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# Welsh Crab & Lobster Fisheries Management Plan Recreational Sector Engagement Report

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Prepared for Welsh government by Seafish



September 2024

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## 1. Introduction

### Purpose & Scope

This report presents a summary of the engagement undertaken with the recreational shellfish sector in Wales carried out by Seafish for the Welsh Government. The purpose of the project was to engage the recreational shellfish fishing sector in the early phases of development of the Welsh crab and lobster fisheries management plan (FMP), which will be developed by Welsh Government. The report is intended to inform the next stage of FMP development and presents:

- A summary of stakeholder engagement activities carried out by Seafish to gather information.
- An overview of results gathered from the recreational shellfish sector survey released as part of the project, including:
  - An overview of information and insights on the current state of fisheries management in Wales;
  - Recreational shellfish fishers' aspirations for future management, and;
  - Wider considerations for recreational shellfish fishers.

The focus of the project was on gathering information relating to brown crab (*Cancer pagurus*), European lobster (*Homarus gammarus*), crawfish (*Palinurus elephas*), velvet crab (*Necora puber*), spider crab (*Maja* spp.) and common prawn (*Palaemon serratus*), caught in the Welsh zone by recreational fishers including potters, divers, and intertidal gatherers / gleaners.

### Background

This project aimed to build on stakeholder engagement work carried out by Seafish with commercial shellfish fishers in spring 2024.

Through the first phase of the pre-consultation project Seafish gathered a wide range of views from the commercial sector, NGOs, and processors, but there was limited representation from the recreational shellfish fishing sector. To ensure a fair and representative understanding was collected, this project focused on targeted engagement with recreational potters, divers, and intertidal gleaners catching brown crab, European lobster, and crawfish in the Welsh zone.

Given that the Welsh crab and lobster FMP will include all removals from stocks, it was felt that recreational fishers should also be considered legitimate stakeholders who should be engaged in the FMP development process, both now and in the future.

The Welsh crab and lobster FMP is due to be developed and published before the end of 2026.<sup>1</sup>

A significant number of people from Wales and across the UK participate in recreational fishing each year and get a variety of benefits from this leisure activity, including the economic impact of the recreational industry as a driver of tourism. The enjoyment and satisfaction that comes with recreational fishing play an important role in a person's wellbeing and has cultural value for many.

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<sup>1</sup> [Joint Fisheries Statement, 2022](#)

## 2. Methods

### Survey / webinar format and promotion

Seafish delivered a mix of stakeholder engagement activities, including an online survey and online webinars to ensure as many stakeholders as possible had the opportunity to discuss the management of Welsh crab and lobster fisheries. Both the survey and webinars were open to any stakeholder with an interest in Welsh crab and lobster recreational fisheries, including resident and non-resident stakeholders.

Seafish created a survey on Microsoft Forms. The survey comprised 22 questions, ranging from multiple choice, Likert scales, and open text formats. The survey was released at the end of July 2024 and was open for 55 days. All responses were anonymous. A full read out of the survey questions is included in Annex I.

Seafish promoted the survey and the webinars via social media, trade media, through the Welsh Government via a permit notification, bespoke mailing list acquired through stakeholder mapping exercises and on the Seafish and Welsh Government website. Posters were created and were circulated to relevant stakeholders, bait shops and crabbing centres across Wales. All project resources were supplied in both English and Welsh.

Seafish set up three online webinars in August hosted on Microsoft Teams, each lasting one hour. The webinars consisted of an introduction to the project, scene setting on FMPs, and a discussion with attendees on the current and future management of recreational shellfish fisheries. A copy of the presentation shared at the webinars is included in Annex II.

The survey and webinars focused on four topics, including:

1. The strengths and weaknesses of existing recreational shellfish management in Welsh waters;
2. Respondents' aspirations for the future management of Welsh crab and lobster recreational fisheries;
3. The representation of the recreational shellfish sector and how the sector could be better engaged in FMP development in the future and;
4. Wider challenges and considerations that Welsh Government could take into account when developing the FMP.

An end of project wrap-up session was held by Seafish at the end of September 2024; this online meeting gave stakeholders an opportunity to review key themes in findings, sense check outputs of the project, and for Seafish to gather any final points of feedback from stakeholders before the report was submitted to Welsh Government.

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## Survey and webinar representation summary

A total of 41 stakeholders who were recreational shellfish fishers completed the online survey, with two based in North Wales, five in the Llyn Peninsula, 24 in Anglesey, and ten in west Wales.

Uptake of online webinars was low, with only four attendees over the three webinars, one of which was a recreational potter and diver based in Anglesey. The remaining three attendees had an interest in recreational shellfish fisheries management but were not themselves active recreational shellfish fishers.

### **3. Fishing activity data**

This section summarises the background information collected about the survey participants, including where recreational shellfish fishing takes place, how shellfish are being caught, and what species are primarily targeted. This information was gathered to give context to the wider survey results and to highlight which species are of highest interest to recreational shellfish fishers in Wales.

#### **Who participated in the survey?**

- 98% of participants responded that they had a recreational fishing permit.
- 63% of participants were residents who recreationally fished seasonally, 5% were residents who recreationally fished all year round, and 33% were visitors who recreationally fished on occasion.

#### **Where did participants report they undertook fishing?**

- 59% fished in Anglesey
- 24% fished in West Wales
- 12% fished on the Llyn Peninsula
- 5% fished in North Wales

#### **What species were participants targeting?**

Most participants reported catching lobster, brown crab, and spider crabs. Less than half of respondents reported catching common prawn and velvet crab.

No participants reported catching crawfish, however this is likely a result of crawfish distribution (primarily found in southern waters) and the predominance of respondents from north and west Wales. Qualitative information gathered during the first phase of the pre-consultation project – engagement with commercial fishermen – suggested that crawfish were present in southern Welsh waters and that their range was increasing northwards. Discussions with commercial fishermen also suggested that crawfish are targeted by recreational fishers, despite the fact that this information did not appear in the online survey.

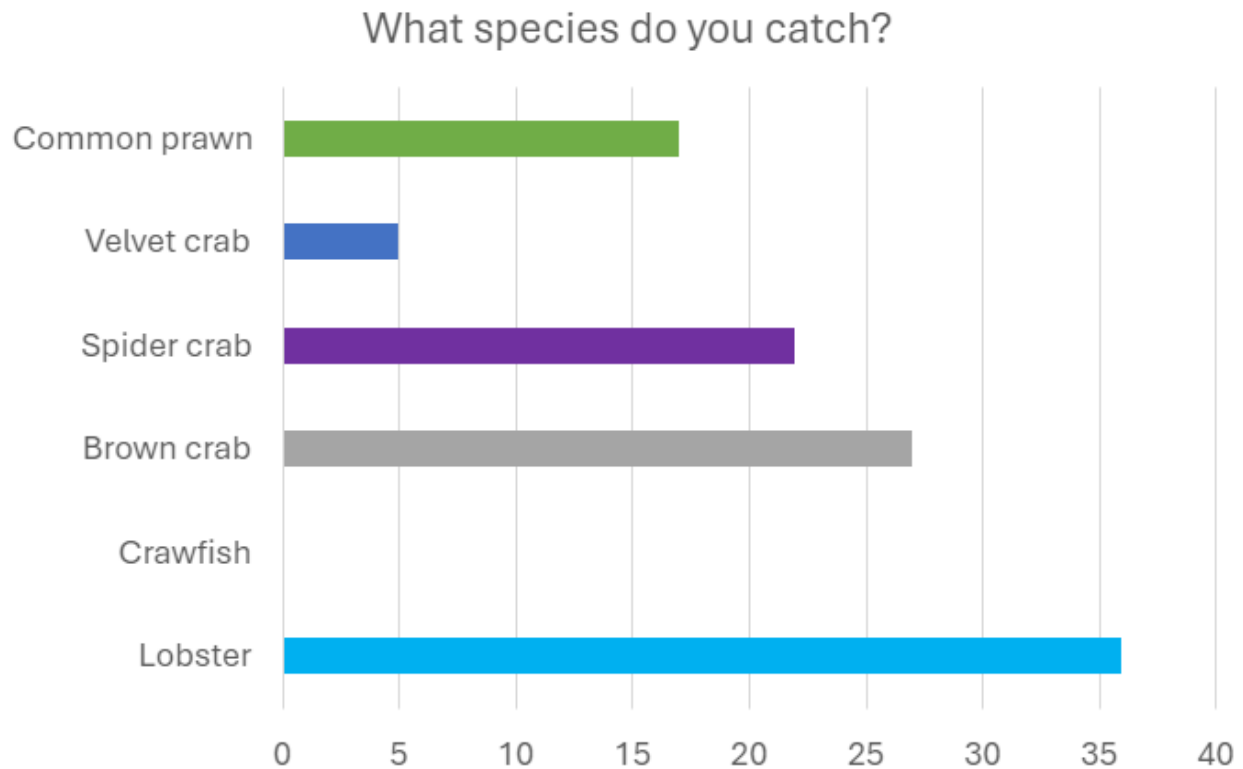


Figure 1: Types of species caught by survey participants. Participants were able to select more than one species when answering to this question. The X axis is the number of participants who selected the species displayed on the Y axis.

Seafish, September 2024

### What fishing methods were participants using?

- 72% used pots and creels
- 16% hand gathered from the shore
- 12% hand gathered by diving or snorkeling

Participants were asked how many pots they fish, whether they mark them with their permit number, and whether they have escape gaps in their pots. 37 out of 41 survey participants answered these questions. Three out of four of the participants who did not answer these questions were snorkelers or divers who did not fish with pots, and the remaining one participant did fish with pots or creels. Responses showed that most participants fished between three and five pots (61%), whilst the remaining participants who answered the question fished

between one and two pots (29%). It is key to highlight that the number of pots fished by the 1 participant who did not answer the question but did fish with pots, is unknown. It is useful to note that the five-pot limit is only in place in the permit zone and those fishing south of Cemaes Head are able to fish more than five pots. All participants who answered the question (37/41 participants) mark their gear with their permit number (100%), and just over half (54%) have escape gaps fitted.

## How many pots do you fish?

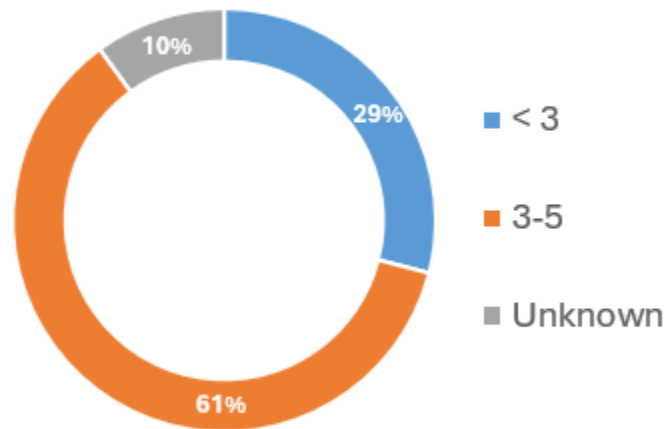


Figure 2: Percentage of survey participants who fished 3-5 pots compared with less than 3 pots. It is important to note that 37/41 participants responded to this question.

*Seafish, September 2024*

## Feedback and key themes

This section summarises key themes emerging from the online survey and stakeholder engagement events on three topics: a) current management approaches, b) options for future management, and c) aspirations for the future.

### Summary of event and webinar feedback: Key themes

- The FMP should address the **lack of data** collected on recreational shellfish fishing activity, and should consider how these data can be best used to manage fisheries in Wales. Participants felt that the FMP should consider how to manage the recreational shellfish sector when there are limited data available at the moment, and a permit scheme that only applies to recreational fishing along a section of the Welsh coastline.
- The FMP should focus on **improving compliance through access to information** on recreational shellfish fishing could help engagement with the FMP and recreational fishing regulations. Specifically, participants felt that better communication of regulations, as well as any voluntary guidelines or best practice, should be improved to prevent

intentional or unintentional misreporting or rule breaking by fishers. Examples cited included clearer information in harbours and common fishing spots on minimum conservation reference sizes (MCRS) and bag limits.

- Participants felt that there should be **relevant and credible representation** of recreational shellfish fishers on any forum or fisheries management group to ensure that the engagement process is fair and balanced. It was noted that, unlike commercial fisheries, there are no producer's organisations or associations able to represent recreational fishers. It was also acknowledged that recreational fishers are a more disparate group that can be difficult to engage with and that these challenges must be overcome in order to secure effective engagement.
- The FMP should focus on **strengthening enforcement of current measures** in place for recreational shellfish fisheries as they are considered sensible but lack effectiveness due to a lack of enforcement, which can result in non-compliance.
- It is essential that local residents are able to continue utilising the marine environment for leisure. The **educational and cultural importance** of recreational shellfish fisheries should be acknowledged by the FMP.

### 3.1 Summary of event and webinar feedback: Current management

Survey participants were asked whether they were aware management approaches and measures already in place or in development, including:

- Upcoming FMPs;
- Recreational Potting North Byelaw 30, and;
- Minimum Conservation Reference Sizes (MCRS)



Responses to the survey questions showed that most participants knew what an FMP was (56%), were aware of Byelaw 30 (71%), and knew what an MLS was (98%).

### Do you know what a Fisheries Management Plan is?

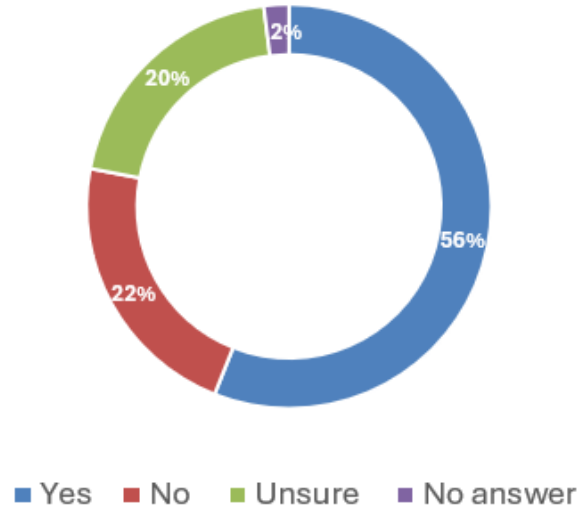


Figure 3: Percentage of survey participants who answered the question "Do you know what a Fisheries Management Plan is?" with "Yes", "No", "Unsure".

Seafish, September 2024

Participants were asked to rank the effectiveness, in terms of protecting the stocks, of current MCRS in place for shellfish species, the ban on taking V-notched lobsters, the pot limit restriction, and the bag limit. The latter two measures are only applicable to those with a permit in north Wales from Point of Ayr (Flintshire) to Cemaes Head (Ceredigion).

Most respondents felt that the species MCRS, the ban on taking V-notched or mutilated lobsters, pot limits, and bag limits were very effective or somewhat effective at delivering stock benefits. Less than 25% of respondents felt that any of these measures were ineffective or very ineffective. Further discussion with stakeholders suggests that perceptions of ineffectiveness may come from the view that there is insufficient enforcement (and so non-compliance exists) rather than the effectiveness of the management tools themselves.

These results suggest that the management tools already in place in Wales (or in parts of Wales) are largely appropriate for recreational shellfish fisheries.

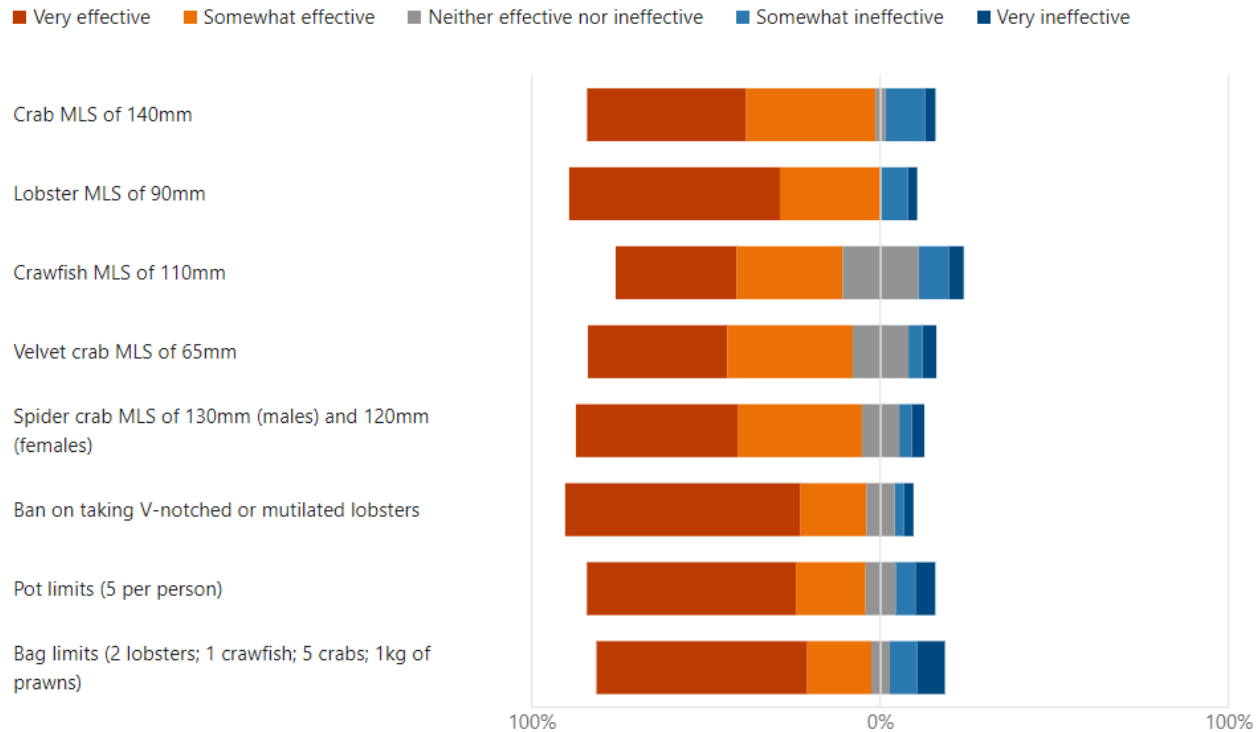


Figure 3: Percentage of participants who ranked the effectiveness of the management measures displayed in terms of their success at protecting shellfish stocks.

Seafish, September 2024

### **Challenges in Welsh recreational shellfish fisheries:**

Survey participants and event attendees were asked to describe challenges they experience in the fisheries. The feedback is summarised below under the following themes:

- Lack of compliance with regulations
- Competition for space (both between commercial / recreational fisheries and between recreational fishers amongst themselves)
- Severe weather limiting activity and / or driving pot losses
- Seasonal expansion of the sector
- Administration requirements

#### **Lack of compliance**

A lack of compliance to the bag limits and MCRS, particularly for lobster, was raised in relation to tourists and a lack of awareness of the current 90mm MCRS.

Concern was raised regarding residents and tourists recreationally fishing without a permit in north Wales. There was concern that in a few instances, people were fishing without a permit and selling their catch to local restaurants and fishmongers, i.e. committing an offence by fishing commercially without a valid fishing license. It was suggested that tourists and other hobby fishers recreationally fishing without a license was likely due to lack of awareness of the permit

scheme. Respondents suggested online social media awareness raising efforts and posters / signs in popular fishing spots and harbours.

Anecdotes were provided and a respondent commented:

***“Without enforcement all byelaws and rules are useless. There are too many people with no clue taking undersized shellfish and we need more presence in the area with regular checks on landings and real action taken if found to be in breach, otherwise there is no deterrent.”***

- **Anonymous survey response**

### **Competition for space**

Competition for space between the commercial sector and recreational sector was expressed by several respondents as a challenge. Some responses noted that fishing grounds were overcrowded by commercial pots, leaving nowhere for recreational potters to put their gear and risking instances of gear conflict. Increasing fishing effort was cited as a driver of both spatial competition and also declining catches of brown crab, lobster, and common prawns. Some participants reported that there were more undersized shellfish being caught and fewer species of taking size, this was attributed (anecdotally) to high levels of fishing effort on productive grounds. The only species to be reported as increasing in number was spider crab, however recreational interest in spider crabs was limited.

### **Severe weather**

Many participants commented on the difficulties the weather and the increasing number and severity of storms has had on their fishing. Some examples explained how the severe weather prevents recreational fishers from being able to check their pots, can result in them losing fishing gear, and stops them from going fishing altogether. It was acknowledged that this factor is outside of the control of any future FMP but that it does contribute to or exacerbate other challenges, such as competition for space. Anecdotes were provided and a respondent commented:

***“The weather causes difficulties when I go out to check my pots and can stop me from recreational fishing. Sometime pot buoys are lost due to the increasing occurrence of bad weather.”***

- **Anonymous survey response**

### ***Seasonal expansion of the sector***

Participants stated that the influx of tourists to Welsh coastal towns during summer months has created some challenges for resident recreational shellfish fishers. Specific challenges noted include:

- tourists' use of floating ropes that are inadequately buoyed, creating a navigation hazard for all marine users;
- tampering with pots and removing catches, or theft of pots;
- non-compliance with MLS;
- non-compliance with the permit scheme.

### ***Administrative requirements***

The submission of monthly catch and return forms is seen as an administrative burden on those who only fish recreationally occasionally or who are visiting Wales and recreationally fishing whilst on holiday. The previous requirement to submit these annually was considered more appropriate. However, these statements contradict other aspirations for better data gathering and the timely use of best available data to manage fisheries.

### **3.2 Summary of event and webinar feedback: Future management**

Survey participants and event attendees were asked how they would like to see Welsh crab and lobster recreational fisheries managed in the future, and what specific management measures they believed would work for Welsh recreational shellfish fisheries. Feedback is summarised on the most discussed measures, noted below:

- Greater enforcement of management measures;
- Raising awareness of existing regulations
- Ban on taking berried female lobsters, and;
- Desire to see no additional restrictions on the recreational shellfish sector.

### ***Greater enforcement of management measures***

Many survey responses felt that the management measures in place are sensible and would be more effective in delivering stock benefits if more rigorously enforced, reducing the likelihood of non-compliance. Some suggested that they would like fisheries protection officers to be more visible as that could act as a deterrent to non-compliance. Anecdotes were provided where a respondent commented:

***“I have never seen the fisheries patrol boat leave its mooring or seen a fisheries patrol staff member checking boats on the marina.”***

#### **- Anonymous survey response**

In particular, it was reiterated that more robust action should be taken against those fishing without a permit, taking undersized shellfish, or taking amounts of shellfish above the bag limits.

### ***Raising awareness of existing regulations***

It was suggested that non-compliance issues in the recreational shellfish sector could be reduced by improving recreational fishers' awareness and knowledge of management measures and regulations, especially amongst non-residents. Responses included suggestions of using social media to publicise measures such as MCRS and bag limits, and creating posters that could be put up in bait shops and in local recreational fishing "hot-spots" as a way to spread awareness to tourists who recreationally fish seasonally.

Some respondents commented that key stakeholders within the sector, such as individuals with a keen interest in the marine environment and who recreationally fish using the best practices, could be more effectively used to help spread information and help educate those who are unaware of regulations. Building a more detailed stakeholder map of the industry, which is currently disparate and difficult to engage with, could help future FMP engagement.

### ***Ban on taking berried female lobsters***

98% of survey participants were supportive of introducing a ban on taking berried female lobsters to protect the stocks.

Comments received via the survey suggested some recreational fishers would also support mandatory escape gaps in pots.

### ***Desire for no additional restrictions on recreational shellfish sector***

Most respondents felt that the management measures in place were sensible and would be more effective if enforced properly. It was stated that most recreational fishers would not support additional management that would have a financial cost to them. It was felt that ensuring local people could continue to access the marine environment to recreationally fish for leisure and personal consumption was paramount to personal well-being, education, and retaining local culture in coastal communities. Therefore, it was felt that it is important to keep the shellfish fishery accessible as most recreational shellfish fishers were thought to comply with the regulations and fish sustainably. Some felt that if any additional management measures were to be introduced, it should be proportionate to the impact recreational fisheries have on shellfish stocks in comparison to commercial fisheries.

Additional measures respondents and attendees noted as **unfavourable** included the following:

- Further restrictions on bag limits attached to the permit;
- Reduction in pot limits attached to the permit, and;
- Reduction in recreational permits given out.

Better understanding of the likely impact of recreational shellfish fisheries on stocks would align with the Scientific Evidence and Sustainability Objectives of the Fisheries Act 2020 and allow for evidence-based management to be introduced. Whilst perceived stakeholder favourability of management measures is an important consideration, it is more important that fit-for-purpose management action is taken to deliver sustainable fisheries on the basis of the best available evidence.

### 3.3 Summary of event and webinar feedback: Aspirations for the future

In general, there was the sentiment that recreational fishers want to have a **well-managed** fishery that is sustainable so that recreational fishers can continue to partake in the leisure activity. There was the feeling that respondents would be supportive of management that would help increase stock levels but **did not want more stringent controls** placed on the recreational fishing sector.

Some respondents aspired to have recreational fisheries **management that is the consistent** across the UK and that is based on good scientific evidence and environmental sustainability.

Most respondents wanted to see shellfish fisheries that are **better monitored and regulations enforced**, particularly in recreational fishing hot spots and in peak seasons.

A participant commented that their aspirations were to:

***“Ensure the area is not over-fished and the stocks are sustainable so that recreational fishers can continue to catch a few shellfish each year from their local sustainable fishery.”***

- **Anonymous survey response**

## 4. Engaging with FMP development going forward

### Representation

The project highlighted that there is a lack of representation of the recreational shellfish sector compared to the commercial sector. This is understandable given the fact that the commercial sector has PO's, associations, and other formal representative organisations. There are currently no formal recreational fishing engagement groups or associations for shellfish fishers through which information can be shared. Considering recreational fishers' interactions with the marine environment and potential impact on shellfish stocks, communicating and engaging with the sector is considered integral to future management.

The FMP should consider how to balance the interests of the commercial and recreational sector and should ensure that representation on any fisheries management group or forum is done on a fair basis. To tackle this, a mechanism could be put in place to ensure an appropriate number of recreational shellfish fishers are admitted to relevant formal engagement groups and are encouraged to facilitate effective two-way dialogue between groups and wider recreational fishing interests.

### Future engagement

Survey participants and event attendees were asked how they would like to stay engaged with the FMP and were provided with the following options for engagement.

- Staying actively engaged in the development of the FMP through attendance of meetings / membership of working groups.
- Staying informed through information leaflets or online resources.
- Staying engaged through workshops with Welsh Government.

- Staying engaged through online consultations (post-development).

Responses to the survey showed that over 75% of respondents wanted to remain informed of the development of the Welsh crab and lobster FMP through information leaflets and online consultations. Engaging in the FMP through workshops was the least popular option with 70% of respondents answering that they would not like this option, this may be because many recreational fishers only fish seasonally so may not always be available to attend workshops.

Seafish collected email addresses of those who would be interested in participating in a fisheries management group or fishers' forum that would focus on the development of the Welsh crab and lobster FMP. These contacts were passed on to the Welsh Government for future engagement.

## 5. Recommendations

The following recommendations have been prepared for Welsh Government by Seafish based on stakeholder engagement findings to support the next stages of development of the Welsh crab and lobster FMP.

### FMP development

- Create an **engagement mechanism** via a forum or fisheries management group to enable the recreational shellfish sector to have a say in the FMP development process and to encourage **two-way dialogue** with the Welsh Government.
- Draft **accessible, easy to read** documents and project resources to ensure maximum engagement with recreational stakeholders.
- Use key recreational stakeholders, online fishing forums, social media, and posters in tackle shops or popular fishing areas to **more effectively spread information** about the FMP and recreational shellfish fishing regulations.
- Consider how the FMP could help **retain and protect the cultural and well-being** factors that recreational shellfish fishing has for local residents.

### Recreational fisheries management measures

- **Improve enforcement of existing management measures** (and any new management measures) in the Welsh zone, to ensure management delivers stock benefits and reduces non-compliance. This could be delivered through more active enforcement on the ground, more visible enforcement officers actively engaging with the recreational shellfish fishing community and considering stricter penalties for non-compliance with regulations to disincentivise rule breaking.
- **Improve data gathering from recreational shellfish fisheries** to better understand the impact this activity has on stocks. The FMP should cover all removals from the stock, and as such it is important to understand all aspects of fishing mortality. Strengthening reporting requirements for recreational shellfish fisheries would a) give managers the data required to make evidence-based management decisions, b) would contribute to improving overall picture of stock status for key shellfish species, and c) allow for

proportionate management of recreational fisheries as their relative impact on stocks could be determined.

- Consider **restrictions on the landing of berried lobsters** to protect mature hens. Any restriction on the landing of berried hens should be considered alongside recommendations and insights provided in the commercial fishing engagement report where this proposal was supported by parts of the fleet, but opposed in others. As detailed in the commercial fishing engagement report, this measure could disproportionately impact some fisheries (mainly offshore) due to species biology.
- **Consider the financial implications** of introducing measures on recreational shellfish fishers, such as adding a cost to permits.
- Consider **seasonal closures, or other season-specific management tools**, for recreational shellfish fisheries, to protect the stocks and to manage or reduce the risk of overexploitation during peak seasons. However, any seasonal management should take into consideration the highly seasonal nature of recreational shellfish fisheries in Wales, and the cultural and social importance of these fishing opportunities during peak summer seasons, for both residents and tourists.
- Consider the introduction of **mandatory escape hatches** in pots used in the recreational shellfish fishery. This measure could reduce the number of undersized shellfish being caught in the recreational sector, particularly given concerns about instances of non-compliance with MCRS.
- **Review the daily bag limits** to ensure they are appropriate and remain fit for purpose. Improving understanding of the impact of recreational shellfish fishing on total fishing mortality would help set appropriate daily bag limits to manage removals. In the absence of a full dataset on recreational landings, it may be necessary to set more precautionary limits (if supported by science) based on the best available information and effective engagement with the recreational sector.
- **Explore MaxLS for lobsters** in recreational fisheries, as appropriate and supported by science. In alignment with the recommendation presented in the commercial fishing engagement report, exploration of MaxLS for lobster – in order to protect the most important breeding stock – in recreational shellfish fisheries could confer stock benefits. However, this should be explored in the context of the desire to have a level playing field between recreational and commercial shellfish fisheries (i.e. not having different landing sizes between the sectors).