

NOVEMBER 2025

FISHING INDUSTRY
SOCIAL SURVEY

Lives of the fleet



Fishing Industry Social Survey

Key Findings

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Introduction

This 20-page report shares the findings from the Fishing Industry Social Survey (FISS), commissioned by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and carried out across England for the first time between January and March 2025. The survey was delivered by the Countryside and Community Research Institute at the University of Gloucestershire in collaboration with the fishermen-led charity, Fishing into the Future (FiTF), and several key stakeholders from within the charity's network.

"In the fishing industry, there's more to worry about than just the weather. This survey dives deeper to discover the other pressures affecting skippers, crews, and their families to better understand better the challenges faced both on the boat and off it."

- Jenny Price, fishing business owner and steering group member.



What was the purpose of the survey?

While fishing data (on economic performance and composition of the fleet) is already collected from the UK industry each year, the aim of the FISS was to gather information about fishermen's everyday lives and views in England. It is the first national, statistically robust, and open-access (anonymous) dataset to do so.

The survey asked fishermen about:

- 🚩 **Health and wellbeing**
- 🚩 **Job satisfaction and job security**
- 🚩 **Views on and engagement with fisheries management**
- 🚩 **Age, gender and other demographic information**
- 🚩 **Fishing activity**

The results of the survey will give us a more accurate representation of life in fishing communities, and how this has changed over time in response to new policy and management measures, the changing climate, and other potential impacts. This, in turn, will help to inform future decisions on policies designed to ensure a sustainable and prosperous industry – meaning that fishermen can have a crucial voice in improving the quality of life within their own fishing communities.



How was the survey done?

- 🚩 **Invitation-only:** Randomly selected vessel owners received an email invitation from Defra.
- 🚩 **Online and in-person:** Most completed the survey online, but we also offered phone and face-to-face options for those who preferred. Regional surveyors, managed by Howell Marine Consulting and ICF, contacted and helped fishermen to complete the survey where needed.

Who took part?

Between January and March 2025:



1,282 vessels were randomly selected from the MMO UK Fishing Vessel Lists to take part in the survey

60% of the English fleet was represented by the selected vessels

318 completed surveys was the target

435 surveys were completed in the end thanks to strong industry participation

Where survey respondents fished in the last 12 months:

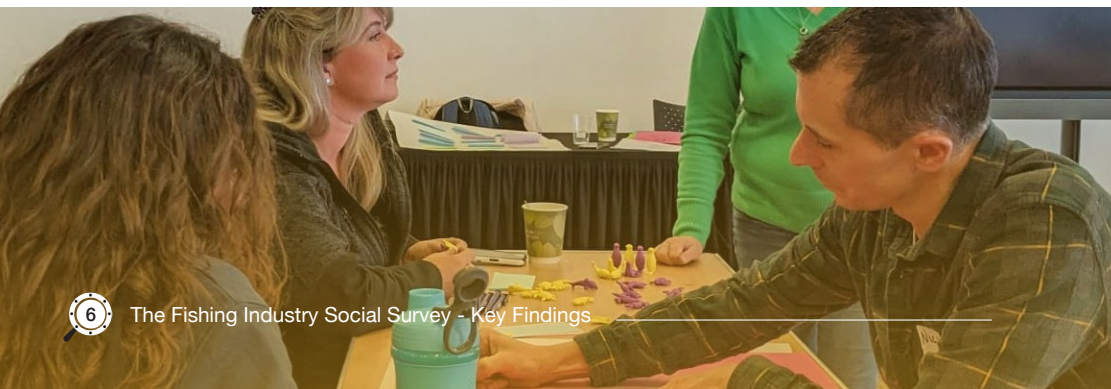
Distance	% of fishermen*
Inside 3nm	71%
Between 3nm and 6nm	56%
Between 6nm and 12nm	42%
Outside 12nm	25%

*Out of 433 respondents

Co-design with the fishing industry

From the start, fishermen, fishing organisations, and charities helped design the survey through workshops in Newlyn, Newhaven, Bridlington, and online.

A steering group made up of people from different parts of the industry (both geographically and across sectors) gave further advice. Survey topics, question wording, answer choices, and approaches to carrying out the survey were all carefully considered throughout the co-design process, to ensure that the dataset would be of value to the fishing industry and to policymakers and fisheries managers.



Key findings from the survey →



1. Fishing is a way of life, but under pressure

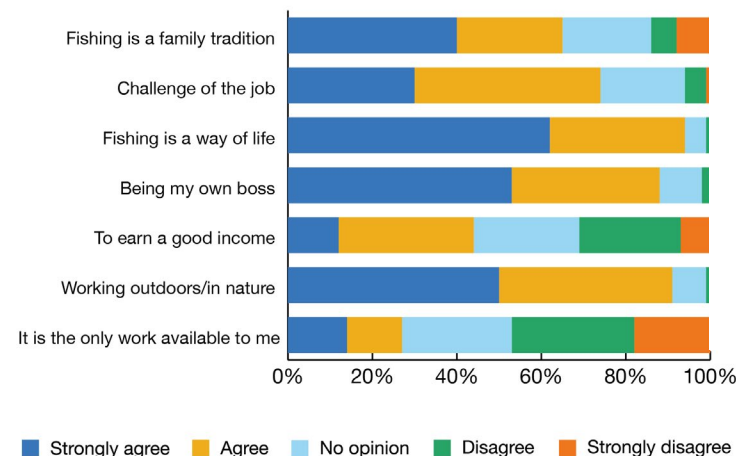
Fishing is deeply rooted in identity and independence, with many respondents motivated by 'fishing as a way of life' (94%) and the appeal of 'being [their] own boss' (88%). Job satisfaction is strong, with 79% saying they are 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with 'the enjoyment [they] get from their work in fishing'.

Yet this livelihood is under pressure. Fishermen report frequent feelings of stress from 'fisheries rules, regulations and administration' (85%), 'spatial squeeze from other marine users' (73%) and 'uncertainty about the future' (65%).

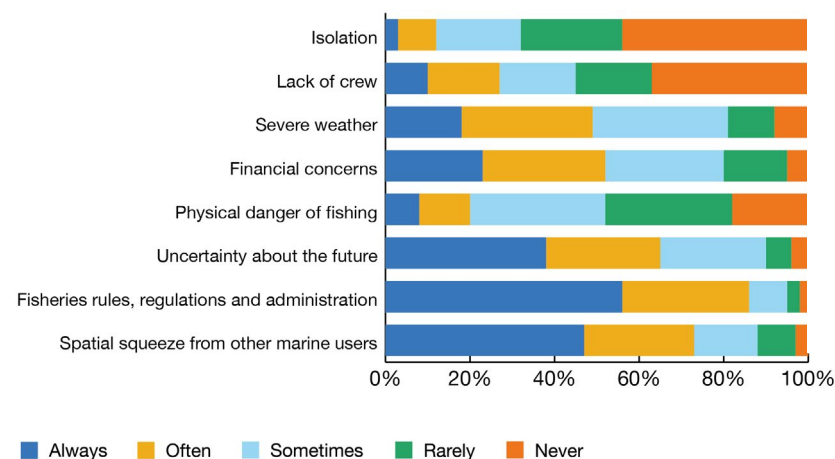
94%
motivated by
'fishing as a way
of life'

85%
reported stress
from 'fisheries rules,
regulations and
administration'

What are your reasons for being a fisherman?



How often do the following cause you workplace stress?

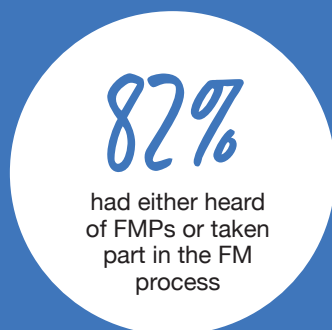


2. Mixed views on fisheries management plans (FMPs)

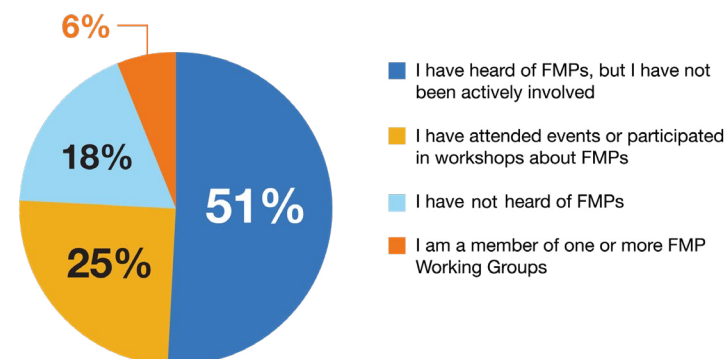
Fishermen shared a range of perspectives on FMPs. While some expressed positive experiences with the FMP process, others were more sceptical. Among those surveyed, 82% had either heard of FMPs or taken part in the FMP process. For those who were engaged, 31% felt fully engaged with the FMP process, 29% felt the FMPs consider the needs of a wide range of stakeholders, and 65% felt it had improved their knowledge of fisheries management.

Half of those engaged believe FMPs may have negative implications for the industry economically (49%), socially and culturally (48%), and their own livelihoods in the long term (49%). A smaller proportion expect benefits for fish stock sustainability (23%) or the marine environment (21%).

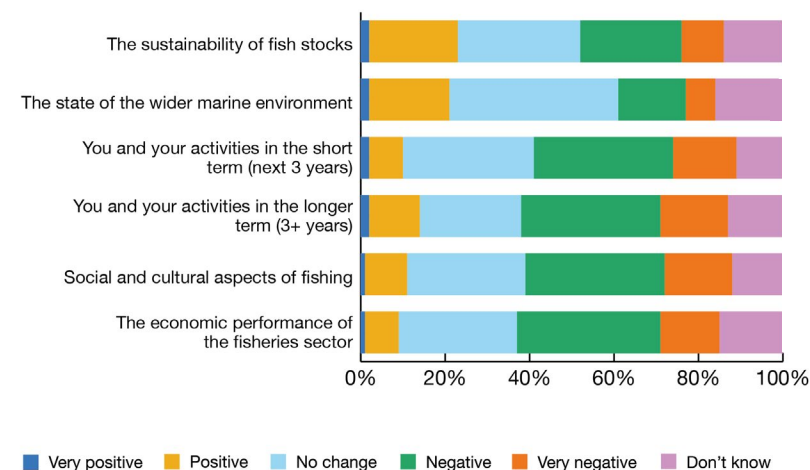
These findings suggest a need to build trust and awareness through meaningful inclusion. Of survey respondents who had taken part in the FMP process, 23% felt listened to during stakeholder events, 13% felt their interests were represented through the collaborative approach to FMPs, and 14% believed their input made a difference.



Which of the following best describes your awareness of FMPs?



What impact do you think that FMPs will have on the following? *(Only asked to those who had heard of or engaged with the FMP process)*



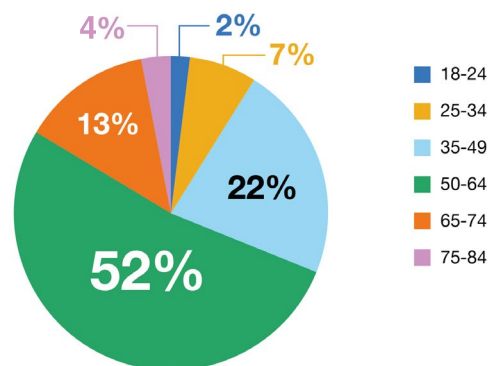
3. The future of the workforce

The age profile of survey respondents (who were primarily skippers) mirrors wider trends across England's fishing fleet, with only 9% under 35 and over 69% aged 50 or older. With nearly 70% of the fishermen surveyed over 50, a succession challenge is potentially facing the industry.

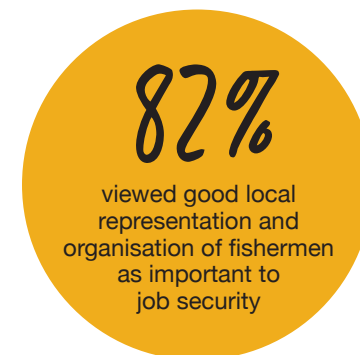
Workforce shortages are already affecting day-to-day operations with 63% of respondents reporting that lack of crew causes them stress. This highlights recruitment as both a practical and mental health issue for many vessel owners and skippers.



Please select the age group to which you belong.

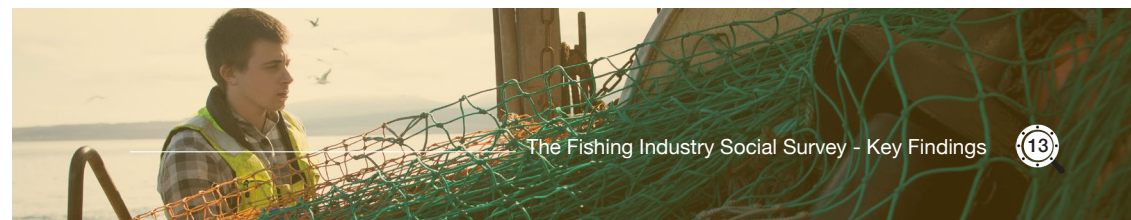
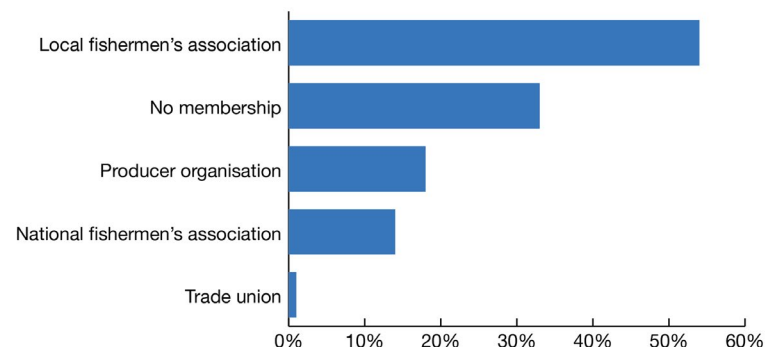


4. Representative support structures and the collective voice



67% of survey respondents are members of representative organisations. Over half (54%) of respondents belong to local fishermen's associations, while smaller proportions are part of producer organisations (18%), national associations (14%) or trade unions (1%). Despite 82% of survey respondents viewing 'good local representation and organisation of fishermen' as important to job security, 33% are not members of any such group. This shows that, even when people value representation, many remain underrepresented.

Are you a member of any of these groups or organisations?



5. Economic pressures and the importance of flexibility

Over half (56%) of respondents felt dissatisfied with the economic viability of working in fishing in the long term. While access to finance to develop or improve existing businesses or vessels (78%) and quota security (73%) are seen as important for job security, 57% are dissatisfied with the cost of and access to quota, licences, and permits, and half (50%) are dissatisfied with public sector financial support.

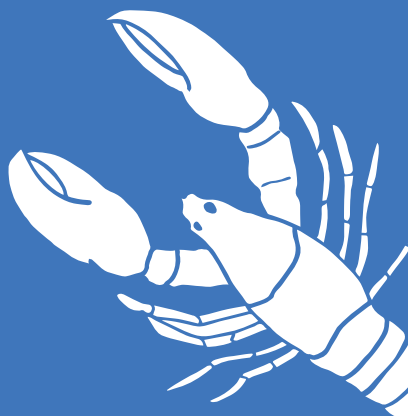
Flexibility appears central to resilience. The survey respondents work with multiple gears (54% pots and traps, 46% drift nets and fixed nets, and 33% longlines and hooks) and target multiple species groups (73% shellfish, 63% demersal, and 33% pelagic); with 77% seeing the ability to switch gears on vessels as important to job security. One third of fishermen (33%) also have other income outside fishing.

56%

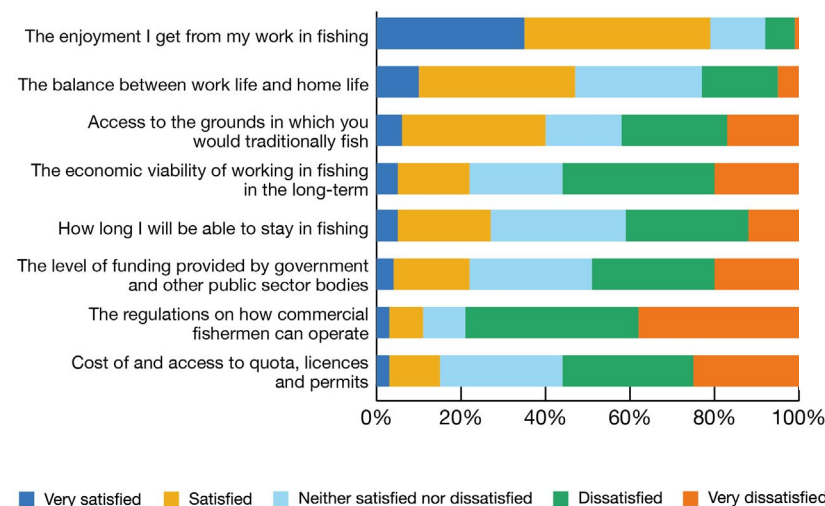
felt dissatisfied with the economic viability of working in fishing in the long term

33%

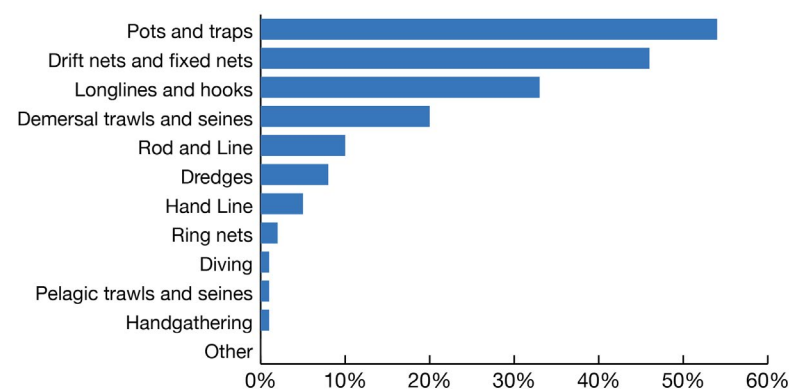
have other income outside fishing



How do you feel about each of the following aspects of your work in fishing?



In the last 12 months, what gear types did you use?



6. Port infrastructure

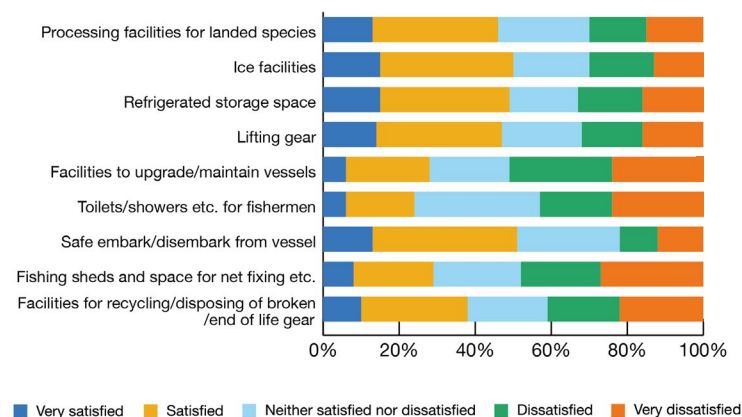
Survey results indicate mixed levels of satisfaction across different port infrastructure facilities. Around half of respondents were satisfied with facilities for safe embarkation/disembarkation from vessels (51%), ice facilities (49%) and refrigerated storage space (48%), processing facilities (46%) and lifting gear (47%).

Respondents expressed dissatisfaction with several other port infrastructure, including facilities for vessel maintenance and upgrades (51%), toilet and shower facilities for fishermen (44%), fishing sheds and space for net fixing (48%), and facilities for recycling or disposing of broken/end of life gear (41%).

51%

satisfied with
facilities for safe
embark/disembark
from vessels

How satisfied are you with the following facilities at the main port where you normally land your catch?



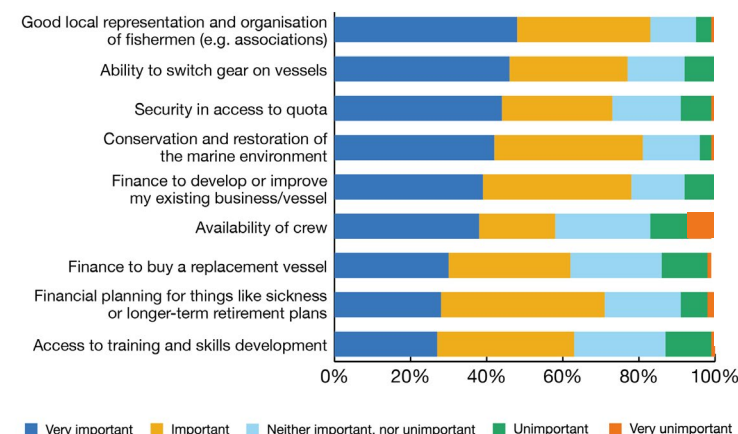
7. The impact of marine conservation and restoration on job security

A strong majority of fishermen surveyed (80%) see marine conservation and restoration as important for their job security. This highlights that conservation policies are closely tied to fishermen's livelihoods, whether beneficial or restrictive, and that relevant decision-making should meaningfully involve fishermen.

80%

see marine
conservation as
important for their
job security

How important are the following factors for your job security?



Looking ahead

The information gathered in this pilot of the **Fishing Industry Social Survey provides, for the first time, a detailed national snapshot of the lives, working conditions, and views of England's commercial fishermen.**

The survey is expected to run once per year or every two years in England, ensuring that the evidence base is regularly updated and that changes are tracked over time. A largely new group of fishermen from the MMO UK Fishing Vessel Lists will be invited to take part in each survey, so those not selected this time are quite likely to be invited in later years.

The pilot included 41 of 81 available survey questions to keep completion time to around 15 minutes for online responses, although in-person completion took longer. In future surveys, some of the questions may be replaced or updated with new questions, allowing the survey to account for emerging and developing issues for the industry, while also maintaining a core set of questions asked regularly.

Although this pilot focused on England, policymakers from the devolved governments were consulted to explore the potential for future roll-out in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Fishing Industry Social Survey will build a reliable, responsive evidence base for decision-making, helping to meet the sustainability objective of the Fisheries Act (2020), with a particular focus on ensuring that social benefits and the needs of fishermen and their communities are considered.



"The data collected in the FISS is critical to describe fisheries beyond landings statistics. We hope it will form part of management decisions and policies developed in the future and provide a mechanism for the voices of the fishing industry reaching policy makers"

- Mike Roach, NFFO and steering group member

"It was good to be able to give our input into shaping what is a very important survey. Going forward, we as an industry will be able to give our views in response to questions we have designed, with fisheries management accountable to the outcomes of the survey."

- David Stevens, skipper and steering group member.

To view the full
dataset, visit
bit.ly/DefraFISS2025



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