

## Written evidence submitted by Greener UK (FB06)

### The Fisheries Bill – a real opportunity to tackle the nature and climate crisis through ocean recovery

The UK is in the midst of a nature and climate emergency as well as a global pandemic which has highlighted weaknesses in our supply chains. In response to the climate crisis the UK government has committed to net zero by 2050 and Scotland by 2045. Decisive action is required if the UK government and devolved administrations are to meet their legally binding targets. The way we manage our fisheries will be an instrumental part of this and will also play an essential role in building back better and greener.

#### The State of UK seas and why getting fisheries management right is vital for ocean recovery

- **Failing health indicators:** The government’s assessment of the health of our seas under the UK Marine Strategy found that the UK is failing on **11 out of 15 indicators** and concluded that the 2020 target for Good Environmental Status “*will not be achieved for many years unless there are further improvements to fisheries management measures*”.
- **Overfishing:** Only 58-68% of UK fish stocks (for which we have data) are fished at or below sustainable levels. Quotas are being set above scientifically recommended sustainable levels year on year, preventing stock recovery and the associated benefits this brings causing some stocks such as cod to decline to critically low levels. Many others, including over 60% of UK shellfish stocks have unknown status in relation to sustainability reference points<sup>1</sup>.
- **Stagnation:** There has been no significant improvement in the percentages of UK fish stocks fished at sustainable levels since 2013 (when the Common Fisheries Policy was last reformed). If the government is to tackle the climate and nature emergency effectively then decisive action is required to address this.
- **Marine wildlife bycatch:** Marine wildlife such as seabirds, porpoises, dolphins and whales are caught in fishing gear in UK waters in their thousands each year but the true scale remains unknown with inadequate monitoring and little action in place to mitigate this so-called ‘bycatch’.
- **Lack of monitoring at sea:** A key failing of the current system is the lack of robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. Less than 1% of fishing trips are currently independently monitored at sea. This means poor data, hampering efforts to build up an accurate picture of what is being taken out of the sea, which would vastly improve sustainable and effective fisheries management.

- **Failure to tackle climate change:** Current fisheries management fails to take account of the need to protect key carbon-storing marine habitat (known as blue carbon) which is vital if our oceans are to realise their potential in tackling climate change.
- **Failure to provide long term security and job opportunities:** More abundant fish stocks can help provide the UK fishing industry with greater long term security - it is estimated that recovering fish stocks to healthy levels would result in a 37% rise (£244 million per year) in the value of fish landings and create over 5,000 new jobs<sup>ii</sup>. Healthy stocks would also contribute to future food security.

UK waters are among the most heavily exploited in the world and the UN Intergovernmental Panel Report on Biodiversity highlighted that commercial fishing has been the biggest cause of marine biodiversity loss globally in the last 50 years<sup>iii</sup>. Overfishing is also affecting our ability to tackle and adapt to the climate crisis by damaging crucial marine habitats, such as seagrass, sea kelp and deep-sea muds, known to store carbon, and negatively impacting ecosystems and food chains. It is therefore vital that the management of our fisheries can help deliver environmental sustainability. **There is a once in a generation opportunity to achieve real and lasting change through the Fisheries Bill.**

The Fisheries Bill before the Committee represents a crucial part of the legislative changes required to ensure effective fisheries management following EU exit. It is also an unprecedented opportunity for governments across the UK to demonstrate visible environmental ambition and to rethink the way our fisheries are managed. Putting environmental sustainability first and foremost in our fisheries management regime would drive ocean recovery, supporting coastal jobs as well as ensuring UK fisheries are economically viable and resilient for present and future generations. Indeed, some of the biggest seafood businesses and supermarkets in the UK have come together to call on the Government to enshrine sustainable fishing in law and make vital changes to the Fisheries Bill to seize this pivotal opportunity to develop world-leading fisheries management.<sup>iv</sup>

### **Amendments to the original Fisheries Bill.**

Among the amendments made to the Fisheries Bill during its passage through the House of Lords there were two amendments in particular which Greener UK believe offered real improvements to the Bill and its ability to deliver much needed ocean recovery. The first makes sustainability the prime objective of the bill and provides that when making fisheries management decisions environmental sustainability must not be compromised in the long or short term. The second provides for the roll out of remote electronic monitoring systems (REM) with cameras on all boats over 10 meters fishing in UK waters and to consult on introducing it for all under 10 metre vessels. We believe that to ensure that our fisheries management regime really does start to be part of the solution rather than the problem and is truly ambitious for our marine environment, it is vital that these amendments remain in the bill. We offer some of our arguments as to why we believe this to be the case:

**1.Ensuring that sustainability is the prime objective in the Fisheries Bill**  
Greener UK believes it is vital that clauses 1(2) and 1(3) of the bill, which make sustainability

the prime objective, are retained and were disappointed that government amendment 1 to remove these passed at Committee Stage on 8 September. Prioritising the marine environment in management decisions will result in short and long-term benefits, allowing fish stocks to recover and thrive. Healthier fish stocks will result in a more resilient and productive marine ecosystem and have been shown to result in increased long-term catches and greater industry profits, making them in turn more resilient. Other legal systems, such as Australia, provide that conservation and sustainability principles are prioritised over socio-economic principles. Both Australia and the US have prioritised the environment over socio-economic criteria in their fisheries management decisions and fish stocks have thrived as a result.

The government has frequently stated that sustainability is at the heart of the bill: “this bill creates a strong and legally binding framework to deliver this Government’s ambition to leave the natural environment in a better state than we inherited it”. Having sustainability as the prime objective is the best way to ensure this is achieved. With the UK hosting COP 26 next year, retaining this amendment would demonstrate a world leading approach to fisheries management and would support the UK in meeting its global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) commitments – particularly SDG 14 (which includes the commitment to end overfishing by 2020).

The government has indicated that having sustainability as the prime objective will not allow for “flexibility” or “balance” in decision making and has stressed the importance of socio economic factors. By making sustainability the prime objective, it does not prevent fisheries management authorities from opting out of the policy statements in future, but what it does do is to put a sustainability lens over decisions meaning that authorities would have to explore avenues such as using lower impact fishing gear before making decisions to set quotas above sustainable levels. The bill allows authorities to opt out from compliance with any of the fisheries objectives, particularly where there is a change in socio economic circumstances. All too often short term socio-economic factors end up taking precedence over environmental factors, both in relation to setting annual fishing limits and in habitat protection, where it could have a potentially negative impact on the profits of a fishery.

Sustainable fishing limits are still regularly exceeded due to pressure from industry on the basis of potentially adverse economic impacts, rather than following scientific advice or indeed putting into place effective monitoring at sea to understand the real nature of the problem. By retaining the amendment, which makes sustainability the prime objective of the bill, this would help to address situations where socio economic factors take precedence over environmental factors and at the same time reduce overfishing.

These failings of the Bill were recognised by the Natural Capital Committee in their recent 2020 report whereby they noted that *the Fisheries Bill should prevent fish catches above Maximum Sustainable Yield. The current wording in the Joint Fisheries Statement that the Secretary of State need only comply with this “unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise” is unacceptable and should be amended.*<sup>v</sup>

### **Case Study – West of Scotland cod**

The population of cod off the west coast of Scotland is badly depleted and has been unable to recover due to a lack of effective management and adherence to scientific advice. For several years, the scientific catch advice has been for a zero Total Allowable Catch (TAC), however the agreed TACs have been consistently well above this – with the TACs in 2019 and 2020 being 1735 and 1279 tonnes respectively<sup>vi</sup>. Cod in this area is mostly caught as a bycatch species. Consequently, fisheries managers are reluctant to impose restrictive measures due to the impact this may have on other fisheries in the region. Such decisions have led to cod and several other stocks being continually overfished and never afforded a real opportunity to recover to healthy levels despite the long-term benefits that this would have to both industry and environment. The introduction of cameras as a condition of fishing west of Scotland cod would at the very least improve our understanding of the situation but this has been resisted.

It is time for the four UK nations to come together to fulfil their commitments to environmental sustainability in the Marine Strategy Regulations and international law by agreeing to retain sustainability as the prime objective of the Fisheries Bill.

### **2.Rolling out REM with cameras on all vessels fishing in UK waters, particularly the larger ones, fishing in UK waters to collect data for management, ensure full and verifiable documentation of catches and robust monitoring and enforcement.**

Cameras on boats would bring a number of different benefits. If we can effectively record what is being caught in UK waters, we can help put an end to the current overfishing. Improved data will inform scientific stock assessments and ensure authorities can set fishing quotas in line with scientific advice. Enhanced monitoring with cameras would also provide valuable data on the capture of marine wildlife such as seabirds and dolphins, essential to achieve the bill's "ecosystem objective" to minimise and where possible, eliminate the incidental capture of sensitive species.

The cost of adopting this new technology is decreasing year on year and the entire over 10m UK fleet could be fitted with REM for between £4.8m (with current EMFF grant subsidy) to £6.75m (without EMFF grant subsidy)<sup>vii</sup> including hardware and software costs as well as monitoring of the data by operators. The non subsidised cost is around 1% of the value of the seafood caught by these boats and is a fraction of the £20m or more that is spent on current monitoring which documents less than 1% of activity at sea.

An inquiry in 2019 by the House of Lords EU Energy & Environment Sub-Committee highlighted the widespread lack of compliance with the landing obligation (which prohibits fishers from discarding fish). The committee recommended that the government and devolved administrations: "urgently take steps to put robust mechanisms in place to monitor and enforce compliance" and "we remain of the view that REM is the only way to monitor compliance with

the landing obligation". UK fisheries authorities have run successful trials and voluntary schemes of REM since 2011<sup>viii</sup> but have not yet required its use. Even if the landing obligation is modified in the future, committing to roll out REM in the bill would place data and science at the heart of UK fisheries management and demonstrate clear and ambitious leadership.

In addition to the scientific and compliance benefits of REM, retailers are keen to see fully documented fisheries in order to demonstrate to customers that their products are sustainably and legally sourced. Cameras on boats can provide this accountability for retailers and consumers, improving competitiveness and consumer confidence at the same time.

When REM with cameras is introduced it is normal for vessel operators and crew to express concerns over how this will affect their day to day operations, particularly crew privacy. Addressing these concerns proactively is vital and understanding that cameras are not on 24/7 but are triggered by sensors on gear so they are only on while fishing and sorting of catch is taking place and set up to operate only in these working areas of the vessel. They are not operational inside the living quarters of the vessel. As such crew privacy is secure.

It is also worth remembering that fisheries are not being singled out as the use of CCTV is commonplace in other industries and in public places – e.g. shops & trains – and is mandatory in abattoirs across the UK.

Any government considering the adoption of REM should review the reasons set out by the New Zealand government for the introduction of REM. We believe they could easily be applied to the situation in the UK.

### **New Zealand commit to REM with CCTV**

In 2017 the New Zealand government introduced a regulation to require fishing permit holders to use electronic catch reporting, geospatial position reporting and electronic (camera) monitoring of commercial fishing activity. They identified that Integrated Electronic Monitoring and Reporting System (IEMRS) is expected to provide important contributions to Future of our Fisheries strategic proposals and cited a range of benefits that such a policy will have, including:

**Reduction of wastage in commercial fisheries:** Camera monitoring of commercial fishing Operations by IEMRS will encourage full catch reporting and eliminate discarding of unreported catch.

**Improvement of the information base to support fisheries management:** Timely catch reporting and monitoring via IEMRS will improve the information base for setting sustainable catch limits. This presents a significant opportunity to improve the value realised from commercial fisheries, particularly for those stocks for which there is currently limited information.

**More responsive decision-making:** The availability of more comprehensive, timely and fine scale information on fishery interactions with fish stocks and the environment will enable a decision making framework that is more responsive to risk, and better able to assure the sound environmental performance of New Zealand fisheries.

**Verifiable, accurate, integrated and timely data** on commercial fishing activity to inform decisions of fisheries managers in Government and industry.

**Better and verifiable information** from commercial fisheries will contribute to significant improvements in fisheries management.

**Monetary benefit:** In addition to enabling significant improvements in fisheries management,

IEMRS is expected to generate economic benefit for New Zealand. The Cost Benefit Analysis undertaken for the Ministry's 2017 Budget bid to support IEMRS identifies monetised costs of \$83.2 million over 15 years (2018-32), compared to monetised benefits of \$158.6 million in the same period. Monetised benefits result from, for example, securing and increasing access for New Zealand's wild-caught seafood to premium markets that require assurance of sustainable fish production and boat to plate tracking.

**Substantial non-monetised benefits.** The introduction of IEMRS will increase public confidence in New Zealand's fisheries and fisheries management system, strengthen our international reputation and help minimise the impact of commercial fishing on the aquatic environment.

*Source: Paper from the New Zealand Office of the Ministry of Primary Industry*

While implementation has been slower than originally anticipated, the New Zealand government are in the process of rolling out the use of cameras across their commercial fleets and on September 4th 2020 announced the latest phase of this – committing \$NZ40m - \$NZ 60m (£20-30m) over the next four years with the claim that cameras will improve the quality of fisher reported data through verification and drive positive behaviour change on the water<sup>ix</sup>.

And yet the UK government's amendment 8 is seeking to remove this clause from the bill despite the many benefits to governments, industry and the marine environment that it would potentially deliver as set out by NZ in support of its application. NZ commented on the benefits to its international reputation and public confidence. Introducing REM to UK waters would provide assurances to seafood supply chains about the sustainability and legality of fishing in UK waters by all nations and represent a visible response to the increasing consumer interest in the sustainability of their choices. UK supermarkets have clearly stated their support for REM as a means of achieving fully documented fisheries and the attainment of healthy fish stocks<sup>x</sup>.

**Government support:** The government has previously indicated support for REM and Secretary Eustice has commented previously "*We are strong advocates of fully documented fisheries and REM is the most effective way to be able to monitor what is happening with the catches*".<sup>xi</sup> The Secretary of State also stated at second reading that the government already has powers to increase the use of REM "*which we will be able to do once we have a greater understanding of how it would be deployed*". It is not clear what greater understanding government requires to demonstrate how REM would be deployed. It is a well established technology which has gone through a number of long running trials in the UK and as referenced above has been successfully rolled out in other countries where governments and industry alike are seeing the benefits.

**Devolved Administration support:** It is also worth noting that the Scottish government recently stated that if the amendment were made devolution compliant they would be willing to support it<sup>xii</sup>. An amendment has been tabled to provide this compliance (92). The significance of this should be borne in mind as the Scottish fleet lands the majority of fish by volume and value into the UK.

We therefore urge the government to seize the opportunity of its flagship Fisheries Bill to set a clearer direction of travel and show strong leadership on rolling out REM with cameras. With

the support of the devolved administrations, a joined up cross nation approach would lead to a level playing field for all vessels fishing in UK waters, incentivising best practice. Rolling out REM could be a win-win for government, industry and the environment and we urge Committee members retain clause 48 (commitment to roll out REM) in the bill.

**In summary, Greener UK are firmly of the view the above amendments must be retained in the Fisheries Bill to ensure that our fisheries management regime is truly ambitious for our marine environment. As the UK's first major piece of domestic fisheries policy in over 40 years, this is an unprecedented opportunity to rethink the way we manage our fisheries so that we can ensure our marine environment and fishing industry are fit for the future.**

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<sup>i</sup> Marine strategy part one: UK updated assessment and Good Environmental Status. DEFRA, 2019 [here](#)

<sup>ii</sup> More Food, More Jobs and More Money in the UK: Oceana's Recipe for Fish Recovery. Oceana, April 2018 [here](#)

<sup>iii</sup> Report of the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services on the work of its seventh session. IPBES, 29 May 2019 [here](#)

<sup>iv</sup> Sustainable Seafood Coalition letter to Minister Eustice, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2020 [here](#)

<sup>v</sup> State of Natural Capital Annual Report. Natural Capital Committee 2020 [here](#)

<sup>vi</sup> ICES Advice on fishing opportunities, catch, and effort: Celtic Seas ecoregion. International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, June 2019 [here](#)

<sup>vii</sup> Remote Electronic Monitoring and UK Fisheries. WWF, October 2017 [here](#)

<sup>viii</sup> North Sea fully documented fishery (FDF) scheme. MMO, 2020 [here](#)

<sup>ix</sup> Select Committee on the European Union, Sub-Committee on Energy and Environment, Corrected oral evidence: Access to UK Fisheries. House of Lords, 4 March 2020 [here](#)

<sup>x</sup> Correspondence from Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism, UK Fisheries Bill. Scottish Parliament, 8 September 2020 [here](#).

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Greener UK is a coalition of 13 major environmental organisations united in the belief that leaving the EU is a pivotal moment to restore and enhance the UK's environment. Greener UK is working in partnership with the New Economics Foundation and Oceana.

## GREENER UK

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