



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Welsh Government
Consultation – Summary of Responses

Cockle Fishery Management Measures 2022

Consultation Summary

27 May 2022

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Contents

	<u>Page</u>
1) Background	3
2) Consultation period and distribution	3
3) Responses	4
4) Consultation questions	4 - 8
5) Summary	8
6) Next steps	8

1. Background

The Welsh Government manages public cockle fisheries throughout Wales. North Wales cockle fisheries are currently managed under the Cockles and Mussels (Specified Area) (Wales) Order 2011 and Byelaws of the former North West and North Wales Sea Fisheries Committee (NWNWSFC). The South Wales fisheries are currently regulated under Byelaws of the former South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee (SWSFC).

The current legislation used to manage public cockle fisheries is outdated and inconsistent across Wales and needs updating. Feedback from previous public consultations on proposals for new cockle management measures, recent requests from the cockle industry and information gathered from a recent pilot opening of the Three Rivers Fishery, has highlighted the need to address a wide range of issues.

This consultation was launched to collect feedback and assess public opinion on these new proposed measures, the intention of which is to:

- Ensure the protection of the environment and future sustainability of Welsh cockle fisheries through adaptive management.
- Modify the permit application system to ensure gatherers work legitimately and safely.
- Adapt and simplify the management of all public cockle fisheries in Wales to ensure the sustainability of our cockle stocks and protect the wider environment for future generations. This will include the introduction of an All-Wales Permit to gather cockle on any or all public fisheries in Wales.

2. Consultation period and distribution

The consultation commenced on 11 February 2022 and closed on 6 May 2022.

The consultation was widely publicised throughout Wales. It was published on the GOV.WALES website and in the Fishing News, and public notices were put up at all known intertidal fishery sites and in areas where there was a likelihood of interest from the public. At the same time the consultation was shared with known stakeholders by email and post, including cockle gatherers and processors, local residents, landowners, organisations, and authorities with an interest in the industry.

Respondents were able to respond by filling out the online form, by email or providing a written response.

3. Responses

The Welsh Government would like to thank everyone who took the time to submit their views and respond to the consultation, all responses will be considered before the proposals are introduced.

One hundred and seventy-four responses were received from a range of individuals and constituted bodies who have an interest in the Welsh cockle industry.

Of these 80 were received via the Welsh Government website, 80 were completed response forms received via email and 14 were written responses received via email not on a response form.

The 14 responses received by email not on a response form did not respond to the specific consultation questions. However, they were direct responses to the consultation and were received during the consultation period. Therefore, they have been considered in the total consultation responses.

Broadly the 14 written responses can be grouped into 5 groups:

- a) worries about the numbers of gatherers “getting out of hand”;
- b) criticism of the Welsh Government for taking 30 years to try to rectify the problems and for not listening to the gatherers;
- c) need for stricter eligibility criteria, i.e. safety and skipper qualifications;
- d) need for stronger links with Local Authorities and FSA re movement documents; and
- e) the need for the fisheries to be licensed (capping of permit numbers).

Three outdoor face to face meetings were held in April with permit holders and processors in South Wales to discuss the proposals highlighted in the consultation. Attendees were encouraged to fill in response forms and submit them to the Welsh Government before the closure date of 6 May. It was recommended they submit individual responses where possible to ensure all views were considered.

An article by the Three Rivers Gatherers' Association and one Processor was published in the Fishing News in its 31 March edition. While agreeing with the Welsh Government consultation proposals there was a strong indication in the article that a cap on permits for the Three Rivers would be preferable.

4. Consultation questions

The consultation consisted of a request for comments on several proposals. A total of 174 responses were received.

The responses are detailed below:

Question 1	What is your interest in the cockle industry in Wales?
The following responders completed this question:	
133 Commercial Gatherers 3 Recreational Gatherers 1 Buyer 1 Processor 10 Environmental/Conservation responders 2 Enforcement/Regulatory responders 6 Other occupations/interested parties 1 Responder skipped this question 140 Responders were resident in Wales 19 Responders were resident in England 1 Responder was resident in Scotland	
Question 2	Do you agree with Welsh Government's aims to improve the management and sustainability of cockle fisheries and protect the environment by introducing new legislation?
153 (96%) responded YES 5 (3%) responded NO 2 (1%) responders skipped this question	
Question 3	Do you agree with the issuing of annual all Wales cockle permits, as described in proposal A?
134 (84%) responded YES 24 (15%) responded NO 2 (1%) responders skipped this question	
Question 4	Do you support the introduction of a daily limit if deemed necessary, as mentioned in proposal A?
76 (47.5%) responded YES 83 (52%) responded NO 1 (1%) responder skipped this question	

Question 5	Do you support the carrying out of eligibility checks on applications for all Wales cockle permits, as described in proposal B?
154 (96%) responded YES 4 (3%) responded NO 2 (1%) responders skipped this question	
Question 6	Do you support the charging of an annual fee for a cockle permit, as described in proposal C?
145 (91%) responded YES 13 (8%) responded NO 2 (1%) responders skipped this question	
Question 7	Do you support universal permit conditions attached to all permits as described in proposal D?
146 (91.25%) responded YES 9 (5.75%) responded NO 5 (3%) responders skipped this question	
Question 8	Do you support the submission of daily catch returns to enable effective monitoring, as mentioned in proposal D?
145 (91%) responded YES 13 (8%) responded NO 2 (1%) responders skipped this question	
Question 9	Do you support the proposal for adaptive cockle fishery management through additional local conditions specific for individual named fisheries, as described in proposal E?
151 (94.5%) responded YES 5 (3%) responded NO 4 (2.5%) responders skipped this question	
Question 10	Do you agree with the proposal to standardise the personal recreational gathering allowance throughout Wales, as described in proposal F?
148 (92.5%) responded YES 7 (4.5%) responded NO 5 (3%) responders skipped this question	
Question 11	We would like to know your views on the effects that changes to the management of cockle fisheries would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English. What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

Many responders did not answer this question but of those who did, three main themes were apparent:

- Yes, this could be viewed as positive in highlighting the Welsh language
- This question held no relevance to the management of cockle fisheries
- All languages should be treated equally as Wales is viewed as a multi-cultural society where many other languages are spoken

Question 12

Please also explain how you believe the proposed policy changes to the management of cockle fisheries could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

Again, many responders did not answer this question but of those who did, three main themes were apparent:

- All languages should be treated equally
- It would enable Welsh speaking cockle gatherers to feel comfortable speaking Welsh at work
- English language tends to be favoured as it is more universal

Question 13

We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any comments you would like to make on related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Many varied responses were received to this question. Two main themes featured heavily i.e.:

- 1) Concern that appropriate/legal cockle gathering equipment was routinely not being used on the cockle beds and this needed to be strictly enforced in future. (71 responses)
- 2) It was felt that as the new MCA coded vessels already had a load limit assigned to them, a daily quota was not needed. (79 responses)

Specific environmental concerns were submitted:

- 1) I would like to see cockle extraction ended - certainly in the estuary around Burry Port and Ginst. It's an area that ought to be sensitively managed for wildlife but at present, cockle extraction means heavy vehicles on the beach, destruction of dune and marsh area - and plastic waste (not least the mesh bags which get left behind). Cockles are a valuable resource for feeding overwintering birds. It is not providing regular income - and those that come to extract cockles do not appear to be local to the area. The amounts that are taken are significant - with lorryloads removed.
- 2) There is no mention of environmental conservation in the document beyond it being listed under 'aims'. Preventing environmental damage to the coastal areas from which the cocklers access the beds; where they drive their vehicles, launch their boats etc is of key importance. But it does not feature in the document. Our group and other individuals and groups around the Three Rivers Estuary have made repeated complaints in recent years about damage to the sand dunes and

the sea barrier and about the churning up of large areas of delicate habitat at Ginst Point, home to rare marine flora and fauna. We strongly believe that any permit holder found to have wilfully damaged the environment in this way or by depositing plastic and other waste on the land or at sea should have their permit withdrawn and that this should be written into the legislation. In this latter connection we are concerned at the mention of the use of nets which may end up being lost at sea or deposited on the beach as the cockle bags are currently. There should be a system of spot checks and responsiveness to local complaints in order to monitor this.

Additional suggestions were made regarding eligibility criteria i.e.:

- Proof of skipper qualification if using a vessel
- Proof of commercially endorsed powerboat 2 course – successful completion if using a vessel
- Proof of sea survival course
- Proof of radio operator course
- Proof medically fit to attend cockle fisheries e.g., ML5 certificate

Other responses to consultation worthy of note at this time and voiced through telephone conversations with officials during the consultation period are as follows:

- Welsh Government to introduce a management plan, management group and complaints procedure
- Need for more Foreshore Gatherers Courses to be made available

A few concerned individuals used the consultation forum to express concerns around access issues, vessel legislation, parking, and substance abuse. These concerns are being forwarded to the relevant enforcing authorities.

5. Summary

The consultation consisted of a request for comments on the proposals put forward on cockle management measures. The results strongly showed support for the proposals apart from one, “imposing a daily catch limit”, which divided opinion equally.

6. Next steps

Welsh Government policy officials have considered all responses and comments which were received. Officials will now prepare a brief for the Minister on the results.

