

FAQ: Policy Lab's role in helping create a new Sea Bass FMP

PL171 Sea Bass FMP



Background to the project

The Fisheries Act 2020 places an expectation on the UK fisheries policy authorities to prepare and publish Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs). FMPs are documents that set out policies and measures to help manage fishing activity to restore and/or maintain fish stocks at sustainable levels.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) are starting with 6 FMPs, known as 'frontrunners', which will test and evaluate different approaches to preparing FMPs. The seabass FMP is one of these frontrunners and will be published in 2023. The plan will cover bass stocks in both English and Welsh waters.

Defra are committed to taking a collaborative approach to frontrunner FMPs that involve a diverse range of stakeholders. They have therefore commissioned Policy Lab – who are experts in facilitating this kind of collective endeavour (known as 'co-design') – to help in the creation of the FMP and to see how co-design might work when preparing future FMPs.

Who are Policy Lab?

[Policy Lab](#) is a small multidisciplinary team based at the Department for Education. Their team includes policymakers, designers and researchers. They work with policy teams across the government, supporting them to get closer to the real lives of the people they are creating policy for, and to co-design new solutions.

What are Policy Lab planning to do?

The seabass co-design process will take place in two stages.

Firstly, over the summer, Policy Lab will be conducting social research with commercial and recreational seabass fishers: to ensure their voice and perspectives are brought into the co-design process. As part of this, researchers will try to find out about participants' lived experience by spending time with them in their own environments as far as possible. The method is designed to allow the participant to lead the conversation, so they can talk about the issues which matter to them.

Secondly, over late summer and autumn, we will be conducting co-design workshops in which people from across the seabass community will have the chance to sit down together and decide on the approach which ought to be taken to the FMP.

There will be an initial co-design workshop in September 2022, in which attendees will be given the opportunity to contribute their views and make proposals for how the FMP should look. Following this workshop, Policy Lab will take away the insights gathered and explore some possible solutions. These will be shared with attendees for them to provide feedback and iterate together during a 'co-refine' workshop in October 2022.

It is anticipated that outcomes from Policy Lab's work will, alongside an evidence workstream and environmental assessments, feed into a draft FMP produced by Defra and Welsh Government which will go out for public consultation ahead of the scheduled FMP publication date in late 2023.

How can I get involved?

Policy Lab are new to the seabass management space; but with this outside perspective they are building a picture of the networks of individuals and groups by speaking to representatives from across the fishing sector.

It won't ultimately be possible for Policy Lab to involve every single individual and group with an interest in seabass in the process, but they recognise the importance of making sure the full diversity of perspectives are represented and that the fishing sector can use its extensive networks to collate and feed views into the project. Policy Lab are therefore working hard to identify all of the interest groups in the seabass sector, whether it be people who fish for bass recreationally or commercially, those who are involved in the supply chain, the scientists, those involved in regulation (such as the IFCAs or the Marine Management Organisation), and many others.

You can help Policy Lab build this network by emailing team@policylab.gov.uk and telling them a bit about who you are and the nature of your interest in seabass. You can also send Policy Lab your thoughts on bass management and what you would like to see from the Bass FMP directly by filling in the form at tinyurl.com/seabassFMP.

If you are interested in hearing more, Policy Lab will be attending all five of the quarterly Regional Fisheries Group meetings in May to introduce their work.

When will the new FMP regime start? 2023 is too slow. We need changes now.

EU exit has precipitated the most significant shift in domestic fisheries management for a generation, heralding the advent of the Fisheries Act and FMPs as a key vehicle for ongoing management. The Bass FMP was prioritised as one of 6 frontrunner FMPs outlined in the Joint Fisheries Statement, recognising the importance of this species to fishers. We want to make sure we get this crucial opportunity right, so we need to take the time to comprehensively review our domestic management approach and co-design the best possible solution. Policy Lab's involvement in the project will continue until the end of 2022. Outcomes from their work will feed into a draft FMP to be produced by Defra and Welsh Government, alongside an evidence workstream and environmental assessments, which will go out for public consultation ahead of the scheduled FMP publication date in 2023.

Do we still need to share the bass stock with the EU? Will they be participating in this project?

Management of bass is shared at UK-EU level and agreed at the UK-EU annual fisheries consultations. The current measures and adjustments will be reviewed at the annual consultations for 2023. The EU, as with all stakeholders, will have the chance to comment on our draft FMP at the public consultation stage.

General Defra top lines on bass FMP:

Existing joint UK/EU seabass management measures, in place since 2015, have been effective in reducing fishing pressure overall, improving the sustainability of the stock. The frontrunner Bass FMP will now provide an opportunity to review and build on current management measures in order to co-design a more holistic management approach.