

Wild-Capture Ratings Methodology

Version 3: Draft

March 2026



CONTENTS:

Contents:.....	1
Table of Figures.....	2
Table of Tables.....	2
1. Summary of changes.....	4
1.1 Overview.....	4
1.2 Changes in Score Weighting.....	4
1.3 Management Scoring: What's Changed?.....	4
1.4 Capture Method Scoring: What's Changed?.....	4
2. Introduction.....	5
3. Overview of ratings process.....	6
3.1 Unit of assessment.....	6
3.2 Summary of default or critical fail ratings.....	9
4. Criterion 1: Stock or species status.....	10
4.1 Route 1: Stock Status.....	11
4.1.1 Stock status detailed descriptors for Route 1.....	11
4.2 Route 2: Data limited stock status.....	16
4.3 References.....	17
5. Criterion 2: Management.....	19
5.1 Management detailed elements.....	21
5.1.1 Management of the Target Stock.....	21
5.1.2 Alignment with Scientific Advice and Catch Controls.....	24
5.1.3 Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance effectiveness.....	27
5.2 References.....	30
6. Criterion 3: Capture method and ecological effects.....	31
6.1 Capture method and ecological effects detailed descriptors.....	35
6.1.1 Habitat impacts.....	35
6.1.2 Bycatch impacts.....	37
6.1.3 Vulnerable or ETP species impacts.....	38
6.1.4 Impact on ecosystems/ trophic-webs.....	39

6.2	References.....	39
	Appendices	41
I.	Appendix I: External review process	41
II.	Appendix II: Good Fish Guide update schedule.....	42
III.	Appendix III: Wild-Capture certification programmes recognised by the Marine Conservation Society.....	43
IV.	Appendix IV: Glossary.....	44
V.	Appendix V: ICES stocks category definitions.....	48
VI.	Appendix VI: Guidance on habitat scoring where MPAs with habitat features are present.....	48
vi.i.	Scale of assessment.....	49
vi.ii.	Defining 'high likelihood'	49
vi.iii.	Scenarios.....	49
vi.iv.	Supply chain recommendations.....	50

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Overview of Wild-Capture ratings process.....	6
Figure 2: Matrix for determining Stock Status score using values for Biomass (B) and Fishing Mortality (F).....	15
Figure 3: Data limited descriptors, resilience and scoring matrix.....	16

TABLE OF TABLES

Table 1: Relationship between combined score and overall rating.....	7
Table 2: Weighting of sustainability criteria.....	8
Table 3: Sustainability criteria and scoring elements	8
Table 4: Summary of default ratings.....	9
Table 5: Category descriptors and weighting for Stock Status, Route 1 (biomass and fishing mortality).....	11
Table 6: Category descriptor detail for Stock Status – Biomass (B).....	12
Table 7: Category descriptor detail for Stock Status – Fishing mortality (pressure) (F).....	14
Table 8: Category Descriptors and weighting for Management.....	20
Table 9: Category descriptors (Management of the target stock).....	21

Table 10: User guidance on management measures appropriate to a well-managed fishery.....	23
Table 11: Category descriptors (Alignment with Scientific Advice and Catch Controls).....	24
Table 12: User guidance on management measures that are appropriate to a well-managed fishery.....	26
Table 13: Category descriptors (Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance effectiveness)	28
Table 14: User guidance on management measures appropriate to a well-managed fishery.....	30
Table 15: Fishing method impacts, associated descriptors and scores	32
Table 16: Examples of measures to reduce gear impacts.....	33
Table 17: Gear vs. Habitat.....	36
Table 18: Impact on non-target (bycatch) species (retained or non-retained).....	38
Table 19: Impact on vulnerable or ETP species (retained or non-retained).....	38
Table 20: Impact on ecosystems /trophic webs.....	39

1. SUMMARY OF CHANGES

1.1 Overview

The Wild-Capture Methodology has been updated from Version 2 (V2) to Version 3 (V3) to create a more balanced, transparent, and detailed assessment of fisheries. While the indicators for evaluating Stock Status remain the same, V3 expands how Management and Capture Method impacts are assessed.

1.2 Changes in Score Weighting

The new methodology updated the previously heavy weighting toward stock status by rebalancing the framework, so **stock status, management, and capture method are all equally weighted**. This change creates a more balanced assessment, giving well-managed fisheries and low-impact fishing methods greater influence on overall scores, and is supported by additional scoring elements that allow clearer evaluation of specific issues within each criterion.

1.3 Management Scoring: What's Changed?

In the new methodology (V3) the management section was restructured from the single, overall management score used in Version 2 to improve transparency and balance. Version 2 combined a wide range of factors into one score. **Version 3 divides management into three distinct, equally weighted elements:** target stock management, alignment with scientific advice and catch controls, and monitoring, control, and surveillance effectiveness. Each element is scored separately and combined to produce the overall management score, providing a clearer view of specific strengths and weaknesses.

The new methodology **removes the Fisheries Improvement Project (FIP) improver score** (allowing fisheries in FIPs to score 4.5 instead of 5), while continuing to identify and label fisheries that are participating in a FIP.

1.4 Capture Method Scoring: What's Changed?

In the new methodology (V3) the capture method section shifts from using only the single worst impact score from the three evaluated elements to **combining all capture method scored elements together**. This allows for lower impact fishing methods to be better recognised, and broader ecosystem effects to now be explicitly considered.

A **new ecosystem and trophic-web impacts element** was added to encompass the impact of the fishery on the broader ecosystem and structure of trophic-webs.

2. INTRODUCTION

Since 2018, when the last version of the Wild-Capture Methodology was released, the Marine Conservation Society team has gathered feedback from a range of stakeholders, including seafood businesses and other professionals, on the strengths and weaknesses of Version 2. The methodology was subsequently reviewed by a team of external consultants, who provided several recommendations. A decision and validation workshop was then held in collaboration with the Good Fish Guide (GFG) team. This document sets out the updated Wild-Capture Methodology and forms the basis for Version 3. It is aimed at 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.

To see an introduction to GFG ratings and the GFG Aquaculture Methodology please click [here](#).

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

3. OVERVIEW OF RATINGS PROCESS

3.1 Unit of assessment

The Unit of Assessment (UoA) for Good Fish Guide Wild-Capture assessments refers to a fishery defined by a specific species (the focus of the assessment), originating from a particular geographic stock, operating under a particular management framework, and using a specific capture method. Where appropriate, and where credible information and 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.

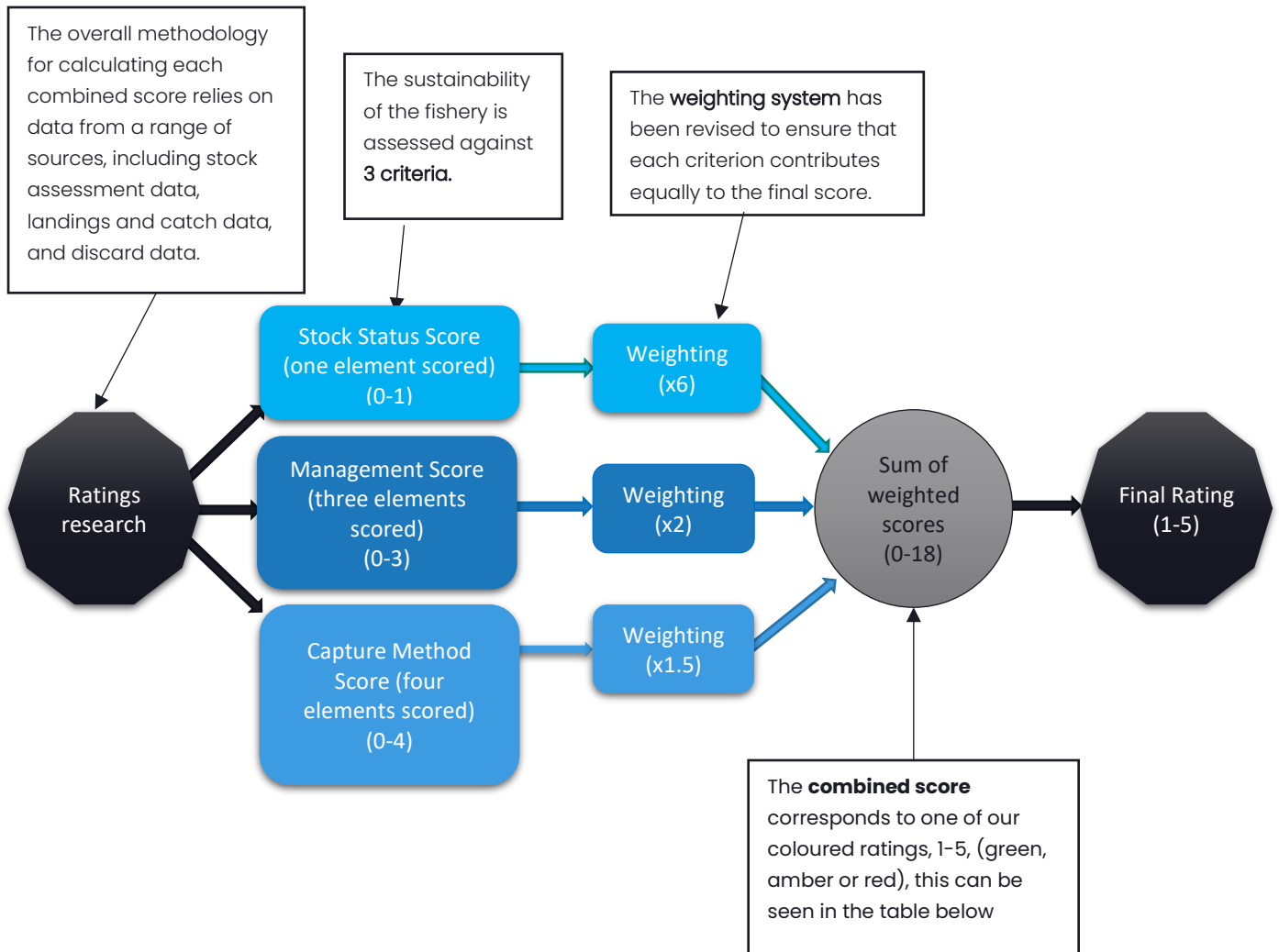


Figure 1: Overview of Wild-Capture ratings process

The criteria against which we measure sustainability are:

- **Stock or species status** – the state of the stock i.e. stock size (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 ensure the stock is maintained sustainably and catch controls are aligned with scientific advice, along with an assessment of the monitoring, surveillance, enforcement, and compliance systems used to verify the effectiveness of these measures.
- **Capture method and ecological effects** – an assessment of the impacts of the capture method on non-target species (bycatch), Vulnerable and Endangered, Threatened and Protected (ETP) species, habitats and the wider ecosystem.

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	Overall Rating	
0 – 2.9	1	Dark Green (Best Choice)	Best Choice
3 – 5.9	2	Light Green (Good Choice)	
6 – 8.9	3	Yellow (OK)	OK – Needs Improvement
9 – 11.9	4	Orange (Fishery requires improvement)	
12 – 18	5	Red (Avoid)	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 different weighting factors mean each of the 3 criteria adds up to the same total of 6 i.e. 1x6, 3x2 and 4x1.5. The weighting multipliers are designed to ensure a minimum total or combined criterion score of 0, and a maximum 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)	X value by 1.5

A score of either 0, 0.25, 0.5, 0.75 or 1 is allocated for each element included in each criterion (see Table 3 below). This score is then multiplied by the weighting (see Figure 1 and Table 2) given to each criterion to obtain the criterion score, the higher the score (up to a maximum score of 18) the less sustainable the fishery. The complexity of the methodology lies in the collection of relevant data to justify the scores given to each element evaluated, and allocating a score to each category within each sustainability criterion.

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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 and ecological effects	Four elements scored: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 1.5

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 in order to ensure that each rating is robust and transparent. It also helps to reduce individual interpretation and therefore ambiguity.

3.2 Summary of default or critical fail ratings

We use 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 (i.e. current and best assessment of species status available) For Low Trophic Level (LTL) species, where there is evidence that their status is significantly affecting the status of other species (through links in the food chain) 	5
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no appropriate or relevant management system or regulatory framework in place including No measures to address critical issues e.g. intrinsic and widespread IUU fishing, for example 	5
Capture method and ecological effects	<p>The fishing method is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Causing substantial or long-lasting damage e.g. unmanaged deep-sea trawling Damaging protected features of MPAs Illegal e.g. dynamite fishing Bottom trawling below 600m (deep sea fishing) without robust regulation in place 	5

4. CRITERION 1: STOCK OR SPECIES STATUS

Stock is the term given to a group of individuals in a species occupying a well-defined spatial range independent of other stocks of the same 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. In order for a stock or population to be maintained at a sustainable level, that is, a level at which fishing can continue indefinitely, fishing must be controlled. This is achieved by identifying target or limit reference values for biomass and fishing pressure, below or above which, respectively, levels must not fall or rise.

Biomass (B) is the total weight of a resource or stock, usually the weight of mature breeding fish in a stock. The fishing mortality (F) is a measure of fishing pressure and is the proportion of fish in a specific year class[es] or cohort[s] (i.e. all fish born in the same year), that is 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 available information and the type¹ of stock assessment for the target species in question either Route 1 or 2 is followed:

- **Route 1** is typically used for stocks for which an analytical or survey-based assessment relative to BOTH indicators, Biomass (B) and Fishing Pressure (F), is available.
- **Route 2** is used for stocks where data is limited or unknown for Biomass and/or Fishing Pressure i.e. 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.

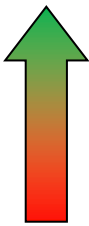
In situations where: ICES or equivalent scientific advice is for zero catch or for no direct fishery i.e. where the species is being targeted by the fishery, and it should be closed, and this advice is not followed, or biomass (B) is at or below the biomass limit (B_{lim}) or where the target species is listed as Endangered or Critically Endangered by IUCN or equivalent, the fishery is rated a 5 by default (see Table 4).

¹ Please see Appendix V for definitions for types of ICES stock assessments.

4.1 Route 1: Stock Status

The criterion score for stock status under Route 1 is obtained by completing the matrix in Figure 2 with the scores obtained separately from the tables for biomass (Table 6) and fishing pressure (Table 7), this value or 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 more detailed descriptors as outlined in Table 6 and Table 7.

Table 5: Category descriptors and weighting for Stock Status, Route 1 (biomass and fishing mortality)

Category description	Score	Weighting Multiplier	Criterion Score	Sustainability levels
Stock under fished and harvested within sustainable limits	0	X 6	0	 <p>High</p> <p>Low</p>
Stock fully fished and harvested within sustainable limits	0.25	X 6	1.5	
Stock level below Biomass at maximum sustainable yield (BMSY) (see Glossary) but harvested within sustainable limits	0.5	X 6	3	
Concern for stock and fishing level 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	

4.1.1 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	Score	Associated descriptors
Fully Fished		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

Category Description	Score	Associated descriptors
<p>Stock Level below B_{MSY} or full assessment not available</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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>
<p>Concern for Stock Level Or At increased risk</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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>
<p>Stock Outside Safe Biological Limits Or Reduced Reproductive Capacity Or Depleted</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	Score	Associated descriptors
Harvested sustainably		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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)
Fishing above MSY		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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}) i.e. Harvested sustainably
Concern for fishing level Or At increased risk		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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

Category description	Score	Associated descriptors
Outside Safe Fishing Limits Or Harvested unsustainably		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 Matrix

Figure 2 is then used with the values obtained separately for biomass and fishing pressure from Tables 6 and 7 to determine the final score which is then multiplied by the weighting multiplier (Table 2) to obtain the criterion score using Route 1.

		Under fished	Fully fished	Stock level below B_{MSY}	Concern for stock level	Stock depleted
Biomass		> B_{MSY}	$B_{MSY} - MSY$ Btrigger	MSY Btrigger - Bpa	Bpa - Blim	< Blim
Mortality						
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	FPA - Flim	0.5	0.75	1	1	1
Outside safe fishing limits	> Flim	0.75	1	1	1	1

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

4.2 Route 2: Data limited stock status

The criterion score for stock status using Route 2 is obtained by completing the matrix below (Figure 3). This value or 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 catch index is below long-term average or stable or increasing but at a low level or fishing level is not believed to be of concern.

Concern for F: Fishing mortality is unknown in relation to reference points but catch index is stable or increasing but at a high level or increasing above long-term average or there is concern for the fishing level or information is conflicting or no information available.²

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

Concern for B: Biomass is unknown in relation to reference points, is stable at low levels or is declining below long-term average or there is concern for the biomass level or information is conflicting or no information available.²

² 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.

In Figure 3 above, 'Species resilience' (or vulnerability, if resilience is not available) is obtained from Fishbase³, Sealifebase⁴ for invertebrates, or Cephbase⁵ 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 6 or more years
- Longevity is 20 years or greater
- Growth rate or parameter, k is ≤ 0.15

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

4.3 References

Caveen A.J., Lart, W., Duggan, H., 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].

Caveen, A.J., 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].

ICES, 2015. General context of ICES Advice. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.advice.18667646> [Accessed on 04.02.2026].

MSC, 2019. Guide to the MSC Fishery Assessment Process. 105pp. 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].

MSC, 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].

³ www.fishbase.org

⁴ <https://www.sealifebase.ca/search.php>

⁵ <http://cephbase.eol.org/>

MSC, 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].

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].

5. CRITERION 2: MANAGEMENT

This criterion considers the management framework and objectives for the fishery. If there is no appropriate and proportionate management system in place, including measures to address critical issues such as intrinsic and widespread IUU fishing, the fishery is rated a 5 by default (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 the management of a crab fishery in Orkney compared to the regulatory framework for the management of Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna will differ enormously. However, the basis or the minimum requirements for management of any fishery are:

- Proportionate measures to assess and protect the stock;
- Compliance with scientific advice, including adaptation of management measures depending on the outcome of the advice, to ensure the long-term sustainability of the stock;
- Adequate monitoring, surveillance or control and enforcement.

Therefore, in Version 3 of the Wild-Capture Methodology, three individual elements are evaluated under the management criterion:

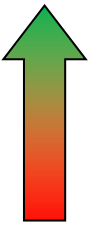
- **Management of the Target Stock** – This element assesses how the fishery manages the target stock, including how scientific advice is generated and its integration into management measures.
- **Alignment with Scientific Advice and Catch Controls** – This element assesses whether catch limits are set in line with scientific advice, as well as how mixed-fishery and group TAC constraints are addressed. It also considers management of non-target catch, through discarding rules, the Landing Obligation, and similar.
- **Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) effectiveness** – This element evaluates the Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance framework in the fishery, including VMS use, observer coverage, and overall compliance and enforcement levels.

The management criterion score is based on an evaluation of the measures in place for the fishery under assessment. The Marine Conservation Society's expectations for well-managed fisheries are outlined in Table 8. Each element within this criterion is scored, and the total is multiplied by a weighting factor of 2 to

produce an overall management score ranging from 0 to 6. This final score is then matched to the appropriate category description.

Category description and weighting for management is summarised in Table 8 below.

Table 8: Category Descriptors and weighting for Management

Category description	Weighting Multiplier	Criterion Scores	Sustainability Levels
Well-managed. The fishery has robust stock-management measures, high compliance with catch limits, and a strong monitoring, control, and enforcement system. All relevant measures are implemented and operating as intended.	X 2	0 – 1	 <p>High</p> <p>Low</p>
Management requires some improvement. The fishery demonstrates generally sound management, but there are identifiable gaps in stock management, catch limit compliance, or monitoring/enforcement that need improvement.	X 2	1.5 – 2	
Partly effective management. Some measures are functioning, but key weaknesses remain across the elements. A precautionary or formal recovery plan is in place, indicating recognition of issues and commitment to rebuilding or improving the fishery.	X 2	2.5 – 3.5	
Poorly managed. Significant weaknesses exist in stock-management practices, catch limit compliance, and/or monitoring and enforcement. Considerable improvement is required, although some isolated or limited measures may exist.	X 2	4 – 4.5	
No relevant or effective management measures in place. The fishery lacks meaningful management, with no effective measures addressing stock sustainability, catch limits, or compliance.	X 2	5 – 6	

5.1 Management detailed elements

The elements assessed under the management criterion are explained in more detail in the sections below.

5.1.1 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 that advice is implemented. It also assesses whether management responds appropriately to changes in stock status, and whether measures are applied in a timely and precautionary way.

This element is scored on a five-step scale ranging from 0 to 1. Descriptions for each step are provided in the Table 9 below. Examples of management measures appropriate to a well-managed target stock can be viewed in Table 10.

Table 9: Category descriptors (Management of the Target Stock)

Category Description	Score	Associated Descriptors
Adequate or well-managed.	0	<p>All appropriate management measures are in place, and highly effective.</p> <p>And, if applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The stock is well above target and limit reference points, sustainably harvested, and shows resilience. • Where a Management Plan is in place, Fmp and Bmp are below and above targets respectively. • Management is precautionary and adaptive, with scientific advice integrated into management decisions, ensuring sustainable outcomes. • Management aligns fully with stock area.
Management requires some improvement	0.25	<p>Some appropriate management measures are in place and largely effective.</p> <p>And, if applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The stock is well above target and limit reference points, sustainably harvested, and shows resilience. • Where a Management Plan is in place, Fmp and Bmp are below and above targets respectively. • OR if a Recovery Plan is in place, stock is recovering as expected within the agreed timeframe.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management is informed by, and adaptive to, scientific advice. • Management aligns fully with stock area.
Partially effective management.	0.5	<p>Some, but not all, appropriate management measures are in place but appear to have little effect or are insufficient, inadequate, or have not been in place long enough for their effect to have been assessed.</p> <p>And, if applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The stock is at or within target levels or defined range. • Where a Management Plan is in place, Fmp and/or Bmp is at or within target/defined range. • OR if a Recovery Plan is in place, stock is recovering but not necessarily within the agreed timeframe. • Scientific advice is only partially integrated into management. • There is some mismatch between management and stock area.
Poorly managed and requires considerable improvement or specific management measures implemented.	0.75	<p>Few appropriate management measures are in place which appear to have limited effect.</p> <p>And, if applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The stock is below target levels, potentially approaching limit reference points. • Management Plan is in place, but F and B are above and below Fmp and Bmp targets respectively. • 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 some mismatch between management and stock area.
No appropriate or effective management measures in place.	1	<p>No appropriate management measures are in place.</p> <p>And, if applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The stock is depleted/below safe levels and overfished. • No Management Plan in place.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stock at or below or in vicinity of Blim with no Recovery Plan in place. • Scientific advice is lacking and not followed or integrated into management. • Management is significantly misaligned from stock area.
--	---

Table 10: User guidance on management measures appropriate to a well-managed fishery

Measure	Description
<i>Management measures to protect the species or stock under assessment.</i>	
Catch or harvest control rule	Agreed management response to various stock status.
Effort or access limitations or controls	Effective effort control e.g. days at sea; spatial and time closures; limited entry e.g. restrictive licensing or permit; transferable access rights etc.
Regular & robust stock assessment or appropriate assessment of data limited stocks	<p>Appropriate reference points, precautionary management to mitigate uncertainty where the stock is data limited.</p> <p>Regular monitoring e.g. CPUE, size and age structure etc., good knowledge of species biology.</p> <p>Reliable stock assessment conducted on a regular basis (should reflect needs of the fishery and not be more than 5 years old).</p>
Measures in place to address discarding	Landing obligation or other measures in place specifically to reduce discarding and waste, e.g. selectivity and avoidance measures; limit on discard rates.
Adequate measures to protect juveniles and spawning fish	E.g. byelaws to protect spawning sites or berried crustaceans i.e. illegal to land berried lobsters; target spawning adults; seasonal or spatial and time closures
Voluntary Code of Conduct or Practice	Code or practice available publicly

5.1.2 Alignment with Scientific Advice and Catch Controls

This element evaluates how effectively scientific advice is incorporated into management decisions through the setting of TACs/quotas and the control of total catches. It also considers how mixed-fishery or group TAC constraints are addressed, and how management accounts for impacts on non-target species through measures such as bycatch mitigation, adherence to the Landing Obligation, and compliance with discard rules. Undersized or juveniles of the target species may also be considered as bycatch.

As in the management of the target stock, this element is evaluated using a five-point scale from 0 to 1, with each step described in the Table 11 below. Examples of management measures that reflect the target stock's compliance with scientific advice, TACs, mixed fishery considerations, and/or non-target catch can be found in Table 12.

Table 11: Category descriptors (Alignment with Scientific Advice and Catch Controls)

Category Description	Score	Associated Descriptors
Management fully aligns with scientific advice and effectively controls total catches.	0	<p>Management fully aligns with scientific advice, with robust control of TACs, catches, landings, discards, and bycatch/non-target species.</p> <p>And, if applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TACs/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 (i.e., 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, and small shortcomings exist in TAC, catch, discard, or bycatch management.

<p>Management largely aligns with scientific advice, with minor implementation gaps.</p>	<p>0.25</p>	<p>And, if applicable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catches remain at or below TACs/quotas, and TACs are set in line with or below scientific 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, Landing Obligation adherence, and discard-rule compliance, though coverage or consistency may vary.
<p>Partial integration of scientific advice and inconsistent control of total catches.</p>	<p>0.5</p>	<p>Management partially integrates scientific advice, and catch, landing, discard, and bycatch controls are inconsistently applied or insufficient.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Few management measures exist and no advised catch limits are set, but there is no evidence of concern regarding fishing pressure or biomass.</p> <p>And, if applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TACs/quotas are set above scientific advice, but catches remain below scientific advice. • 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.
		<p>Management shows limited integration of scientific advice, and TAC, discard, and bycatch controls are inadequate.</p> <p>OR</p>

<p>Limited integration of scientific advice and inadequate control of catches and bycatch.</p>	<p>0.75</p>	<p>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).</p> <p>And, if applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catches have exceeded scientific advice in fewer than 5 years within the last 10 years. • Mixed-fishery or group TAC constraints are largely overlooked, increasing choke or overshoot risk for the most limiting stock. • Bycatch and non-target species impacts are poorly managed.
<p>Scientific advice is not integrated, and catches are not effectively controlled.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Scientific advice is not integrated, and TAC setting and bycatch/discard controls are ineffective.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Few management measures are in place and no advised catch limits exist, and there is evidence of concern regarding both fishing pressure and biomass.</p> <p>And, if applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catches have exceeded scientific advice for 5 or more years within the last 10 years. • 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.

Table 12: User guidance on management measures that are appropriate to a well-managed fishery.

MEASURE	DESCRIPTION
<i>Alignment with scientific advice and catch limits where applicable.</i>	
<p>Compliance with best available scientific advice</p>	<p>TACs/quotas are set in line with recommendations from the latest stock assessment or scientific advice.</p>

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 approaches such as bycatch-mitigation practices, adherence to the Landing Obligation, and compliance with discard rules to limit unintended catch.

5.1.3 Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance effectiveness

This element assesses the overall effectiveness of the fishery’s Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) system. It considers the use and coverage of tools such as VMS, AIS, observers, CCTV, logbooks, and at-sea or dockside inspections, as well as the strength of enforcement, including patrols, transparency in addressing violations, and implementation of measures such as discard bans. It also evaluates the extent to which illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing may be occurring within the fishery and whether the Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance system is effective in detecting or deterring such activity. This section also recognises traceability efforts within the fishery. While we encourage greater traceability throughout the supply chain, this is acknowledged here for context only. Overall, this element determines whether the Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance framework provides sufficient assurance that management measures are being followed.

As in the previous two, Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance effectiveness is evaluated using a five-point scale from 0 to 1, with each step described in the Table 13 below. Examples of monitoring, control, and surveillance management measures can be viewed in Table 14.

Table 13: Category descriptors (Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance effectiveness)

Category Description	Score	Associated Descriptors
<p>Fully comprehensive monitoring, control, and surveillance with highly effective enforcement and negligible IUU fishing activity.</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>The fishery operates under a fully comprehensive and highly effective Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) system, supported by strong enforcement, violations promptly and transparently addressed, and very low levels of IUU activity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance measures in place (VMS, observers, CCTV, patrols) • Extensive logbook, observer, and electronic monitoring coverage • High compliance, including voluntary measures • Negligible IUU fishing • Discard bans fully enforced • Digital traceability throughout the fishery <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fishery is certified to a recognised standard, indicating greater traceability within the fishery ⁶ (e.g. Marine Stewardship Council)
<p>Well-developed monitoring and enforcement systems with good coverage and low levels of IUU activity.</p>	<p>0.25</p>	<p>The fishery has a well-developed and effective Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) system with reliable enforcement and low levels of IUU activity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance coverage (e.g., VMS, observers, CCTV) • Regular monitoring and complete logbook reporting • Generally high compliance • Low IUU risk • Discard bans usually enforced

⁶ In the majority of cases where a fishery is certified, a score of 0 will apply, however in situations where, for example, certain conditions are attached to the certification or measures are deemed inadequate/ineffective, a lower score may be allocated.

<p>Adequate monitoring and enforcement in place, though coverage gaps and occasional IUU concerns remain.</p>	<p>0.5</p>	<p>The fishery has an adequate Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance system, though coverage gaps and variable enforcement reduce its overall effectiveness. Some IUU activity may occur.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partial Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance coverage (e.g., VMS, observers, CCTV) in place • Monitoring present but inconsistent • Compliance moderate but inconsistent • Occasional IUU concerns • Discard bans inconsistently implemented
<p>Limited monitoring and weak enforcement, with insufficient coverage and notable risk of IUU activity.</p>	<p>0.75</p>	<p>Monitoring and enforcement are limited, with irregular coverage and weak deterrence. IUU activity is a notable risk.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance coverage (e.g., VMS, observers, CCTV) in place • Irregular monitoring and logbook reliability • Low or inconsistent compliance • Notable risk of IUU activity • Discard bans rarely enforced
<p>Minimal or absent monitoring and enforcement, with widespread or likely IUU activity.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>The fishery lacks meaningful monitoring and enforcement, with widespread or likely IUU activity and little evidence of compliance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little or no Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance coverage • Monitoring largely absent • Very low compliance • High levels of IUU activity • Discard bans not enforced

Table 14: User guidance on management measures appropriate to a well-managed fishery

MEASURE	DESCRIPTION
<i>Adequate monitoring, surveillance or control and enforcement.</i>	
Monitoring, control and surveillance	Regular patrols and enforcement, fisheries inspectorate, port controls, fines, VMS. Observer &/or CCTV coverage. Ban on discarding target species.
Enforcement	Measures to avoid or reduce IUU fishing. Logbooks; observers at sea; fines; fully documented fishery, Registration of buyers and sellers or equivalent.
Illegal, unreported, or unregulated activity	Prevalence of IUU, penalties regime, awareness of the consequences of non-compliance, patrols (on shore and at sea). If IUU suspected to be significant, intrinsic and widespread, default 1 for the fishery.

5.2 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. 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> [Accessed on 05.03.2026].
- SFP, 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].

6. CRITERION 3: CAPTURE METHOD AND ECOLOGICAL EFFECTS

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

Depending on the fishing gear in use there can be varying impacts to the marine environment. Active gear types, such as trawls, in general have more direct environmental impacts than passive gear types, but these impacts are heavily dependent on fishing intensity, site vulnerability and target species. Towed gears including beam trawls, otter trawls, dredges and seine and purse seine methods can also generate significant levels of bycatch from several different species including other commercial fish species, and non-commercial species, such as ETP species, cetaceans, and many species of invertebrate. However, for many of these gear types, modifications can be put in place to reduce discards and bycatch. Dive caught, pole and line, handline, pot or creel, trap and set (gill) net fishing methods tend to have a low-impact on the marine environment, as they are not towed along the seabed and so have a limited range of impact. Similarly, while long-lining may have significant shark or bird bycatch, it has little or no contact with the seabed and accordingly does not have a significant benthic impact.

Where a fishing method causes significant impacts on species or habitats, involves illegal activity, damages designated MPA⁷ features (see Appendix VI), or where bottom trawling occurs below 600 m without robust mitigation measures, the fishery receives a default rating of 5 (see Table 4).

Category description and weighting for capture method and ecological effect is summarised Table 15 below.

Any measures deployed to reduce gear impacts for the capture method and fishery in question is taken into consideration when determining the individual impact scores. These measures are outlined in Table 16.

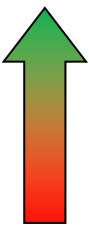
⁷ Many bottom trawling gears will need to be assessed for potential damage to seabed features where Special Areas of Conservation, Scottish nature conservation MPAs and English Marine Conservation Zones are designated to protect the integrity of seabed features.

The criterion score for capture method and ecological effects is determined by assessing the impacts of the fishing gear on several elements, including habitat, non-target species (bycatch), and Vulnerable, Endangered, Threatened, and Protected (ETP) species. In Version 3 of the Wild-Capture Methodology, a new element has been added to the assessment: ecosystems and trophic-webs:

- Habitat (Table 17);
- Non-target species (bycatch), retained or discarded, and their removal (Table 18); and
- Vulnerable and Endangered, Threatened and Protected species, retained or discarded, and their removal (Table 19).
- Ecosystem and trophic-webs (Table 20).

In this new version of the methodology, all the scores obtained from the evaluation of these four impacts are used to obtain a final score for criterion 3. This score is multiplied by a weighting multiplier (x1.5) to obtain the criterion score.

Table 15: Fishing method impacts, associated descriptors and scores

Impact	Associated descriptors	Weighting Multiplier	Criterion Scores	Sustainability Levels
Very low-impact	Fishing method associated with negligible bycatch , including juveniles and any overfished, vulnerable, or ETP species, negligible habitat impacts , and no detectable effects on ecosystem structure or trophic-webs .	X 1.5	0 – 1	High
Low-impact	Bycatch is low or unlikely and unlikely to cause populations declines; and/or method is unlikely to cause habitat impacts; and/or ecosystem or trophic-web impacts are minimal or unlikely.	X 1.5	1.5 – 2	
Some or moderate impact	Bycatch is moderate and likely contributing to populations declines; and/or the method is likely to cause some or moderate habitat impacts;	X 1.5	2.5 – 3.5	
			Low	

	and/or the fishery is likely to cause localized or moderate disruptions to ecosystem interactions or trophic-web dynamics.			
High impact	Bycatch is high, clearly causing population declines; and/or method is causing moderate or likely causing high or significant damage; and/or the fishery is causing moderate to high disruption of trophic relationships, including the removal of key predators or prey.	X 1.5	4 – 4.5	
Very high impact or illegal or unknown	Bycatch is significant, causing populations to fall to critical status; and/or method is causing significant damage; and/or ecosystem and trophic-web impacts are severe or poorly understood, with limited information on bycatch rates, habitat effects, or ecosystem-level consequences.	X 1.5	5 – 6	

Table 16: Examples of measures to reduce gear impacts

FISHING METHOD	MITIGATION MEASURES OR SELECTIVE DEVICES
<i>Protect target species, juveniles and reduce discards</i>	
Demersal (single, pair or multi rig) trawl; beam trawl	Square Mesh Panels (SMPs); Sorting grids; Coverless trawls; Cod-end configuration e.g. Square mesh in codend; Separator panel; Larger meshes; Mesh shape
Mechanical dredge	Limit on number of dredges per side of vessel
Dredge (Hydraulic or suction)	Gear restrictions – solids pump dredge; spacing of grid bars, no. and width of dredges; rigid or flexible delivery pipe

Any applicable	Monitoring of catches -- Camera documentation or Fully Documented Fisheries (FDFs) or observers at sea?
Any applicable	Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS). See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/minimum-conservation-reference-sizes-mcrs/minimum-conservation-reference-sizes-mcrs-in-uk-waters for a guide to minimum landing sizes. Also http://www.anglingtrust.net/page.asp?section=163 as a guide for actual size-at-maturity and corresponding legal minimum landing sizes for UK species.
Any applicable	Maximum Landing or Marketing or Conservation Reference Size where appropriate e.g. lobster
<i>Reduce bycatch and protect non-target species</i>	
Any applicable	Use and monitoring of bycatch reduction devices: BRDs are regulated for and effectively monitored, including use of observers where necessary and feasible. Use of reference fleets and electronic remote monitoring to assist.
Any applicable	Bycatch quotas: Full catch recording for both target and non-target species. Fisheries implement best practice avoidance and ETP handling measures as recommended or directed by the RFMO.
Any applicable	Restrictions or ban in place on damaging practices? Closures or avoidance of bycatch hotspots?
Demersal trawl	Turtle Excluding Devices (TEDs); BRD;
Mid-water or pelagic trawl (single and pair)	Sorting grids e.g. Nordmøre grid; TED (Turtle Excluder Devices)
Seine net	Selective panels
Troll	Visible hooks; Set lines below reach of seabirds
Purse seine	Dolphin-friendly methods applied where applicable, e.g. Medina panel and backdown principle or manoeuvre, restrictions for setting around whale sharks or cetaceans
Purse seine (FAD)	Control number and density of FADS; Restrictions on setting on FADS, logs or debris, GPS, sorting grids, non-tangling design, restrictions for setting around whale sharks or cetaceans

Longline (pelagic); longline (demersal or bottom)	Measures to reduce incidental catch or by-catch & impact on non-target and ETP species: bird streamers/scarers; replacement of hooks with O-hooks; bait change for turtles; Fishing at night only; Increasing weight on branch lines – ensures they sink quickly and baited hooks out of reach of seabirds; Set lines underwater; Offal management e.g. disposal away from lines; Dyed bait so it is less visible to seabirds; Streamers used as a scaring device; Magnets to reduce shark bycatch; Restrictions on: number of hooks; length of line; soak time; type of bait etc.
---	--

Fixed or gill or drift net (trammel; wreck; tangle)	Attachment of acoustic deterrent devices; Dyes to make nets more visible; Restrictions on number and length of nets; Exit panels; Scaring devices e.g. pyrotechnics; Coloured e.g. white –mesh visible to seabirds; Mesh size restrictions; Soak time restrictions
---	--

Pot or creel or trap	Restrictions on type of pot or trap in use; Escape gaps
----------------------	---

Protect habitat

Demersal (single, pair or multi rig) trawl	Lighter ground gear – rollers instead of hoppers, suspended and semi-suspended trawl doors
--	--

Beam trawl	Replacement of skids with wheels; sumwing
------------	---

Dredge (Mechanical)	Gear restrictions or design, limit on number of dredges etc.
------------------------	--

Any applicable	Spatial management: Area/Time closures; MPAs; MCZs, protection of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) e.g. deep sea
----------------	---

Any applicable	Precautionary approach applied to fishing activity in vulnerable habitats
----------------	---

6.1 Capture method and ecological effects detailed descriptors

6.1.1 Habitat impacts

Table 17 below considers the collateral impact of the fishing gear on the seabed and/or other habitat such as coral, rich sandbanks, seamounts etc.

The fishing gears listed below, although not an exhaustive list, are indicative of the main gear types prevalent in commercial UK and European fisheries. Specific gear types not listed are assessed on their own merit.

Table 17: Gear vs. Habitat

Habitat \ Gear	Fine mobile sand	Mud and/or gravel	Bedrock, boulder and/or cobble ⁸	Biogenic reef, seagrass, maerl, or corals	MPAs designated for benthic features ⁹	Deep sea, seamounts
Manual						
Dive caught	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	N/A
Hand gathering or rake	Green	Green	Green	Orange	Green	N/A
Pole & line, jig, troll	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	N/A
Hook and line, handline (if fished on sea floor, otherwise NA)	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	N/A
Spear or harpoon	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	N/A
Static						
Bottom longline	Green	Green	Green	Orange	Orange	Orange
Pelagic longline	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	N/A
Coastal drift net	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	N/A
Fixed or gill net	Green	Green	Orange	Orange	Orange	Restricted below 600m in EU
Pot, creel or trap	Green	Green	Green	Orange	Orange	N/A
Suction dredge	Green	Orange	Red	Red	Red	N/A
Towed Pelagic						
Mid water or pelagic trawl	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	N/A
Pair trawl	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	N/A
Towed Bottom						
Beam trawl	Green	Orange	Orange	Red	Footnote 7	N/A
Demersal otter trawl	Green	Orange	Orange	Red	Footnote 7	Red
Dredge	Green	Orange	Red	Red	Footnote 7	N/A
Encircling						
Purse seine	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	N/A
Benthic seine net	Green	Green	Orange	Red	Footnote 7	N/A
Explosives, chemical or illegal e.g. high seas drift net and electrical fishing	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Score		1	0.75	0.5	0.25	0

⁸ See Glossary (Appendix IV) for definitions of boulder and cobble particle sizes.

⁹ Where MPA features are present that are both vulnerable to bottom towed fishing gears and dredgers, and where there is the opportunity within the MPA for biological features to recover on the seabed were bottom trawling to be restricted i.e. in areas of the MPA where benthic recovery could occur. Conversely, if the feature is ephemeral (such as mussel beds), and is proven (e.g. through a Habitat Risk Assessment) not to support other biodiversity in high current areas, it can be harvested to an extent that doesn't compromise other natural predators (e.g. seabirds).

For guidance on habitat impact, we refer to the risk ratings of how likely different fisheries gear types and activities are to damage protected features of European Marine Sites (initially Special Areas of Conservation) produced by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) in June 2014.¹⁰

This figure is also currently being utilised by English regulators to actively manage different fishing impacts within Marine Conservation Zones and Special Areas of Conservation.

To determine the sediment type found in various waters, habitat maps can be used, or preferred substrate types for different species at different stages of life-history.¹¹

6.1.2 Bycatch impacts

This impact considers the impact of the fishing gear on non-target species (often referred to as by-catch) which may be retained or discarded. These species may be other fish species or non-fish species such as sponges and other benthic fauna. Undersized or juvenile individuals of the target species may also be considered bycatch. The extent of the impact on them depends on several factors such as the target fish species and the area in which and time at which the fishing activity is taking place.

When assessing the likelihood of impacts on non-target species the status of the most vulnerable and most commonly associated non-target species will be considered. If a bycatch species is commonly discarded, the discard rates of the fishery will also be considered.

Note: If the assessed species is generally recognised as a bycatch species (e.g., yellow or tub gurnard) and receives a score of 0 to 0.5 in the '*Stock Status*' criterion, this section is scored as 0. If the species scores between 0.75 and 1 in the '*Stock Status*' criterion, a score of 0.25 is awarded, unless it is part of a larger depleted fishery.

If the species under assessment is retained as part of a mixed fishery (see Glossary, Appendix IV), all tables are completed with the impact of the fishery on a minimum of 6 key species (e.g cod, haddock, whiting, coley, hake and plaice) also considered.

¹⁰ This guidance is summarised and available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31081/matrix.xls [Last accessed on 12.03.2026].

¹¹ E.g. Seitz, R.D., Wennhage, H., Bergström, U., Lipcius, R.N., Ysebaert, T., 2014. Ecological value of coastal habitats for commercially and ecologically important species. ICES Journal of Marine Science, Volume 71, Issue 3, 1 April 2014, Pages 648–665. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fst152> [Accessed on 12.03.2026].

Table 18: Impact on non-target (bycatch) species (retained or non-retained)

Score	0	0.25	0.5	0.75	1
Descriptor	Fishery associated with low or negligible impact	Fishery unlikely over-exploiting other species	Fishery has the potential or is possibly over-exploiting other species	It's likely the fishery is over-exploiting other species and causing them to decline	The fishery is causing other species to fall to critical levels (e.g. stock biomass below Blim)

6.1.3 Vulnerable or ETP species impacts

The fishery may also impact on vulnerable and/or Endangered, Threatened or Protected (ETP) species.¹² ETP species are species that are generally in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of their range or likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of their range.

Table 19: Impact on vulnerable or ETP species (retained or non-retained)

Score	0	0.25	0.5	0.75	1
Descriptor	Fishery associated with negligible bycatch of vulnerable and / or ETP species	Bycatch levels unlikely causing populations to decline	Bycatch level is possibly contributing to population decline and / or preventing their recovery and / or fishing method is causing significant by catch issues	Bycatch level is likely causing populations to decline and / or is preventing their recovery	Bycatch level is very likely causing populations to decline and/or is preventing their recovery

¹² The Marine Conservation Society recognises that it is often difficult to prove that accidental catch is impacting populations and that in some fisheries where there is a significant bycatch issue, it may not necessarily be having population effects. The Marine Conservation Society believes however that continuing efforts are needed to reduce incidental capture of ETP species, especially where there is an attendant welfare issue, to as close to zero as possible.

6.1.4 Impact on ecosystems/ trophic-webs

The fishery may also 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.

Table 20: Impact on ecosystems /trophic-webs

Score	0	0.25	0.5	0.75	1
Descriptor	Low or negligible impact on trophic-webs or ecosystems	It is unlikely that the fishery has an impact on the trophic-web or the ecosystems	It is possible that the fishery has the potential to alter the trophic-web or the ecosystems.	There is evidence that the fishery likely leads to long-term changes in the trophic-web or the ecosystems.	It is very likely that the fishery causes irreversible changes in the trophic-web or the ecosystems.

6.2 References

Clarke, J., Milligan, R.J., Bailey, D.M., Neat, F.C., 2015. A scientific basis for regulating deep-sea fishing by depth. *Current Biology*, Volume 25, Issue 18, 2425 – 2429. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2015.07.070> [Accessed on 05.02.2026].

DEFRA, 2014. Benthic habitats. Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141203181034/http://chartingprogress.defra.gov.uk/benthic-habitats> [Accessed on 05.03.2026].

JNCC, 2025. UK Atlas of Seabed Habitats: UKSeaMap Predictive Map v2025.1. Available at: <https://jncc.gov.uk/resources/202874e5-0446-4ba7-8323-24462077561e> [Accessed on 05.03.2026].

Cappell, R., T. Huntington, G. Macfadyen, B. Caillart, and M-E. Guélé. 2024, Research for PECH Committee – The EU oceans and fisheries policy – Latest developments and future challenges, European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU\(2024\)747291](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/IPOL_STU(2024)747291) [Accessed on 05.03.2026].

- European Commission, 2026. Discarding in fisheries. Available at: https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/fisheries/rules/discarding-fisheries_en [Accessed on 05.03.2026].
- Ellis, J.R., McCully Phillips, S.R., Poisson, F., 2017. A review of capture and post-release mortality of elasmobranchs: capture mortality of elasmobranchs. *J. Fish Biol.* 90, 653–722. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jfb.13197>. [Accessed on 05.03.2026].
- Enever, R., Catchpole, T. L., Ellis, J. R. & Grant, A., 2009. The survival of skates (Rajidae) caught by demersal trawlers fishing in UK waters. *Fisheries Research* 97, 72–76. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fishres.2009.01.001> [Accessed on 05.03.2026].
- Enever, R., Revill, A. S., Caslake, R. & Grant, A., 2010. Discard mitigation increases skate survival in the Bristol Channel. *Fisheries Research* 102, 9–15. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fishres.2009.09.013> [Accessed on 05.03.2026].
- Global Fishing Watch, 2016. Global fishing watch interactive website. Available at: <https://globalfishingwatch.org/> [Accessed on 05.03.2026].
- ICES, 2025. Working Group on the Biology and Assessment of Deep-Sea Fisheries Resources (WGDEEP). ICES Scientific Reports. 7:59. 921 pp. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17895/ices.pub.29086478> [Accessed on 05.03.2026].
- Marine Conservation Institute, 2017. Atlas of marine protection. Available at: <http://www.mpatlas.org/> [Accessed on 05.03.2026].
- Seafish, 2026. Fishing Gear Database. Available at: <https://www.seafish.org/responsible-sourcing/fishing-gear-database/> [Accessed on 05.03.2026].
- Seafish, MSC, FCI, SAGB, 2013. Project inshore MSC pre-assessment database. Available at: <http://msc.solidproject.co.uk/msc-project-inshore.aspx> [Accessed 1/06/17].
- Seitz, R.D., Wennhage, H., Bergström, U., Lipcius, R.N., Ysebaert, T., 2014. Ecological value of coastal habitats for commercially and ecologically important species. *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, Volume 71, Issue 3, 1 April 2014, Pages 648–665. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fst152> [Accessed on 05.03.2026].
- Thurstan, R., Brockington, S. & Roberts, C., 2010. The effects of 118 years of industrial fishing on UK bottom trawl fisheries. *Nat Commun*, 15. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1038/ncomms1013> [Accessed on 05.03.2026].

APPENDICES

I. Appendix I: External review process

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

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

To receive notifications about ratings updates and consultations, please email us (ratings@mcsuk.org) and request to be added to our interested parties email distribution list.

Details of ratings consultations will also be made available online at: <https://www.mcsuk.org/ocean-emergency/sustainable-seafood/about-the-good-fish-guide/how-our-good-fish-guide-ratings-work/ratings-consultations/>

II. Appendix II: Good Fish Guide update schedule

Timing	Action
Jan	<i>Ratings research</i>
Feb	February Consultation
Mar	<i>Ratings finalisation</i>
Apr	April Launch
May	<i>Ratings research</i>
Jun	
Jul	
Aug	August Consultation
Sep	<i>Ratings finalisation</i>
Oct	October Launch
Nov	<i>Ratings research</i>
Dec	

III. Appendix III: Wild-Capture certification programmes recognised by the Marine Conservation Society

The Global Seafood Sustainability Initiative (GSSI)¹³ is used to inform consideration of certification standards for recognition within the Wild-Capture Methodology. Presently the Marine Conservation Society recognises the following standards:

- [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](#)

¹³ Global Seafood Sustainability Initiative. Available at <http://www.ourgssi.org/benchmarking/recognized-schemes/> [Accessed on 11 December 2025]. See <http://www.ourgssi.org/> for information on GSSI benchmarking of certification programmes.

IV. Appendix IV: Glossary

Term	Description
Artisanal	Small-scale, traditional fisheries.
Benthic	On or near the seabed.
Biodiversity	The variability amongst living organisms.
Biogenic reef	Reefs made up of animals. In the UK these include coral reefs, made by cold-water corals such as <i>Lophelia pertusa</i> and <i>Madrepora oculata</i> . Mussels such as the edible mussel <i>Mytilus edulis</i> and the horse mussel <i>Modiolus modiolus</i> can also create biogenic reef structures.
Biomass	The total weight of living organisms or total weight of a resource or stock.
B_{lim}	Limit reference point for spawning stock biomass (SSB). A stock with biomass below B_{lim} is at greater risk of suffering impaired recruitment.
B_{MSY}	SSB that results from fishing at F_{MSY} for a long time. B_{MSY} is the biomass that enables a fish stock to deliver the maximum sustainable yield. In theory, B_{MSY} is the population size at the point of maximum growth rate. The surplus biomass that is produced by the population at B_{MSY} is the maximum sustainable yield that can be harvested without reducing the population.
Boulder	Seafloor rock particles greater than 256mm across
B_{pa}	Precautionary reference point for spawning stock biomass (SSB).
$B_{Trigger}$	Value of biomass (normally SSB), below which, a specific management action is triggered (e.g. reduction in fishing pressure) in order to recover the biomass above $B_{Trigger}$.
Bycatch	Incidentally caught species which generally have little or no commercial value and often thrown back. This can include finfish, invertebrates such as starfish and sponges, , other species not regularly consumed, and/or Endangered, Threatened or Protected (ETP) species such as sharks, marine turtles, birds or mammals.
CFP	EU Common Fisheries Policy
Cobble	Seafloor rock particles between 64 and 256mm across
Cohort	A group of fish born in the same year within a population or stock.

Data deficient / Data limited	Fisheries for which data are insufficient to evaluate reference points in order to assess stock status.
Deep sea fishing	The Marine Conservation Society defines this as targeting species classed as 'deep sea' species by ICES and/or where fishing primarily occurs below 600m.
Deep sea species	Species that occur in deep-sea waters and are characterised by one or a combination of the following factors: slow growth, low natural mortality, high longevity, no annual continuous recruitment or spawning season.
Discard ban	See Landing obligation.
Discards	Components of catches thrown back after capture e.g. because they are below the Minimum Landing Size (MLS) or because quota have been exhausted for that species. Most of the discarded fish will not survive.
Endangered, Threatened or Protected (ETP)	The US Endangered Species Act defines an endangered species as "any species which is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range." A threatened species is "any species which is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range." Protected species are those identified as Endangered or Threatened.
Fishery	The sum of all fishing activities on a given resource, defined in terms of species, area of capture, stock or sub area and capture method, e.g. shrimp fishery, North Sea cod fishery. It may also refer to a single type or style of fishing e.g. trawl fishery.
Fishing effort	The amount of a specific type of fishing over a given unit of time e.g. hours trawled per day; the overall amount of fishing expressed in units of time e.g. number of hauls per boat per day.
Fishing mortality (F)	Death or removal of fish from a population due to fishing. Usually expressed as the proportion of fish dying from fishing in one year, or an instantaneous rate. It can range from 0 for no fishing to very high values such as 1.5 or 2, meaning that 1.5 or 2 times as many fish have been caught as were present at the beginning of the fishing season (this is possible with short-lived, fast growing species such as anchovies).
F_{lim}	The limit (upper) reference point for fishing mortality.
F_{MSY}	The maximum rate of fishing mortality (the proportion of a fish stock caught and removed by fishing) resulting eventually, usually in a very long-time frame, in a population size of BMSY.

F_{pa}	The precautionary reference point for fishing mortality (F).
Fully fished	Fishery where catches are close to or at MSY.
Landing obligation or 'discard ban'	Introduced 1 January 2015 for pelagic species; for certain demersal species from 1 January 2016, starting with key species such as haddock, sole and plaice, depending on which sea area a vessel is fishing in and what type of fishing gear is used. By 2019 the obligation to land all catches of quota species is due to be fully implemented. The general rule is that species that are subject to catch limits cannot be returned to the sea once caught, although several exemptions apply. For further guidance see https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fisheries-management-landing-obligation .
Mixed fishery	Where several species of commercial importance are caught at the same time in the same fishing gear. Most fisheries around the UK are mixed fisheries eg. see DEFRA consultation on establishing a mixed fishery multiannual management plan in the North Sea (NSMAP) https://consult.defra.gov.uk/fisheries/north-sea-map .
Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY)	The largest long-term average catch or yield that can be taken from a stock or stock complex under prevailing ecological and environmental conditions.
Overfished	The state of a fish stock when its biomass is below its capacity to produce MSY on a continuing basis.
Overfishing	When a stock is subjected to a level of fishing mortality that jeopardises its ability to produce MSY on a continuing basis.
Productivity	The inherent biological characteristics of a species that determine its rate of population generation.
Reef	A rocky marine habitat or biological concretions that rises from the seabed. They are generally subtidal but may extend as an unbroken transition into the intertidal zone, where they are exposed to the air at low tide. They are very variable in form and in the communities that they support. Two main types of reef can be recognised: those where animal and plant communities develop on rock or stable boulders and cobbles, and those where structure is created by the animals themselves (biogenic reefs).
Resilience	See Productivity.
Seamount	An undersea mountain, with a crest that rises more than 1,000m above the surrounding sea floor. They are volcanic in origin, and are often associated with seafloor 'hot-spots' (thinner areas of the earth's crust where magma can escape). The enhanced currents that occur

	around them provide ideal conditions for suspension feeders. Concentrations of commercially important fish species, such as orange roughy, aggregate around seamounts and live in close association with the benthic communities. Seamounts are a distinct and different environment from much of the deep sea.
Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB)	Total weight of all sexually mature fish in the stock.
Stock status	State or condition of the stock e.g. whether it is overfished or being subject to overfishing.
Stock	Term given to a group of individuals in a species occupying a well-defined spatial range independent of other stocks of the same species. A stock will form the basis of a distinct fishery defined in terms of season and area.
Total Allowable Catch (TAC)	An annual maximum tonnage that may be taken of a fish species within an area.
Under fished	A stock which has a biomass above (normally considerably) the B_{MSY} level.
Underutilised	Species with a quota allocation that is not fully taken up as a consequence of either market demand or having landing restrictions in place in a mixed fishery or species for which a substantial part of their catch is not landed (i.e. it is discarded). Species for which resources are available but not yet exploited, i.e. species that potentially offer new fisheries.
Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs)	Assemblages of marine benthic organisms which are susceptible to anthropogenic disturbance, especially that arising from the impact of fishing gear used in bottom fishing, e.g. seamounts, cold-water corals
Vulnerability	A combination of a species biological, physical and behavioural characteristics (productivity and susceptibility) which influence its risk of being caught and overfished.

V. Appendix V: ICES stocks category definitions

ICES Category	Definitions ¹⁴
1	For data-rich stocks (quantitative assessments) with forecasts and are based on production models. Stocks are not considered to be data-limited and have full analytical assessments.
2	Stocks with analytical assessments and forecasts that are treated qualitatively. Quantitative assessments and forecasts exist but only indicate trends in fishing mortality, recruitment, and biomass rather than as an analytical assessment with a forecast.
3	Survey-based assessments from reliable indices e.g. CPUE are available and indicate reliable trends in stock metrics such as mortality, recruitment, and biomass. However, no quantitative, analytic assessment is available.
4	Where only catch or landings data are available but may not be consistent. Reliable time-series of catch data are available and used to approximate MSY.
5	Data-poor stocks where only landings data are available and no relevant fishery information is available from similar stocks or stocks in the ecoregion.
6	Landings data are negligible. Usually used for stocks that are caught in minor amounts as bycatch or where landings are negligible compared to discards, or where abundance is low are therefore the species has received limited study.

VI. Appendix VI: Guidance on habitat scoring where MPAs with habitat features are present

Relates to section 5.1.1 of the Wild-Capture Methodology

For updates and more information about MPAs in the UK, visit [MPA Reality Check](#) or [MPA Mapper / Advisor to Government on Nature Conservation / JNCC](#)

This document has been prepared to provide guidance for ratings assessors and stakeholders when scoring habitat impacts where MPAs with habitat features are present, specifically when applying section 5.1.1 of the Wild-Capture Methodology. It

¹⁴ ICES, 2012. ICES Advisory Framework 1977–2012: From MSY to Precautionary Approach and Back. C.M. 2012/L:07. Available at: <https://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/CM%20Documents/CM-2012/L/L0712.pdf> [Accessed 11 December 2025].

aims to clarify various terms and provides definitions relating to this section of the methodology to help ensure it is interpreted and applied consistently.

This guidance does not apply to MPAs that have been designated for non-habitat purposes such as pelagic species like dolphin and porpoise. The methodology evaluates impacts of the fishery on such species in section 5.1.2 and 5.1.3 (Table 18 and Table 19), as there is no specific mechanism relating to MPAs for these species in the current methodology.

vi.i. Scale of assessment

As stated in the methodology, the scale of most fishery ratings assessments is based on the wider stock area and is therefore generally a very large geographical area, for example the entire North Sea. At such a scale, it is difficult for the Marine Conservation Society to identify if fishing is occurring in an MPA[s] or not and if it is, to what extent.

vi.ii. Defining 'high likelihood'

The methodology states that 'where available information clearly indicates a high likelihood that a fishery/fleet at the scale of the assessment is occurring in an MPA, the MPA tab in the above matrix (sic) is applied to score habitat impacts', referring to Table 17 of the methodology. The statement 'high likelihood... at the scale of the assessment' is defined as follows:

There is evidence (e.g. recent catch reports or VMS data) of significant bottom towed fishing activity ($\geq 20\%$ of the catch or effort or coverage) from the fleet[s] under the unit of assessment occurring in an MPA or MPAs designated for seabed features.

vi.iii. Scenarios

To better facilitate understanding of scoring of habitat impacts in MPAs, the following scenarios have been identified:

Scenario one: less than 20% of the fishery is operating in MPAs

Where there is not a high likelihood that a fishery/fleet at the scale of the assessment is operating in an MPA, we use the default habitat score for that gear. For example, demersal otter trawling over mud is scored 0.5 based on the habitat matrix (Table 17). In these scenarios, we recognise there may still be some bottom towed fishing operating within MPAs and may refer to this within the text of specific ratings and also encourage the supply chain to investigate their specific sources. See **Supply chain recommendations** below.

Scenario two: 20% or more of the fishery is operating in designated or managed MPAs

Where there is a high likelihood that a fishery/fleet at the scale of the assessment is occurring in an MPA, the MPA column in the habitat matrix (Table 17) is applied to score habitat impacts. For example, demersal otter trawling is scored 1 based on the habitat matrix (Table 17).

Scenario three: Default red ratings: 20% or more of the fishery is operating in managed MPAs and fishing illegally or there is concern for the features or objectives of the site

Where there is a high likelihood that a fishery/fleet at the scale of the assessment is occurring in a designated and managed MPA and:

- i. There is insufficient evidence¹⁵ demonstrating that the activity is not damaging to the protected feature[s] or a threat to the conservation objectives of the site[s]; or
- ii. A significant proportion¹⁶ of the fishing activity is operating illegally¹⁷ in an MPA; A critical fail is triggered, and a default red rating is applied.

vi.iv. Supply chain recommendations

In cases where there is not a high likelihood of fishing within MPAs at the scale of the assessment (as defined above), but there may still be some bottom towed fishing operations within some MPAs designated for seabed features within the unit of assessment, the Marine Conservation Society encourages the supply chain to identify if their specific sources are being caught from within the MPAs.

If sources are suspected of coming from within designated and managed MPAs, the Marine Conservation Society advises businesses to:

- i. Establish if the fishing activity is operating legally inside a designated and managed MPA.
- ii. Request evidence (such as justification of management measures or an Environmental Impact

¹⁵ Evidence here generally refers to publicly available information including reports or assessments from relevant managing authorities, scientific research organisations, or conservation advisory bodies. Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and Habitat Risk Assessments (HRAs) would be examples of such evidence.

¹⁶ Significant proportion refers to 20% or more of the fishery at the scale of the assessment.

¹⁷ Illegal operations here refer to incursions into MPAs which are contrary to agreed and active management measures for the site.

Assessment or appropriate risk assessment¹⁸) from the fishery or managing authority to demonstrate that the activity is not damaging to protected features or a threat to the conservation objectives of the site[s].

Where suitable evidence demonstrating the above cannot be provided or the activity is operating illegally inside the MPA, the Marine Conservation Society would consider fish from these sources as red rated and therefore Fish to Avoid and would encourage businesses to source alternatives.

Note: The Marine Conservation Society does not envisage developing specific ratings profiles for fisheries taking place in individual MPAs at this stage.

The Marine Conservation Society is aware that because the required information is not routinely made available to commercial buyers, it is difficult for them to currently know precisely where fish have been caught and if there is overlap with any MPAs. As monitoring practices and technologies continue to improve, and as supply chain information and traceability systems are better developed, we anticipate that it will become easier to integrate such information into seafood buying decisions. Likewise, as MPA management and monitoring improve, it will become easier for the industry and managers to demonstrate to buyers that fish being procured has not been caught using fishing methods that are damaging to MPAs.

¹⁸ For example, the risk-based approach adopted for European Marine Sites.



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:

Email: ratings@mcsuk.org



Registered charity in UK and US. No. 1004005 and 10-500492-00007490.
Registered company limited by guarantee in UK and US. No. 02354966.
Registered office: Chertsey Road, Woking, Surrey, GU24 0NF, UK. VAT number: 320 481 220.



mcsuk.org [mcsuk](https://www.facebook.com/mcsuk) [mcsuk](https://twitter.com/mcsuk) [mcs_uk](https://www.instagram.com/mcs_uk)