Public Consultation on effort management measures in respect of Brown Crab and Spider crab in the Biologically Sensitive Area (BSA) for vessels over 10 metres

Scope of Consultation

In accordance with the Sea-Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act 2006, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine is empowered to introduce measures for the purpose of protecting, conserving or allowing the sustainable exploitation of living marine aquatic species or the rational management of fisheries, in furtherance of national policy objectives and to comply with requirements of the Common Fisheries Policy or other international obligations.

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Timmy Dooley, T.D., *('the Minister'*) has launched a consultation process on effort management measures in respect of Brown Crab and Spider crab in the Biologically Sensitive Area (BSA) for vessels over 10m. Please note that the Minister intends that this will be the only opportunity for interested parties to contribute to this consultation.

This consultation is taking place without prejudice. It is important to note that the Minister has not made any decision to change the current arrangements at this time. No decision will be made by the Minister until after this consultation has been completed. All relevant issues will be carefully evaluated before the Minister decides if any amendment to the current arrangements are justified for the proper and effective management of Brown Crab and Spider Crab effort in the BSA.

Interested parties may submit comments in writing by email to:

FisheriesConsultation@agriculture.gov.ie by 5.00pm on 5th August 2026.

Or by post to:

Public Consultation on effort management measures in respect of Brown Crab and Spider crab in the BSA for vessels over 10m,
Sea Fisheries Policy and Management Division,
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine,
National Seafood Centre,
Clogheen,

Clonakilty,

Co Cork, P85 TX47

You should receive a confirmation receipt from the Department within 5 working days. If you do not receive a confirmation, please send an email to FisheriesConsultation@agriculture.gov.ie or phone us on (023) 885 9500 and request the Quota Management Team.

Background

Brown Crab and Spider crab are non-quota species but there is a limit on the amount of "fishing effort" which Member States may use to fish these stocks. The fishing effort by vessels over 15 metres in Area 6 (waters off the North-west coast of Ireland) and over 10 metres in the Biologically Sensitive Area (see map in Appendix) is capped in EU legislation.

Currently, the level of uptake of effort is monitored each month by the Quota Management Advisory Committee (QMAC). The QMAC does not recommend individual vessel or monthly effort limits, but monitors uptake to determine if swaps are necessary to ensure sufficient effort is available.

Current Measures

The 'Western Waters Regulation' (Council Regulation (EC) No.1415/2004) sets out a limit in the form of "kilowatt days" on the fishing effort that Member States, including Ireland, can employ annually to catch brown crab and spider crab, scallops and demersal fish stocks in waters around Ireland (ICES areas 5, 6 and 7).

Effort is calculated based on kilowatt (kW) days, which is the number of days (or part of a day) fishing for the specified species in the relevant area multiplied by the engine power of the vessel (measured in kW).

The Biologically Sensitive Area (BSA) is an area of the waters around the south and west of Ireland. Ireland's maximum effort in respect of edible (brown) crab and spider crab in the BSA is 63,198 kW days.

The other management measures currently in place for the Irish brown crab fishery are:

- Landing size: A Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) of 140mm which applies to brown crab taken by Irish sea-fishing boats in ICES Areas 6 and 7.
- Restrictions on landing claws: There is no limit on the amount of brown crab that can be landed into Ireland, but EU legislation (Regulation (EU) 2019/1241) restricts the volume of detached crab claws that can be landed for conservation reasons.

Details on the recommendations of the *Brown Crab Working Group Report* regarding the management of brown crab stocks in Ireland are set out below.

Quota Management Advisory Committee

In Ireland, quota species are generally managed on a monthly basis, with catch limits being set for each month. Consultation is carried out each month at the Quota Management Advisory Committee (QMAC) meeting involving fishing industry representatives from the catching and processing sectors, the Department and the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority, which provides up-to-date catch data for stocks. The Committee makes recommendations to the Minister on regimes for particular stocks and, where appropriate, the Minister follows these recommendations subject to the proper management and rational exploitation of our fisheries.

Prior to each meeting, Industry Representatives are provided with up to date information on uptake for all stocks, including Crab Effort in the BSA.

Basis for the review

On 29th August 2025, the Irish South & West Fish Producers Organisation (ISWFPO) submitted a proposal to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine for the management of brown crab in the BSA for vessels over 10metres. The ISWFPO proposed putting management measures in place for the fishery; namely to authorise vessels to participate and to allocate these vessels' kilowatt (kW) days per month to prosecute the fishery.

ISWFPO stated that Ireland's remaining kW days would not be sufficient to keep the fishery open for the year, and referred to previous years, where Ireland has used mackerel to negotiate swaps with France to ensure the crab kW days were secured to keep the fishery open. ISWFPO referred to the current lack of mackerel as a commodity.

Other factors for consideration

Brown Crab Working Group (BCWG) Review and Recommendations

The Brown Crab Working Group was established in 2024 to conduct a focused review of brown crab fishing in Ireland and to identify management options to support the sustainability of brown crab stocks. The Working Group comprised representatives from the seafood Producer Organisations, the Inshore Fisheries Forums and the Irish Fish Processors and Exporters Association. It was chaired by Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) and supported by Department officials, the Marine Institute (MI) and the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA).

The report of the Brown Crab Working Group is available on BIM's website:

The BCWG did not recommend changes to the management of kW days, noting that "*kW days were widely regarded as being ineffective at managing effort in static gear fisheries due to the fact that catching power in vessels using static gear is not related to the power (kW) of the vessel, unlike trawl fisheries. Industry representatives advised that, until such time as Council Regulation 1415/2004 could be revised, which was outside the remit of the Working Group, there was little point in seeking to utilise effort limits more widely as a management measure*" (*Brown Crab Working Group Report*, p. 12).

kW days Swaps

Ireland has consistently exceeded the maximum effort set in the Western Waters Regulation over many years, swapping in effort in from France, which is the only other Member State with an allocation of this effort. Effort in France is managed by the Administration, rather than by industry. France requires the inclusion of a quantity of Mackerel quota for any swap that includes effort.

Since 2009, an average of 37,405kW days has been swapped in per annum to keep the fishery open.

CRAB EFFORT BSA 2009 - 2020			
Year	Initial effort *(kW days)*	Swapped in during the year *(kW days)*	Revised effort *(kW days)*
2025	63,198	12,000	75,198
2024	63,198	3,986	67,184
2023	63,198	46,000	109,198
2022	63,198	24,500	87,698
2021	63,198	40,000	103,198
2020	63,198	25,000	88,198
2019	63,198	50,000	113,198
2018	63,198	66,000	129,198
2017	63,198	45,500	108,698
2016	63,198	41,500	104,698
2015	63,198	30,000	93,198
2014	63,198	40,000	103,198
2013	63,198	40,000	106,198
2012	63,198	43,400	106,598
2011	63,198	35,000	98,198
2010	63,198	52,000	115,198
2009	63,198	41,000	104,198

In accordance with the Minister's policy decision for the distribution of Mackerel on 26 July 2017, 2% of the quota in the TAC and Quota Regulation, or 1,000 tonnes, whichever is the greater, is deducted annually and set aside for demersal swaps before any share out between

segments is undertaken. One thousand tonnes (1,000t) of Mackerel was set aside for 2025 and 2026 for demersal swaps.

Fishery Closure and Re-Opening 2025

The BSA crab fishery was closed for sea-fishing boats over 10 metres by Fishery Management Notice 72 of 2025 with effect from 11th November when the uptake figure received from the SFPA indicated that Ireland's crab effort in the Biologically Sensitive Area (BSA) had been exceeded.

Ireland subsequently secured a quota/effort swap with France for 12,000kw days, following which the Minister re-opened the fishery with effect from 17:15 hours on 15th November 2025, under Fishery Management Notice 73 of 2025.

Ireland's adjusted quota for effort in the BSA for 2025 was 75,198kw days. Figures received from SFPA in January 2026 indicate that final effort uptake was 74,744.520 kW days (99.4%).

Vessel activity in the fishery

Figures provided by the SFPA detail activity in the fishery in the years 2019 to 2025.

Year	No. Vessels	No. Trips
2019	35	669
2020	29	765
2021	37	895
2022	36	1060
2023	37	888
2024	33	635
2025	35	634

Activity by Vessel length in 2024 and 2025

Vessel Length Category	Number of Vessels active 2025	Number of Vessels active 2024
10m to 12m	25	20
12m to 18m	12	13
Total Active Vessels	37	33

Uptake pattern in the fishery

Average monthly effort uptake 2019-2025

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Effort	1141	709	2584	4233	7485	8296	9840	12005	12532	13728	7560	2500

October has seen the highest average effort uptake between 2019 and 2025, with September and August having the second and third highest monthly uptakes during this period.

Management Options

Option 1: No change to current practice, effort uptake to be monitored and managed as previously.

***Advantages*:**

- No booking in system.
- No new management measures or adjustment process for operators.
- Allows for evaluation of the implications of implementations of any changes or restrictions that may be introduced which might affect the fishery.

Disadvantages:

- kW days effort may be exceeded, requiring swaps to keep the fishery open, or the fishery may need to close.

Option 2: Introduce measures as suggested by ISWFPO, with a vessel booking in process, an annual authorisation per vessel and individual amount of kW days to be allocated and reviewed by the QMAC on a monthly basis with recommendations on allocation to be made to the Minister, as appropriate.

Advantages:

- Each vessel would receive an individual allocation of kW days.
- Activity in the fishery would be on an authorisation basis.

Disadvantages:

- Vessels would have to book in and receive authorisations, increasing the administrative burden on both operators and the Department.
- Vessels may book in that do not intend to prosecute the fishery, resulting in reduced opportunities for vessels with a genuine interest in the fishery.
- As these stocks are also targeted by smaller, inshore vessels which use manual log sheets rather than electronic log sheets like larger vessels, this will pose challenges for monitoring uptake in real time, which would be necessary for setting catch limits.
- Fishery displacement; other stocks of conservation concern may be targeted.

Option 3: Introduce measures such as restrictions under kW days per month by Fishery Management Notice/ closure periods as recommended by the QMAC following uptake analysis.

Advantages:

- Fishery can be monitored closely to manage it effectively.
- Closure periods could conserve effort to ensure that effort was available during key points during the year.

- As with current practice, vessels would not need to book in or be authorised to participate in the fishery.

Disadvantages:

- Some vessels may utilise a lot of kW days which may impact on ability of other vessels to prosecute the fishery.
- Vessels would not receive an individual allocation of kW days.
- Fishery displacement; other stocks of conservation concern may be targeted.

Conclusion

This consultation is taking place without prejudice. It is important to note at this time, the Minister has not made any decision to change the current arrangements.

The purpose of this consultation is to invite stakeholders and interested parties to advise the Minister of their views on any changes to the current arrangements within the scope of this review as set out above.

A Sea Fishing Boat License holder should not carry out any activities or make any plans on an assumption that a change in the current arrangements may happen.

Map of Biologically Sensitive Area (BSA)