

Fisheries in brief

2: Evidence-based decision making

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The health of the marine environment is poorly understood. Historic and ongoing habitat degradation and biodiversity loss have restricted our ability to determine a baseline understanding of what pristine ecosystems look like. Reference points, such as fully protected marine areas, and better data resources can inform conservation targets, which in turn will ensure management measures are appropriate for ecosystem recovery and improved environmental health.

In Scotland, fishing activity is recognised as one of the most widespread pressures on marine ecosystems and fisheries management measures will therefore play an important role in improving the health of the marine environment.

There is a disconnect between scientific advice and fishing activity in Scotland, with fishing quotas often set above advised levels. In 2018, just 67% of Scotland's commercial stocks were fished below maximum sustainable yield. Without following scientific advice, or applying a precautionary approach, fish stocks can easily be overfished and their supporting ecosystems can be impacted.

On a practical level, a lack of transparency in the fisheries management decision-making process has prevented stakeholders from providing expert opinion, and denied State representatives from being held accountable. Additionally, a lack of data on fishing activity, methods, and catch (including bycatch) makes it difficult to assess whether management measures are fit for purpose or effective.

What the Scottish Wildlife Trust would like to see:

- Fisheries management decisions that are well informed and based on the best scientific evidence available.
- Data deficiencies addressed through data collection, monitoring and research with support from stakeholders and funding sources.
- Improved data availability.
- A legal obligation to fish at sustainable levels.
- New and existing areas with whole-site protection used to establish a baseline for marine environmental health to inform management decisions and assess management effectiveness.
- Increased measures to involve fishers in data collection and fisheries management projects, such as the Scottish Inshore Fisheries Integrated Data System (SIFIDS), the Paradigm for Novel and Dynamic Oceanic Resource Assessments (PANDORA) project and initiatives supported by Fisheries Innovation Scotland.
- An independent body established to evaluate and scrutinise the application of scientific evidence in decision making, and monitor the progress of Fisheries Administrations towards meeting environmental targets.
- Annual reporting on data availability, collection and analysis to increase transparency in decision making.

To read our full Fisheries Management Policy, visit: scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/living-seas

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