

Increased support for fishing and shellfish businesses

The Government has announced [enhanced financial support](#) for the seafood industry with cash grants for seafood and aquaculture businesses across the UK.

In January, the Government made available [£23 million for seafood exporters](#) that suffered a financial loss because of delays related to the export of fresh or live fish and shellfish to the EU during January 2021.

Having listened to concerns from fishing businesses across the UK, Defra will now be expanding the eligibility criteria to target catching and shellfish aquaculture businesses which have been affected by a reduction in demand from the hospitality sector in the UK and abroad, as well as disruption of exports to the EU. These expanded criteria will mean more businesses can get the support they need.

[The scheme](#), which is similar to last year's Fisheries Response Fund set up in response to the coronavirus pandemic, will open in early March and provide a grant payment to cover up to three months of average business fixed costs incurred between January and March 2021. It will help catching and shellfish aquaculture businesses with costs such as insurance, equipment hire and port fees.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

Our fishermen are at the heart of many of our coastal communities and we recognise the impact of coronavirus and the end of the transition period on them. This expansion of our £23 million support package will ensure many more businesses can benefit from government support.

The coronavirus pandemic has led to the closure of critical markets, and this has been exacerbated by issues faced by exporters at the border. We will continue to ensure we are listening to our fishing and seafood industry as we work to resolve these issues, and work with them to build up the industry in the months and years ahead.

UK Government Minister for Scotland, David Duguid said:

Over the last few months, we have been listening to the seafood industry and have continued to monitor the impacts that the pandemic and export disruption has played on prices, exports and the market.

I am confident in the quality of Scottish fish and seafood but for many fishing businesses the lack of demand in the hospitality trade in the UK and further afield has had a real impact on market prices.

While we continue to take steps to beat this virus and work with the sector to resolve export issues – this expanded support scheme will help the many small and medium sized fishing businesses that support so many of our coastal communities.

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Brandon Lewis said:

The fishing industry plays an important role in Northern Ireland for its people and communities, supporting around 2,000 jobs.

This expansion of the government's £23 million response fund will ensure that the fisheries and aquaculture industry in Northern Ireland receives the financial and practical support it needs.

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart said:

The expansion of the Seafood Disruption Support Scheme highlights the UK Government's commitment to Welsh exporters who are currently facing a uniquely challenging period.

We want to back our fantastic Welsh businesses and I encourage all who are eligible to apply for this support.

The main features of the scheme are:

- For the UK catching sector, the fund will be open to under 40m vessel owners with fishing licences and who have a track record of fishing in the winter months.
- The scheme will offer support to UK shellfish aquaculture businesses, support will be provided on average ongoing costs based on Full-time equivalent (FTE) employees per business. Businesses who have received a grant under the recent Seafood Producers Resilience Fund in Scotland will not be eligible for the UK scheme.
- The Marine Management Organisation will administer the fund across the UK on behalf of Defra, contacting eligible registered owners and licence holders directly with details of how to apply, starting in early March.
- A single payment will be made to cover a proportion of fixed costs over a three-month period from January to March 2021.

The funding follows targeted support to help exporters with new processes. This includes the Seafood Exports Working Group, meeting twice a week to troubleshoot issues raised by the industry; and a newly established [Scottish Seafood Exports Task Force](#).

The UK fishing and seafood sector is also set to benefit from significant government investment with a £100 million fund to help modernise fishing fleets, the fish processing industry, and rejuvenate an historic and proud industry in the UK, on top of the £32 million that will replace EU funding this year.

The Government also continues to seek urgent resolution to export issues, including the EU ban on the import of class B live bivalve molluscs and will explore further ways producers can continue to export this valuable seafood. UK mussels and oysters are highly sought after, at home and abroad. The sector has been highly impacted by Covid restrictions, and now barriers to trade imposed by the EU.

There is also wider support from the Government to the sector including the on-going Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, the furlough scheme and the recently launched [SME Brexit Support Fund](#) to help businesses deal with export requirements.

Information about the Seafood Response Fund and scheme guidance is [published on GOV.UK](#).