

What are the benefits of taking part?

You will be contributing to the important pool of data that will be used for assessments that inform catch options and advice on fisheries management. You can be reassured your data will be protected. Information obtained about the activities of fishermen, either from fishermen themselves, or by Cefas staff in the course of their duties, will be retained and used for scientific purposes only.

A report on the data collected will be provided to each skipper sampled. Cefas will report on our achievements in early 2021. We hope to develop a consistent manageable programme by the end of this year to continue into next year.

An inconvenience payment of £25 per haul sampled capped at £200 per trip will be paid.

How do we contact you?

We are dependent on our contact list that has developed from regular contact with skippers and fleet managers. The list of vessels we work to are based on the official catch returns of the previous year. We can't sample everyone, but if we have your permission to hold your contact details, we may select you to take part.

We would be very interested to hear from anyone who has not been sampled in the last three years to broaden the data available to us. If you can let your Producer Organisation or Association who provided this information know, we will be able to keep your details for selection.

For further enquiries contact AFSTcosampling@cefas.co.uk, we will update on programme progress here: <https://www.cefas.co.uk/impact/case-studies/fisheries-observer-programme/>.



National catch sampling programme:

fisheries data collection
volunteer skippers needed



Centre for Environment
Fisheries & Aquaculture
Science

Cefas national catch sampling programme: a call for help

Volunteer fishermen are needed to contribute to the scientific data usually collected through the Observer Programme. Current Covid-19 restrictions mean that Cefas observers are not able to join commercial fishing vessels.



Cefas has been collecting biological data from commercial landings at fish markets, merchants and on quaysides in England and Wales since the 1950s. The observer programme which also collects the same data from discards at sea has been running continuously since 2002. In March, the lockdown brought this activity to a halt. The onshore programme was able to resume safely in June, however the at sea observer programme is still severely restricted.

“The Covid crisis has disturbed the way in which scientists collect the data that provides the raw material for fish stock assessments. Without good data we cannot expect good management decisions and the risk of tighter restrictions through the application of a precautionary approach is increased.

“There is potential, however, to turn this problem into an opportunity by increasing the industry’s direct involvement in the provision of data. The result could be greater industry confidence that they have had a part in undertaking.”

**NFFO Chief Executive,
Barrie Deas**

Can you help bridge the gap?

We plan, in partnership with the industry, to set up a temporary programme, so that individual vessels bring back samples for our observers to process ashore. We are currently piloting this approach, before extending the programme to the wider fleet. The quality of these data is crucial, if it is to replicate our observer data and be useful. We will work with the industry to ensure that what we ask is practical, reasonable, avoids disruption and, importantly, produces effective data.

“The observer programme is the only source of biological discard data that, combined with the onshore data, feeds into the annual round of fish stock assessments to inform advice on catch options, quotas and fisheries management. While COVID restrictions continue, the gap in the observer data continues to grow which could affect the advice for 2022, and longer-term potentially.”

Jon Elson, Cefas Fisheries Scientist

Region		Vessel size	Gear
North East	Berwick to Fosdyke	Under 10m	Nets and trawls
		Over 10m	Nets and trawls
East and Southeast	Sutton bridge to Poole	Over 10m	Shrimp beamers
		Under 10m	Nets and trawls
		Over 10m	Nets and trawls
Western	Swanage to Gloucester	Under 10m	Nets and trawls
		Over 10m	Trawls
		Over 10m	Nets
North West	Chester to Carlisle	Over 7m	Nets and trawls
All		Over 10m	Beam trawl

Which fleets will we be sampling?

The observer programme is documented on the GOV website and the fleets we aim to sample is summarised in the table above. We will focus this sampling on around 800 of our UK registered vessels that predominantly target, demersal finfish, Nephrops and shrimps with trawls and nets based on catch data for 2019. So that the data is representative of all the activity in the fleet, we will randomly select vessels to approach for these samples. For this to be a success we need to work with at least 100 vessels to address this data gap.