



Clean Catch

Joint Action on Sensitive Species Bycatch

HOW TO BRING (AND KEEP) FISHERMEN ONBOARD SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

A Clean Catch Briefing 2025

THE CONTEXT

Clean Catch has been working closely on voluntary trials with fishermen* since 2019 as part of its work to develop and test practical ways to minimise sensitive species bycatch. In 2024, we interviewed 18 Cornish fishermen who have taken part in trials with us and/or those led by other organisations. Our aim was to explore the barriers that can make fishermen less likely to engage or stay engaged in such collaborations, and how we can address these.



In this briefing, we provide recommendations for anyone seeking to engage fishermen and other fishing industry members in co-designed sustainability initiatives, and set out how Clean Catch itself will (continue to) implement these recommendations.

The fishermen we spoke to want to play a leading role in action to mitigate sensitive species bycatch. However, they feel they have not been supported nor involved enough by past initiatives. This disenchantment poses a risk to future engagement – but can be overcome.

*** What's in a name?**

Although Clean Catch may use the term "fishers" when talking about bycatch globally, we say "fishermen" when referring to the fishermen we work with in the UK, because that's what they call themselves.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Take time to listen to fishermen to gain an understanding of their:

- **Motivations** to contribute to sustainability efforts, such as the ability to demonstrate the sustainability of their livelihood to the public and their connection with the sea.
- **Perceptions** of their fishery and the sustainability issue that the initiative is focusing on.
- **Attitudes** towards the changes to routines and practices that the initiative may need them to make.

The above factors all affect fishermen's decisions to engage in initiatives that ask significant time and/or effort of them.

FEEDBACK

"If [the bycatch measure] was something that was practical and worked with your every day-to-day job then I don't think it'd be a problem."



RECOMMENDATION 2:

Identify and acknowledge proactive measures by individual fishermen to be more sustainable.

As an example, the fishermen we work with in Cornwall realised early on that keeping their nets in the water for less time reduced the risk of porpoises or dolphins getting caught – and adopted this measure even before they started collaborating with us. In fact, many sustainable fishing initiatives are sparked by fishermen themselves. It's valuable to recognise these efforts during conversations and meetings, and to celebrate them publicly if the individuals in question give consent.

FEEDBACK

"There's always going to be something that [fishermen will] bring to the table which hasn't been thought of."

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Articulate the full range of benefits to fishermen of taking part in the initiative.

Benefits promoted to fishermen of being involved in sustainability initiatives tend to focus on more tangible ones such as reducing the time and money lost in dealing with bycatch or the opportunity to be early adopters of innovative technology. While these are important, initiatives seeking to engage with fishermen should also consider the intrinsic motivations that fishermen may hold. The most powerful motivator that emerged when we spoke to fishermen was their connection to the waters they fish in – something that future initiatives should recognise and link to why fishermen should engage with them. Similarly, the fishermen held that taking part in action on bycatch was “the right thing to do”.

FEEDBACK

“I’m not in it for the money.”

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Involve fishermen in defining a clear vision for the project, their roles and responsibilities, and ways of working and communication at the earliest stage possible – and continue to do so throughout the project.

Co-design should be a process, not a step completed at any one point, meaning that project partners should respond to and act on feedback or complaints from fishermen and adapt project elements as possible and appropriate. Drawing fully on the experiential knowledge of fishermen will enable and further motivate them to play a leading role in responding to sustainability challenges.

FEEDBACK

“[Before I agree to participate in another bycatch trial] I want a better outlook on where the project is going, how we’re going to work, and it probably comes down to... if [the scientists designing the trial] are going to follow through with the advice I give them.”



RECOMMENDATION 5:

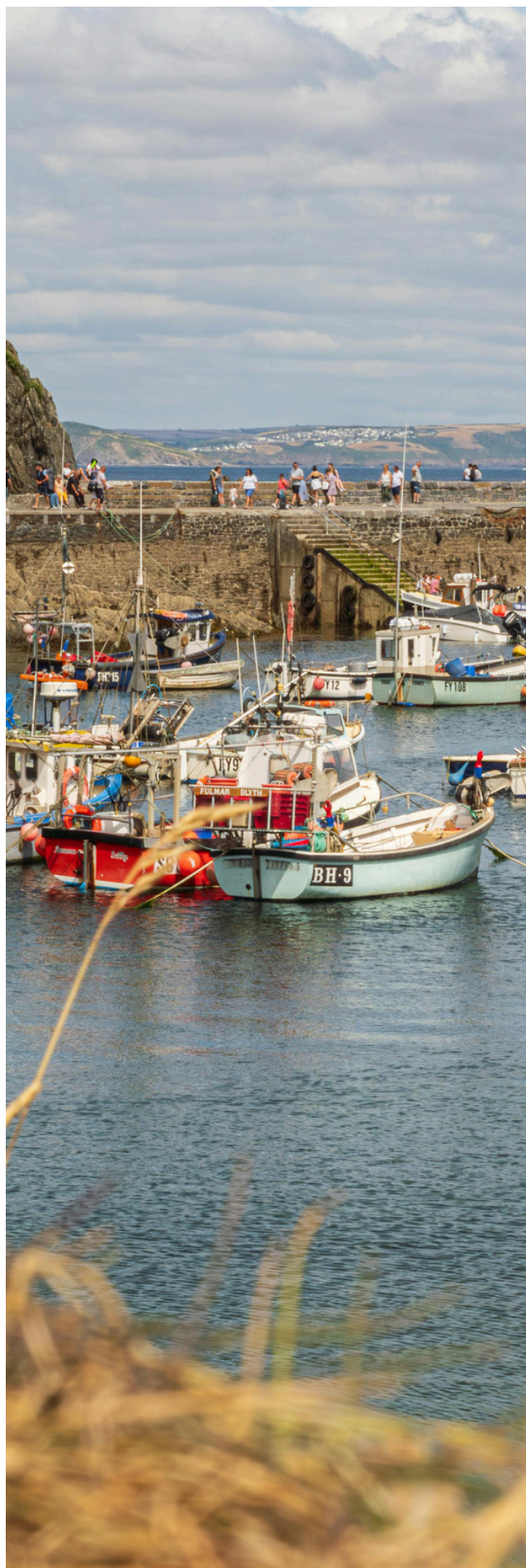
Provide fishermen with timely updates during the project and, after its end, provide insights on the results and how these may be used for policy or fisheries management decisions.

If fishermen are out of the loop when it comes to the part of the project that happens beyond their boats, they can become demotivated, lose trust in project partners, and become less inclined to participate in future projects. While data can take time to analyse, fishermen will appreciate updates or check-ins letting them know of project progress, even when there isn't much to report. Ultimately, fishermen value knowing that the data they have provided has been used, and how that data has been used.

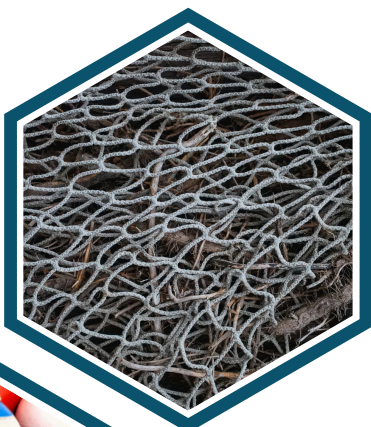
Updates and insights don't have to be delivered in the form of reports, either. They can be shared through other routes including quayside conversations, emails, graphics (shared via platforms like WhatsApp), and presentations at workshops.

FEEDBACK

"I just think if you're going to do a project like that, it'd be nice to see something come from it, at least. The [organisers of a prior bycatch trial] didn't even acknowledge what we fed back."



HOW CLEAN CATCH WILL (CONTINUE TO) WORK WITH FISHERMEN



- Through our co-design vision and communications strategy, we will meet fishermen's expectations when it comes to alignment of purpose, roles and responsibilities, how knowledge and data will be used, and ability to adapt in response to feedback.
- Our co-design vision is based on a shared belief around the need to address sensitive species bycatch, the view that fishermen should play a leading role in this, and the unique value of fishermen's vocational knowledge in shaping effective trials through co-design.
- We will provide the fishermen with regular updates on ongoing trials, and associated research and communications outputs (e.g. sharing footage captured by a bycatch monitoring system, or seeking feedback on drafts of reports).
- We will provide the fishermen with insights – when available – into how the data they collect is applied by others such as scientists and policy-makers, thus providing fishermen with proof of concept.

**Read the full report of
our findings:
bit.ly/4nnWnD4**

BACKGROUND TO CLEAN CATCH

Clean Catch champions collaborative working to help monitor and minimise the bycatch of sensitive marine species in UK commercial fisheries, and to exchange knowledge globally.

We are working directly with fishermen in England to develop and test ways to address bycatch that are both effective in protecting sensitive marine species and practical to use during fishing operations. We also act as an engine for knowledge exchange on bycatch monitoring and mitigation within and beyond the UK.

We are funded by Defra in order to help the UK Government meet its ambitions to minimise and – where possible – eliminate bycatch of sensitive marine species, as set out in the ecosystem objective of the Fisheries Act and elaborated in the UK Marine Wildlife Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI). Clean Catch was established in 2020 and is currently in its “expansion phase” which runs from 2024 to 2026.

www.cleancatchuk.com



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