of the Marine Conservation Society's scheduled ratings updates in April and October each year, and following the release of the latest scientific advice, the Marine Conservation Society consults externally on proposed changes to seafood ratings (see Appendix II).

Interested parties with technical insight, relevant industry or scientific expertise, or information that could contribute to the comprehensiveness and quality of the assessments are particularly invited to contribute.

To receive notifications about ratings updates and consultations, please email ratings@mcsuk.org and ask to be added to the interested parties email distribution list.

Details of ratings consultations are also available on the [Good Fish Guide](#) website.

Appendix II. Good Fish Guide update schedule

Month	Action
January	→ Research
February	→ Consultation
March	→ Finalisation
April	→ April Launch
May	→ Research
June	→ Research
July	→ Research
August	→ Consultation
September	→ Finalisation
October	→ October Launch
November	→ Research
December	→ Research

Appendix III. Recognised certification programmes

The Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI) Global Benchmark Tool is used to inform consideration of certification standards for recognition within the Wild-Capture Methodology. The Marine Conservation Society currently recognises the following programmes:

- [Alaskan Responsible Fisheries Management \(RFM\) Program – Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute \(ASMI\)](#)
- [Icelandic Responsible Fisheries \(IRF\) Certification Program](#)
- [Marine Stewardship Council \(MSC\)](#)
- [Certified Seafood International \(CSI\) Certification Program](#)
- [Marine Eco-Label Japan \(MEL\) Scheme for Aquaculture and Fisheries](#)

Further information: [GSSI recognised certification schemes](#)

Appendix IV. Glossary

The glossary defines technical terms used throughout the Wild-Capture Methodology. Acronyms and abbreviated reference points are listed separately in the Acronyms and abbreviations section.

Term	Description
Artisanal	Small-scale, traditional fisheries, often using relatively low-technology gear and local knowledge.
Benthic	On or near the seabed.
Biodiversity	The variability among living organisms, including diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.
Biogenic reef	Reefs or reef-like structures created by living organisms. UK examples include cold-water coral reefs, such as <i>Desmophyllum pertusum</i> , formerly <i>Lophelia pertusa</i> , and <i>Madrepora oculata</i> , and mussel beds formed by <i>Mytilus edulis</i> (edible mussel) or <i>Modiolus modiolus</i> (horse mussel).
Biomass	The total weight of living organisms in a specified area, population or stock.
Boulder	Seafloor rock particles greater than 256mm across
Bycatch	Bycatch is catch taken incidentally during fishing, alongside the target catch. It can include non-target species, unwanted sizes or life stages of target species, invertebrates, and Endangered, Threatened or Protected (ETP) species such as sharks, rays, marine turtles, seabirds and marine mammals. Bycatch may be retained, landed or discarded.
Cobble	Seafloor rock particles between 64mm and 256mm across.
Cohort	A group of fish born in the same year within a population or stock.
Data-deficient / data-limited	Stocks or fisheries for which available data are insufficient to define or evaluate reference points and assess stock status with confidence.
Deep sea fishing	The Marine Conservation Society defines this as fishing that targets species classed as deep-sea species by ICES and/or fishing that primarily occurs below 600m.
Deep-sea species	Species that occur in deep-sea waters and are characterised by traits such as slow growth, late maturity, high longevity, low natural mortality and low, episodic or non-annual recruitment.

Discards Parts of the catch returned to the sea after capture, for example because individuals are below MCRS or MLS, quota is exhausted, the species has low market value, or the catch is damaged. Survival varies by species, gear and handling, but many discarded animals die.

Fishery The sum of fishing activities on a given resource, defined by species, area of capture, stock or subarea and capture method, for example a shrimp fishery or North Sea cod fishery. It may also refer to a single type or style of fishing, for example a trawl fishery.

Fishing effort The amount of fishing activity using a specific gear over a given unit of time, for example hours trawled per day, or the overall amount of fishing expressed in effort units, for example number of hauls per vessel per day.

Fully fished A stock or fishery where catches are close to, or at, levels expected to produce MSY, with little or no scope to increase catches sustainably.

Landing obligation or 'discard ban' A regulatory requirement that catches of species subject to catch limits must usually be retained, landed and counted against quota, rather than discarded at sea. Exemptions apply, including where a species has a high chance of survival after release, or where only a small amount of catch may be discarded under specific rules. The rules were phased in from 2015 and are subject to current guidance.

Mixed fishery A fishery where several commercially important species are caught together by the same gear. Most fisheries around the UK are mixed fisheries.

Overfished The state of a fish stock when biomass is below the level capable of producing MSY on a continuing basis.

Overfishing When a stock is subjected to fishing mortality above the level that allows it to produce MSY on a continuing basis.

Productivity The biological capacity of a species or stock to grow, reproduce and recover from mortality or depletion.

Quotas Allocated limits on how much fish may be caught or landed, usually set by species, stock, area and period.

Reef A rocky marine habitat or biological concretion that rises from the seabed. Reefs are generally subtidal but may extend into the intertidal zone. They vary in form and in the communities they support. Two main types can be recognised: rocky reefs, where communities develop on rock or stable boulders and cobbles, and biogenic reefs, where structure is created by living organisms.

Resilience The ability of a species, stock or ecosystem to withstand disturbance and recover, often linked to productivity.

Seamount An undersea mountain with a summit rising more than 1,000 m above the surrounding seafloor. Seamounts are usually volcanic, often associated with seabed hot spots and enhanced currents, and can support suspension feeders and aggregations of commercially important fish. They are distinct deep-sea environments.

Stock status The state or condition of a fish stock, for example whether it is overfished or subject to overfishing.

Stock A group of individuals of a species occupying a well-defined spatial range that is relatively independent of other groups of the same species. A stock can form the basis of a distinct fishery defined by season and area.

Underfished A stock with biomass above the level associated with MSY, often with fishing mortality below FMSY, meaning additional catch may be possible without exceeding sustainable limits.

Underutilised A species, stock or quota allocation that is not fully used, for example because of limited market demand, landing restrictions in mixed fisheries, high discard rates or low fishing interest. Underutilised does not automatically mean sustainable.

Vulnerability A combination of a species' biological, physical and behavioural characteristics, including productivity and susceptibility, that influences its risk of being caught, depleted or overfished.

Appendix V. ICES stock assessment category definitions

ICES categorises stocks according to the type and quantity of information available to support scientific advice. The definitions used in this methodology are summarised below.

ICES Category	Definition
1	Data-rich stocks with quantitative assessments and forecasts, based on production models. These stocks are not considered data-limited and have full analytical assessments.
2	Stocks with analytical assessments and forecasts that are treated qualitatively. Quantitative assessments and forecasts are available but indicate only trends in fishing mortality, recruitment and biomass, rather than providing a full analytical assessment and forecast.
3	Survey-based assessments using reliable indices, for example CPUE, are available and indicate reliable trends in stock metrics such as mortality, recruitment and biomass. However, no quantitative analytical assessment is available.
4	Only catch or landings data are available, and these may not be consistent. Reliable time series of catch data are used to approximate MSY.
5	Data-poor stocks for which only landings data are available, and no relevant fishery information is available from similar stocks or other stocks in the ecoregion.
6	Landings data are negligible. This category is usually applied to stocks caught in small quantities as bycatch, where landings are negligible compared with discards, or where abundance is low and the species has therefore received limited study.

Source: [ICES Advisory Framework 1977–2012: From MSY to Precautionary Approach and Back](#) [Accessed on 11.12.2025].

Appendix VI. Habitat scoring in MPAs

This appendix provides guidance for ratings assessors and stakeholders when scoring habitat impacts in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) with designated habitat features. It supports consistent interpretation and application of section 5.1.1 of the Wild-Capture Methodology.

For current information about MPAs in the UK, see:

- [MPA Reality Check](#)
- [JNCC Marine Protected Area Mapper](#)

This guidance does not apply to MPAs designated solely for non-habitat features, such as dolphins or porpoises. Impacts on these species are assessed under sections 5.1.2 and 5.1.3, using Tables 16 and 18, as the methodology does not include an MPA-specific mechanism for pelagic species.

Most fishery ratings assessments are conducted at the scale of the wider stock area, which may be extensive, for example the entire North Sea. At this scale, it is not always possible for the Marine Conservation Society to determine precisely whether fishing occurs inside an MPA or the extent of any overlap.

Where the assessed fishery area overlaps with an MPA, the assessment examines how fishing activity interacts with the designated benthic features of the site. Habitat scores may reflect this overlap if there is evidence of damage from fishing, if fishing activity hinders the recovery of designated features or the achievement of conservation objectives, or if management measures for the MPA are absent or insufficient.

At the time of writing, three Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) in English waters are fully closed to fishing. Other inshore and offshore MPAs have varying levels of protection, depending on the sensitivity of their designated features and the management measures in place. These protections are taken into account when scoring habitat impacts.

Guidance for seafood businesses

Where fishing occurs in MPAs that do not yet have protective measures, the Marine Conservation Society encourages supply chain actors to identify whether their sources originate from within these areas.

Where seafood is suspected to have been sourced from within designated and managed MPAs, the Marine Conservation Society advises businesses to:

1. Establish whether the fishing activity is operating legally within the MPA.
2. Request evidence from the fishery or managing authority, such as justification for the management measures, an Environmental Impact Assessment or an appropriate risk assessment, demonstrating that the activity is not damaging protected features or threatening the conservation objectives of the site.

If this evidence cannot be provided, or if fishing activity is operating illegally within the MPA, the Marine Conservation Society would consider fish from these sources to be red rated (Fish to Avoid) and would encourage businesses to seek alternatives.

Note: The Marine Conservation Society does not currently intend to develop specific ratings profiles for fisheries operating within individual MPAs.

The Marine Conservation Society recognises that commercial buyers often lack access to detailed spatial information about where fish are caught, making it difficult to determine whether fishing overlaps with MPAs. As monitoring technologies, traceability systems and supply chain transparency improve, this information is expected to become easier to obtain and use when making seafood purchasing decisions. Improvements in MPA management and monitoring should also help industry and regulators demonstrate that fishing activities are not damaging protected features.



For any questions about Marine Conservation Society seafood ratings,
or if you would like to comment on or contribute information to the
Good Fish Guide, please contact the Marine Conservation Society at:
ratings@mcsuk.org



Registered charity in England and Wales 1004005 and in Scotland SC037480.
Registered company limited by guarantee in England and Wales 02550966.
Registered office: Overcross House, Ross Park, Ross-on-Wye, HR9 7US. VAT number: 321491232.

**MARINE
CONSERVATION
SOCIETY**

**Good
Fish
Guide**

mcsuk.org



[mcsuk](#)



[mcsuk](#)



[mcs_uk](#)