Prawn/Whitefish FIP Gear Survey Report

December 2025

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Background to the Survey

As part of the work on the Whitefish and Prawn Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs) it was identified that there was a deficit in data in terms of the actual gear in use by both the Irish Whitefish and Prawn fisheries. This deficit was particularly evident in relation to selectivity devices used by fishermen in their fishing gear.

A survey was designed to identify and document the various gear configurations in use while also giving fishermen the opportunity to put forward their views on past, present and future measures.

The survey was carried out using the Survey Monkey platform and participants had from the 1st of June until the 10th of October 2025 to participate. There were 27 questions in total. Not all of the questions were applicable to all participants, and not all were compulsory. A number of "open" questions were included to allow participants to put forward suggestion and opinions on various topics.

The survey was circulated to all relevant FIP members and their participation encouraged. See extract from the email circulating the survey below:

"The Irish Fishery Improvement Projects are conducting a survey to find out what fishing gear Irish fishing vessels are using when targeting Prawns, Haddock, Whiting and Hake. If you have not done so already, please complete the survey by clicking on the link at the bottom of this message. It will only take 5 to 10 minutes to complete.

It is important that as many vessels as possible respond as the results could be very beneficial.

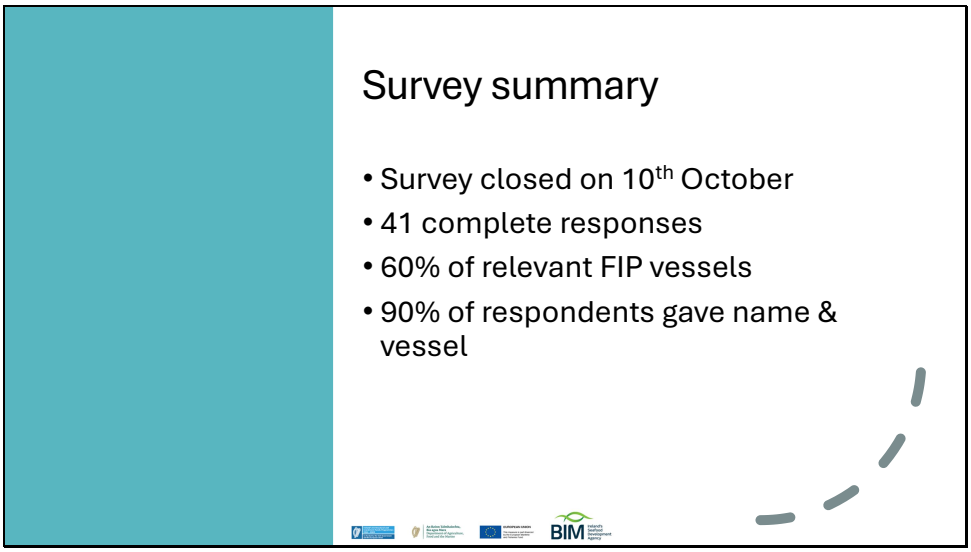
We are aware that fishermen are using different gears, mesh sizes and selectivity devices and that some gears used are more selective than is required by legislation.

Currently this information is not available to fishery managers or scientists and for the first time the survey will provide an overview of the gears used in these fisheries.

The data could have an impact on stock assessments as we are aware that old data on fishing gear is currently being used.

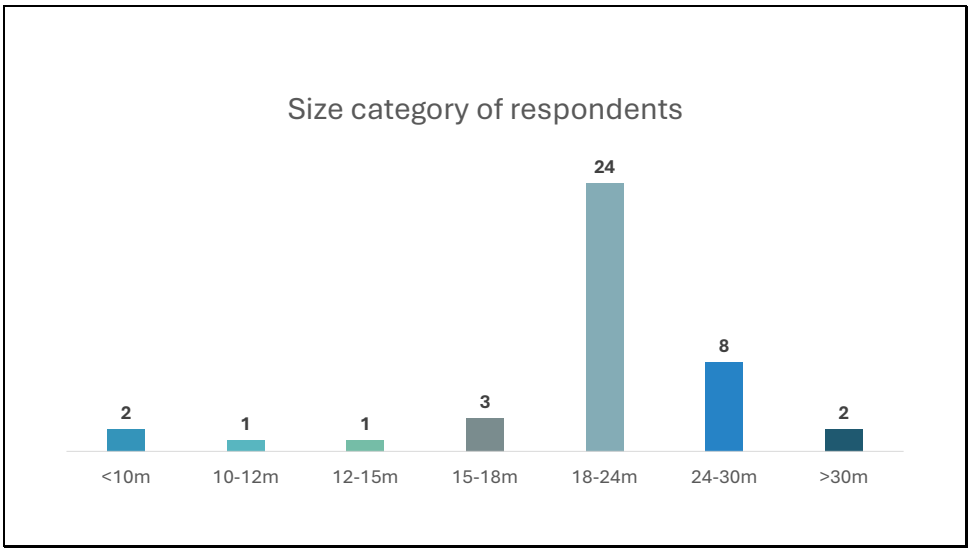
This information will be useful in telling a positive story about actions that fishermen are involved in to protect fish stocks."

Survey Summary



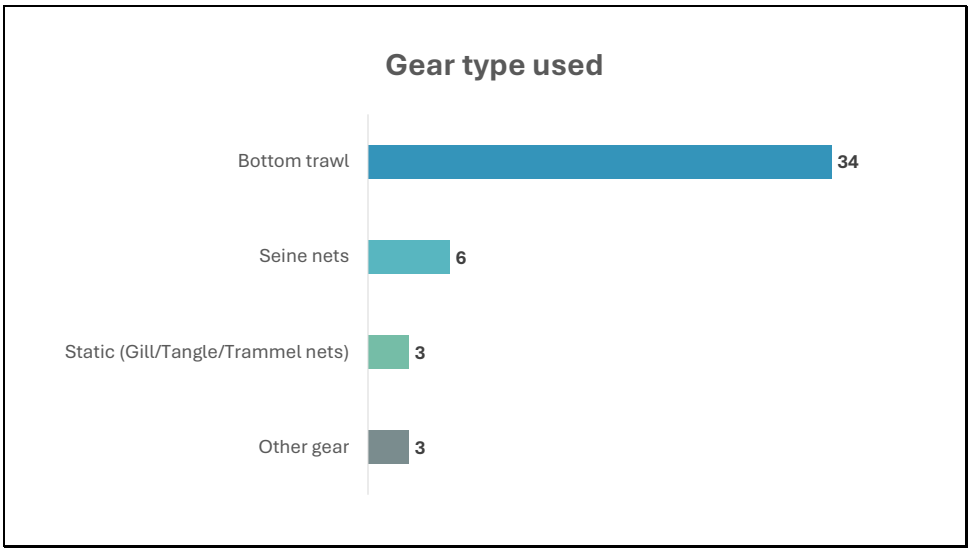
- As set out above the survey closed on the 10th of October 2025.
- 41 individual vessels participated in the survey.
- This figure represented 60% of all relevant FIP vessels.
- Of the 41 participants gave their name and the name of their vessel.

Size Category of Respondents



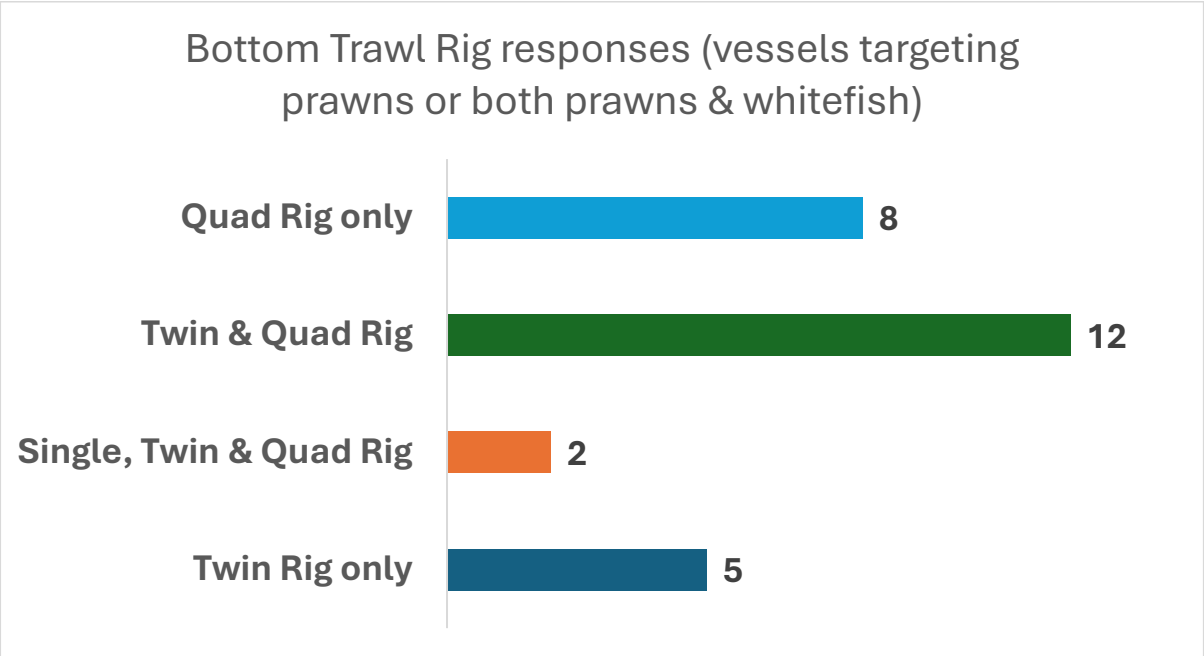
- Of the 41 respondents the 18 -24 metre category was the most represented with 24 respondents.
- Each size category was however represented in the survey.
- The smaller size categories of vessels do not feature strongly in the survey due to the fact that most of these vessels are fishing with static gear such as pots and the survey was aimed at vessels fishing for demersal species.

Gear Type Used



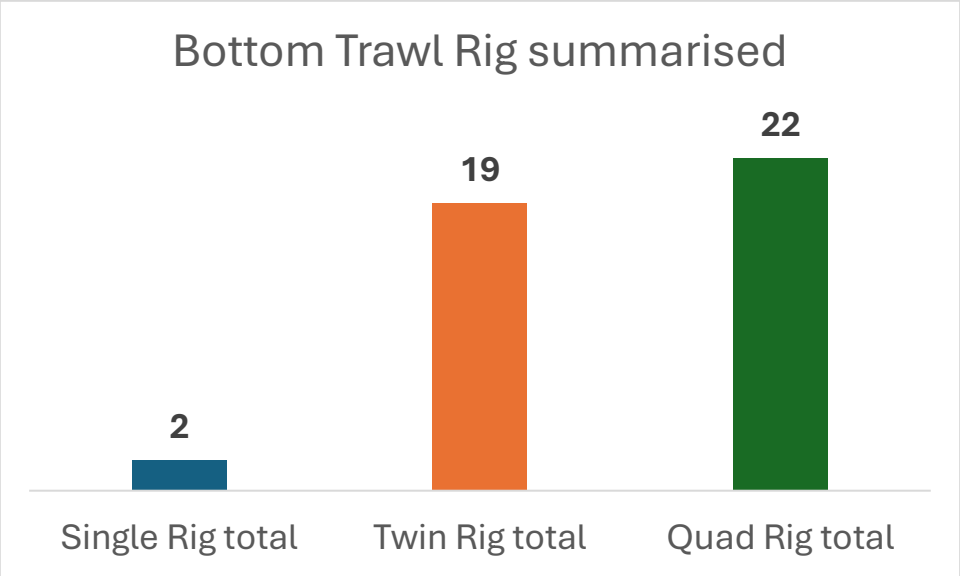
- As expected, Bottom Trawl was the predominant gear type used by the survey respondents.
- Respondents had the option to select more than one gear type for this question.
- "Other Gear" was only selected in conjunction with one of the other main gear types.
- Responses to the "Other Gear" option included:
    - Pelagic Pair Trawling
    - Scallop Dredging

Bottom Trawl Rig Responses



- Reponses to this question were of note as this information is not included in the logbook data.
- Again, respondents were able to choose more than one trawl rig response.
- 13 Respondents carried one gear configuration only.
- 14 Respondents carried multiple gear configurations e.g. twin and quad rigs simultaneously.

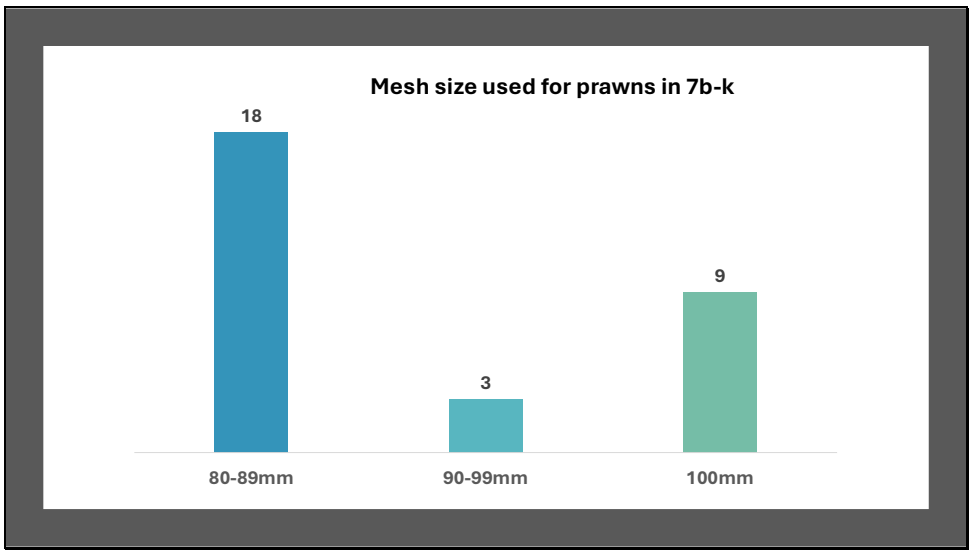
Summary of Bottom Rig Trawl



- This figure summarises the number of times that each of these gear configurations was mentioned by respondents:

    - In total 22 respondents use quad rigs either on their own or with another gear configuration.
    - 19 respondents use twin rigs either on their own or with another gear configuration.
    - 2 respondents use single rig rigs either on their own or with another gear configuration.

Mesh Size Prawn Fishery Area 7 b - k

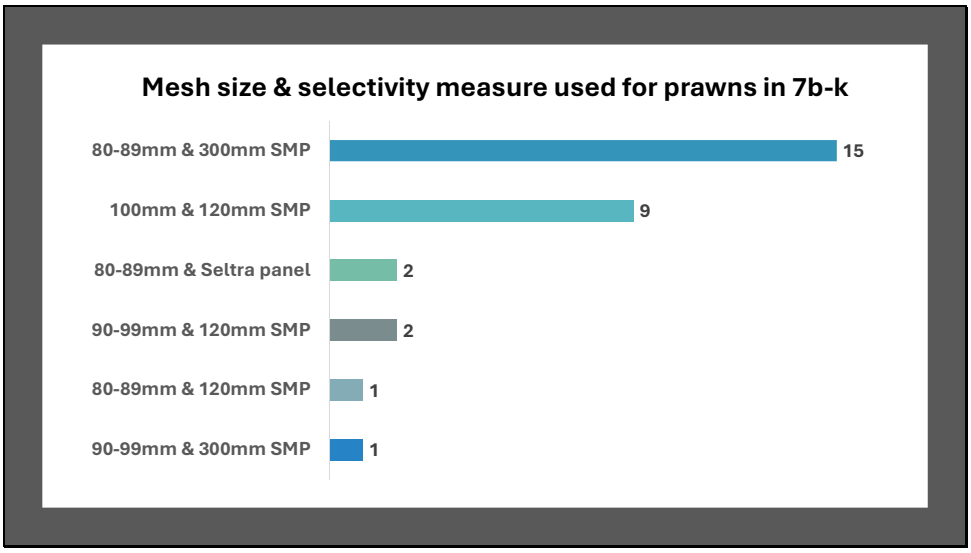


- The main gear size in use in the Prawn fishery in Area 7b-k is from 80mm to 99mm.

- For the purposes of collecting additional information, we divided this size category into:
    - 80-89mm
    - 90-99mm

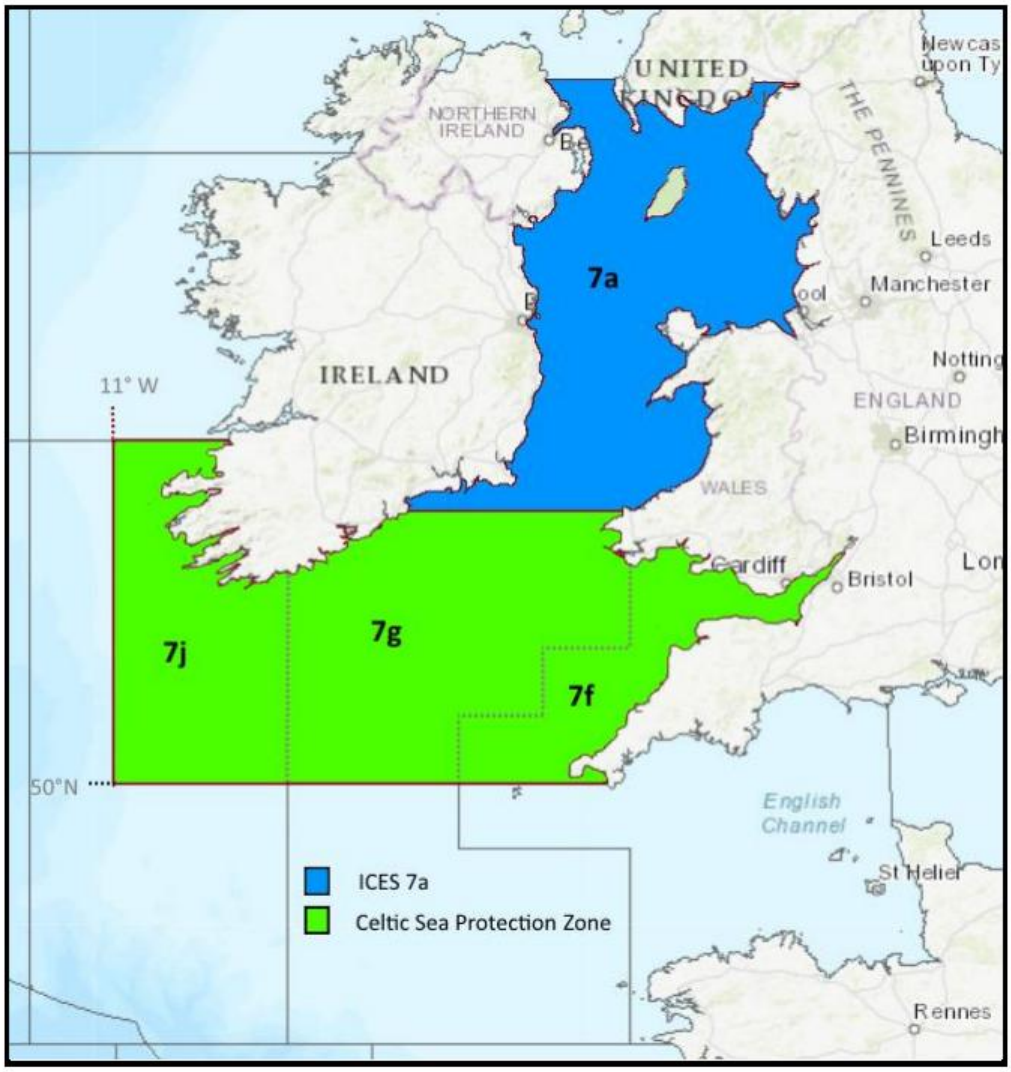
- It is interesting to note that 9 of the Respondents (representing 30% of Respondents) were using a larger mesh size when the legal requirement is 80mm.

Analysis of Mesh Sizes and Selectivity Measures in Prawn Fishery Area 7 b – k



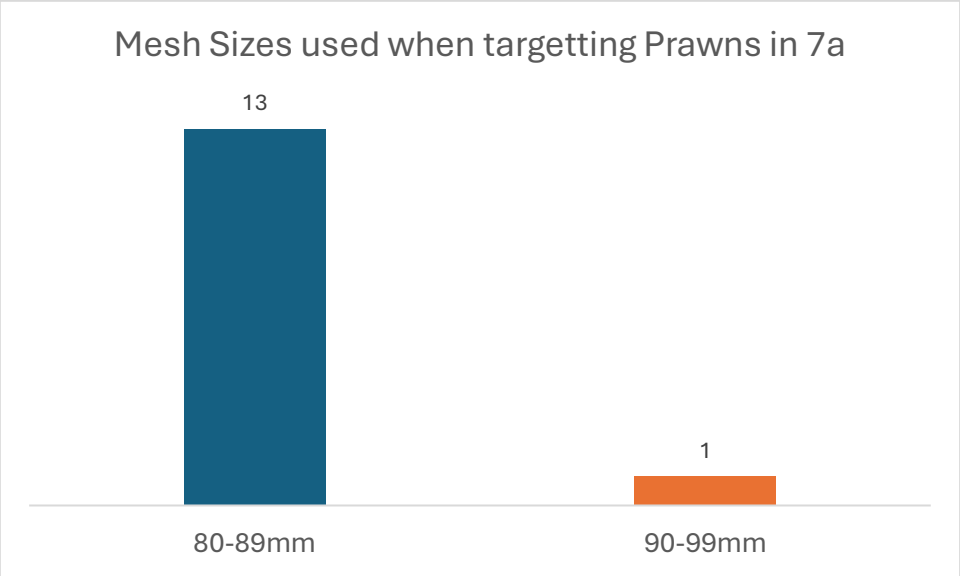
- Area 7b-k is divided into two areas have different regulatory requirements:
    - The Celtic Sea Protection Zone (CSPZ)
    - The remainder of Area 7b-k.

- For the purposes of simplification of the survey and maximising the response rate all legally allowable gears within Area 7b-k were listed as options for this question.



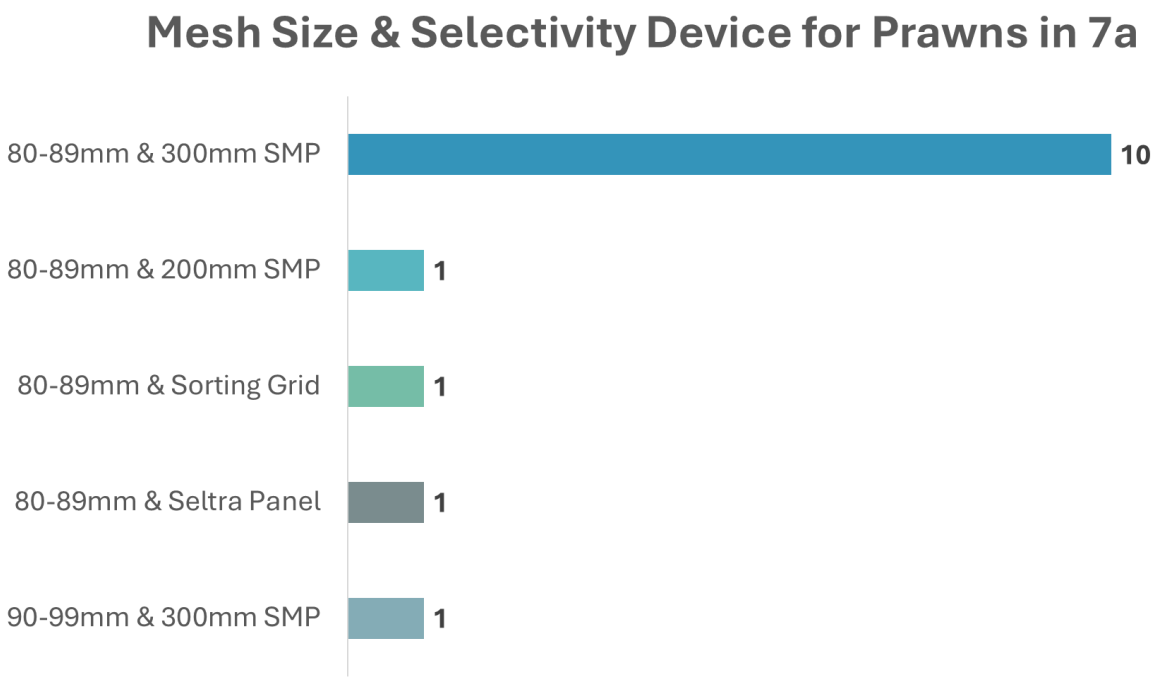
Celtic Sea Protection Zone – waters inside ICES divisions 7f, 7g and the part of 7J that lies north of latitude 50°N and east of 11°W

Mesh Size in Prawn Fishery Area 7a



- The gear size in use in the Prawn fishery in Area 7a is from 80mm to 99mm.
- For the purposes of collecting additional information, we divided this size category into:
    - 80-89mm
    - 90-99mm
- It is notable that the >100mm mesh size is not used by fishermen in Area 7a most likely due to the smaller size of Prawns in that area.

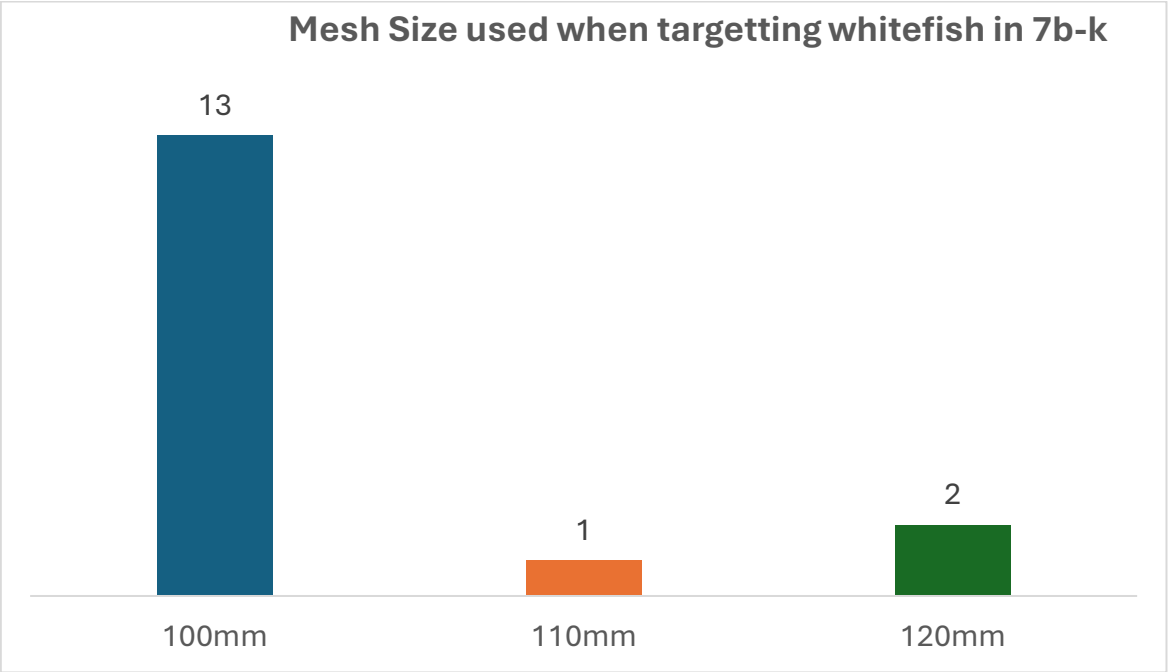
Analysis of Mesh Sizes and Selectivity Measures in Prawn Fishery Area 7a



- The 200mm Square Mesh Panel (SMP) is permissible for vessels less than 12m overall length.

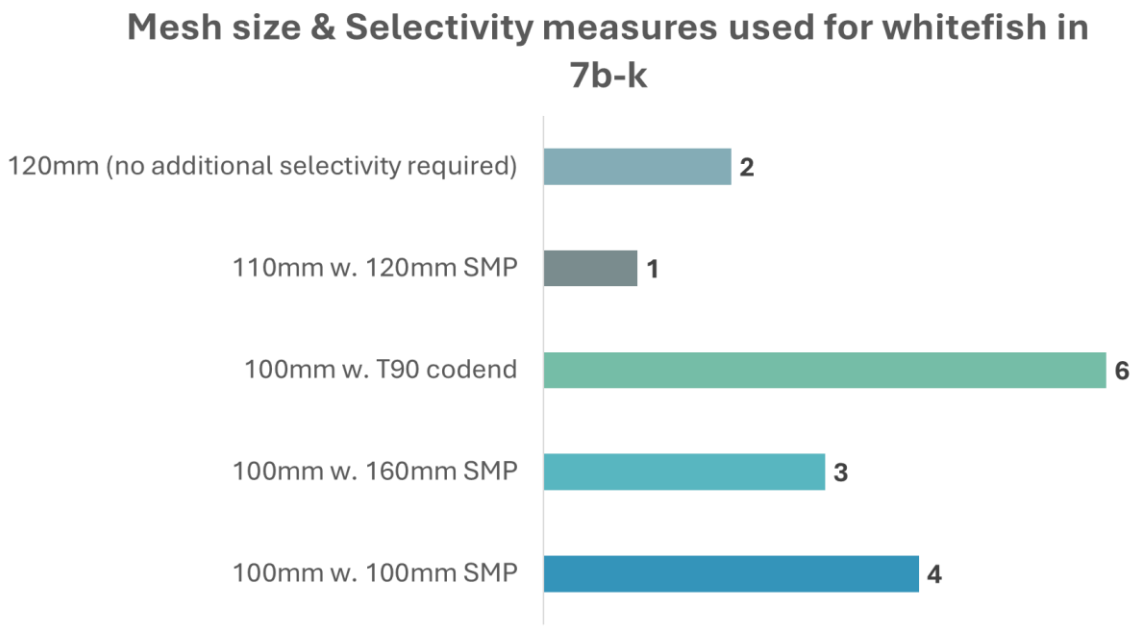
- The use of a Sorting Grid is the only mention of this selectivity device in the survey. This answer was provided by a 10-12m vessel.

Mesh Size in Whitefish Fishery Area 7 b - k



- The majority (81%) of respondents reported using 100mm mesh.

Analysis of Mesh Sizes and Selectivity Measures Whitefish Fishery Area 7b-k



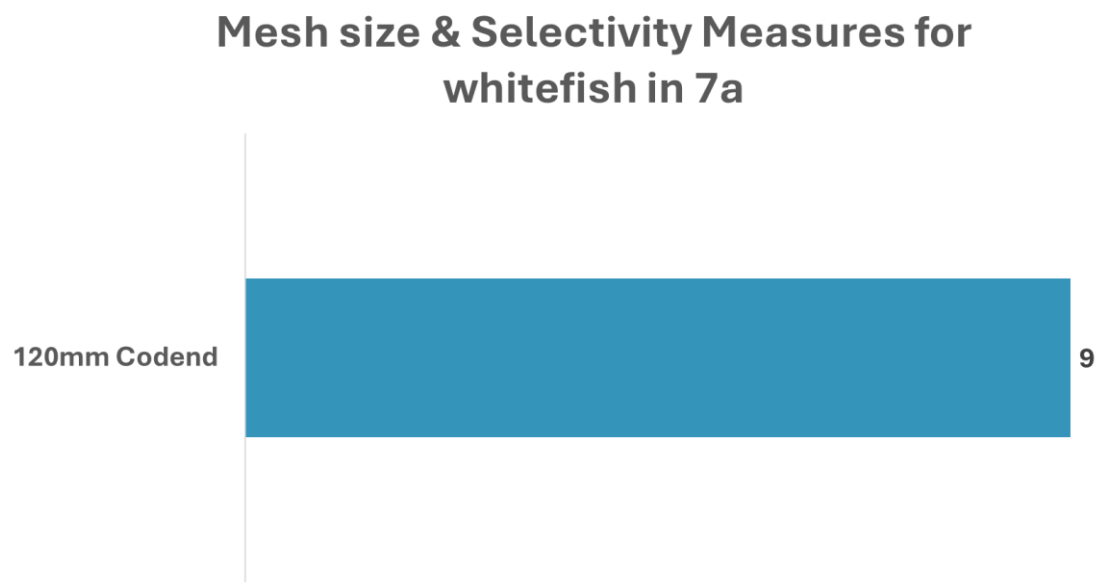
- As set out above the majority of respondents are using 100mm mesh in this fishery.

- It would appear that vessels are prioritising a smaller cod end mesh size with a selectivity device over a larger mesh cod end which requires no additional selectivity device.

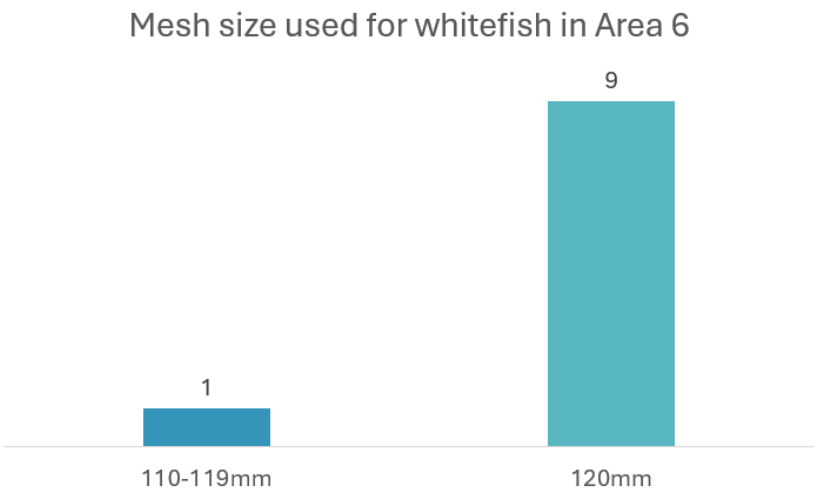
- The T90 is a mesh which is turned at 90˚ in comparison to diamond mesh. This has the effect of allowing more smaller fish to escape through the meshes.

- All of the respondents that selected T90 were Seiners and furthermore 100% of Seiners that responded were using this gear.

Mesh Sizes and selectivity devices used in Whitefish Fishery Area 7a

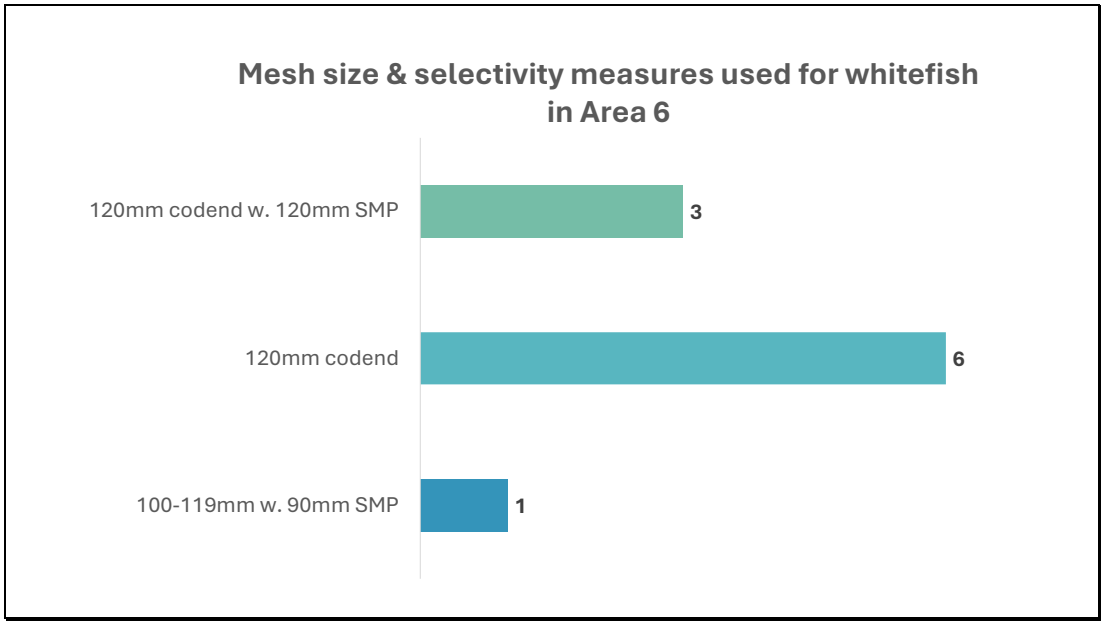


Mesh Sizes used in Whitefish Fishery Area 6



- The prevalence of the use of 120mm cod end is unsurprising as the 110 - 119mm is only allowable under a restrictive catch composition rule.

Analysis of Mesh Sizes and Selectivity Measures Whitefish Fishery Area 6



- The legal requirement for this fishery is that 120 mm cod end is used.
- 3 of the 10 respondents are using a 120mm SMP which is in excess of the legal requirement in Irish waters.

Voluntary Additional Measures

Additional Measures used beyond what is required by legislation

- At least 5 vessels are using 160mm top sheet in prawn nets in all areas.
- Up to 300mm top sheets used
- At least 3 vessels using 120mm SMP with 120mm codend for whitefish in Area 6

- As highlighted above it is clear that a number of vessels are using gear that is in excess of what is required by Irish legislation and is more selective.
- Both vessels who are targeting Whitefish exclusively and Prawns exclusively are implementing these additional voluntary measures.
- The use of these larger mesh top sheets in Prawn fishing gear and additional SMPs in Whitefish should result in significant reductions in the number of smaller fish caught.

Open Questions

- There were 7 “Open” questions included in the survey.

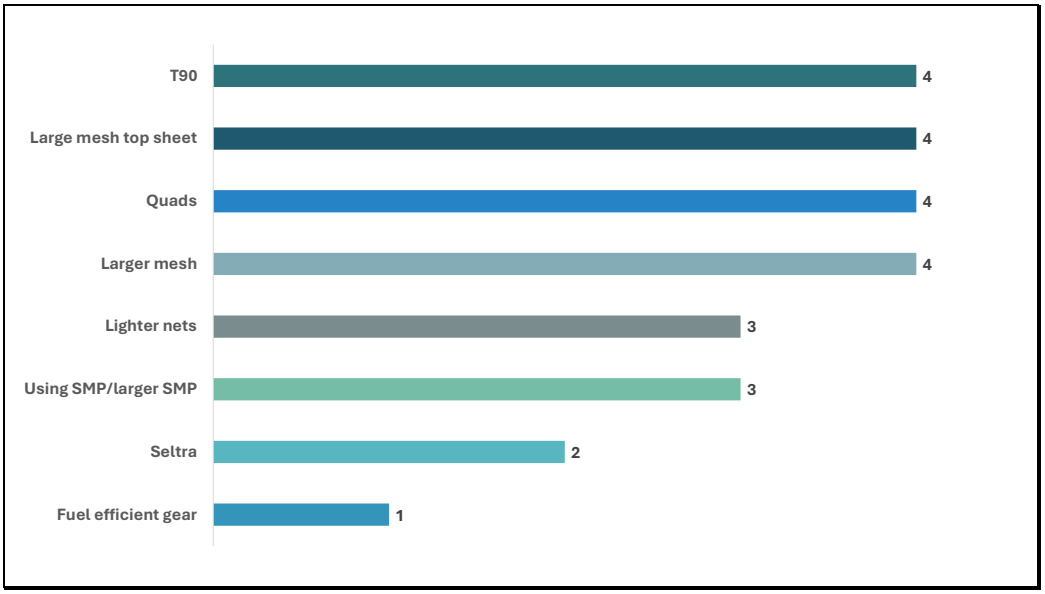
- The purpose of the inclusion of these “Open” questions was to allow fishermen to add additional qualitative context to the more quantitative responses in the first part of the survey.

- While responding to these questions was optional of the 41 participants in the survey 34 completed some if not all of the Open questions.

- Some very useful information was collected through these questions.

Changes in Gear Configuration over the past 5 years

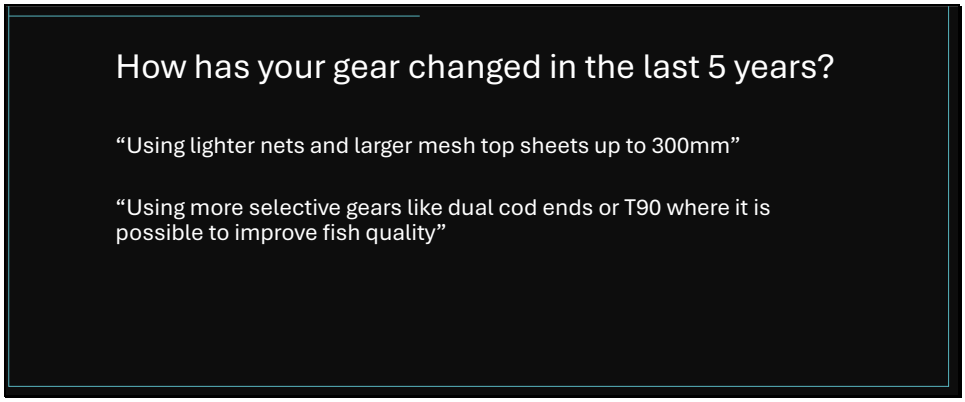
Survey question: How has your gear changed in the last 5 years?



- The responses to this question clearly demonstrate that fishermen have made significant selectivity improvements to their gear over the past five years.

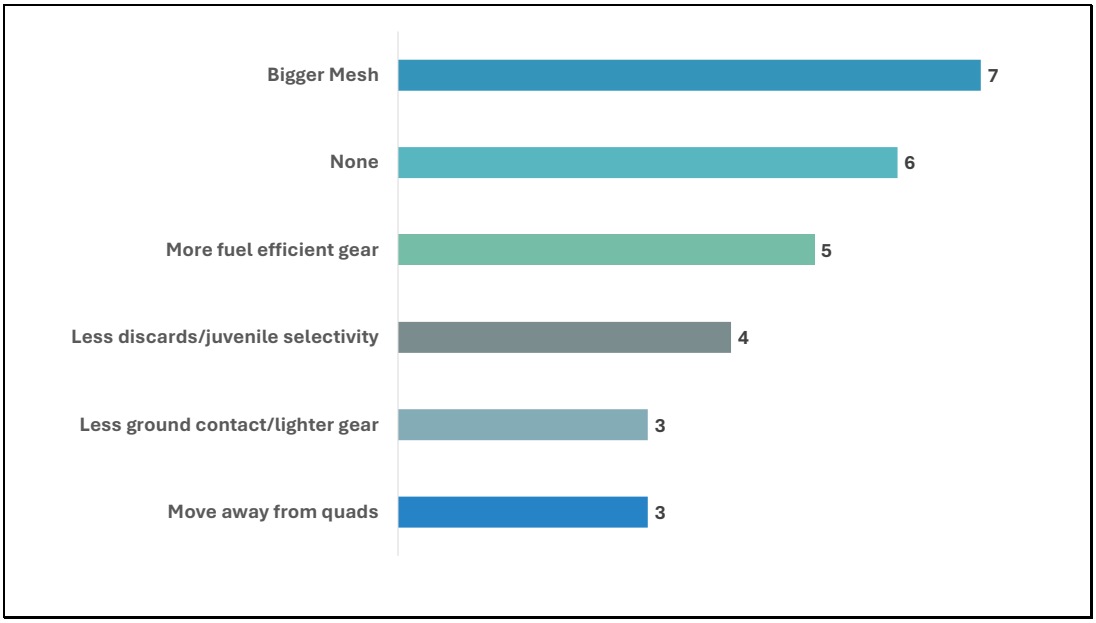
- All of the changes mentioned with the exception of quad nets and fuel-efficient gear are directly related to improved selectivity.

Changes in Gear over the past 5 years – sample responses



Gear Changes in the next 5 years

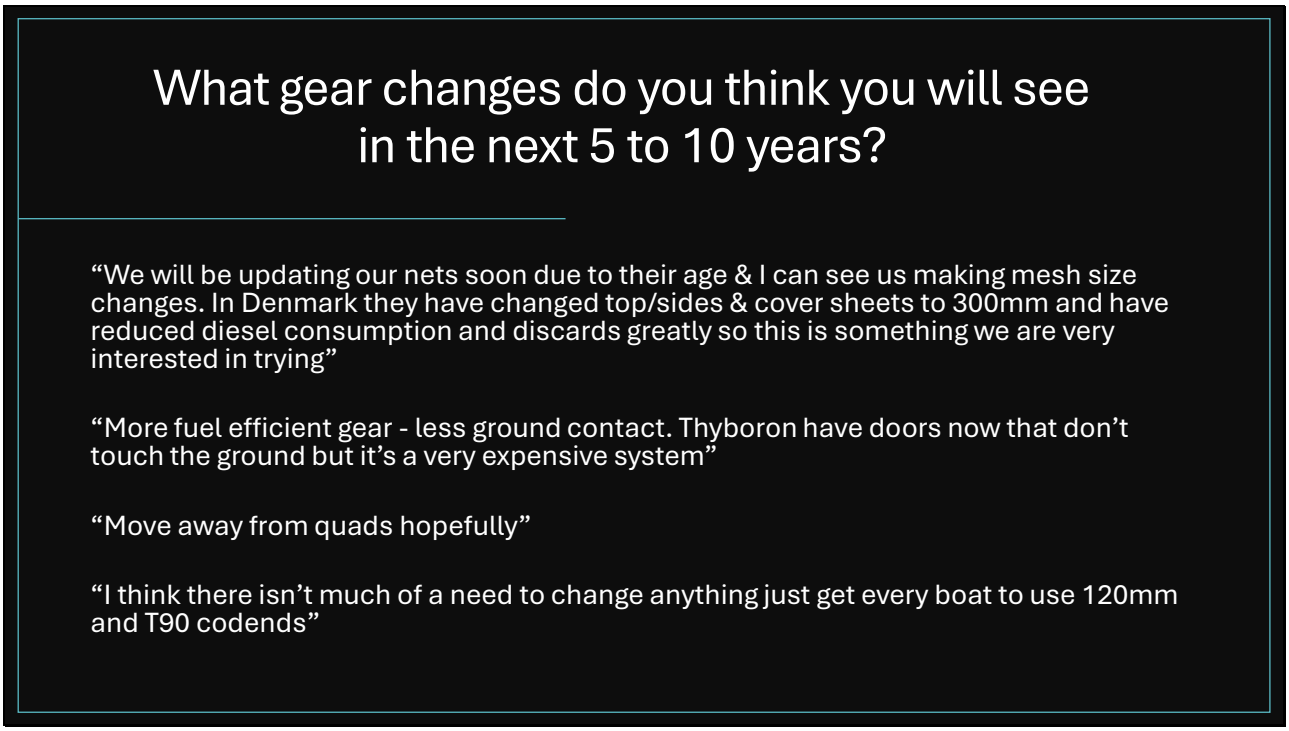
Survey question: What gear changes do you think you will see in the next 5 to 10 years?



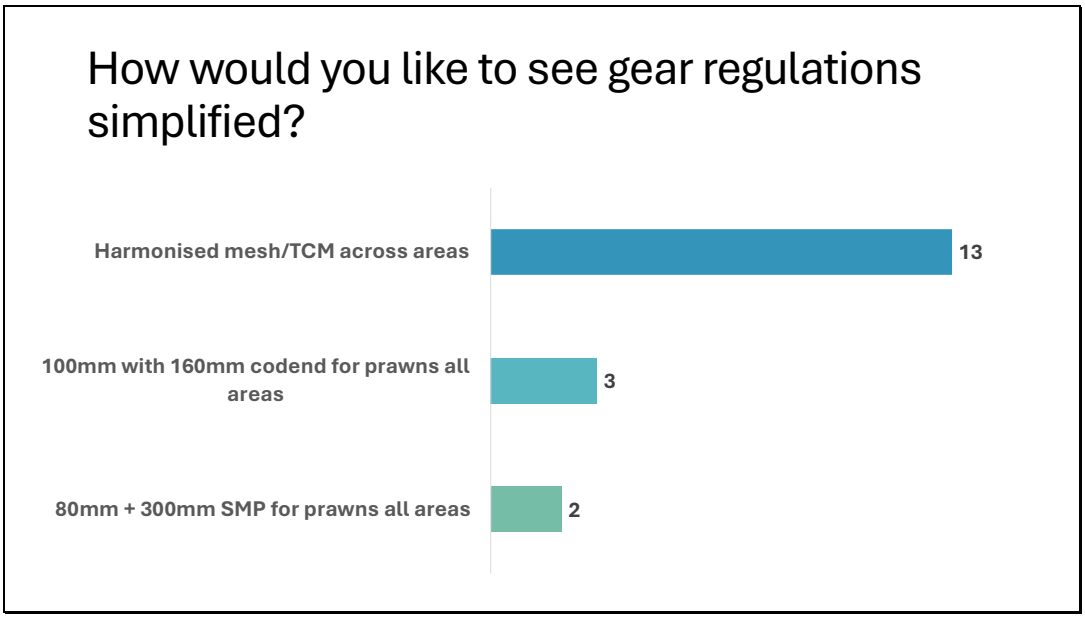
- The responses to this question indicate that fishermen expect to make further improvements to the selectivity of their gear over the next five years.

- The most popular response to this question referred to the use of bigger meshes.

Gear Changes in the next 5 to 10 years – sample responses



Simplification of Gear Regulations

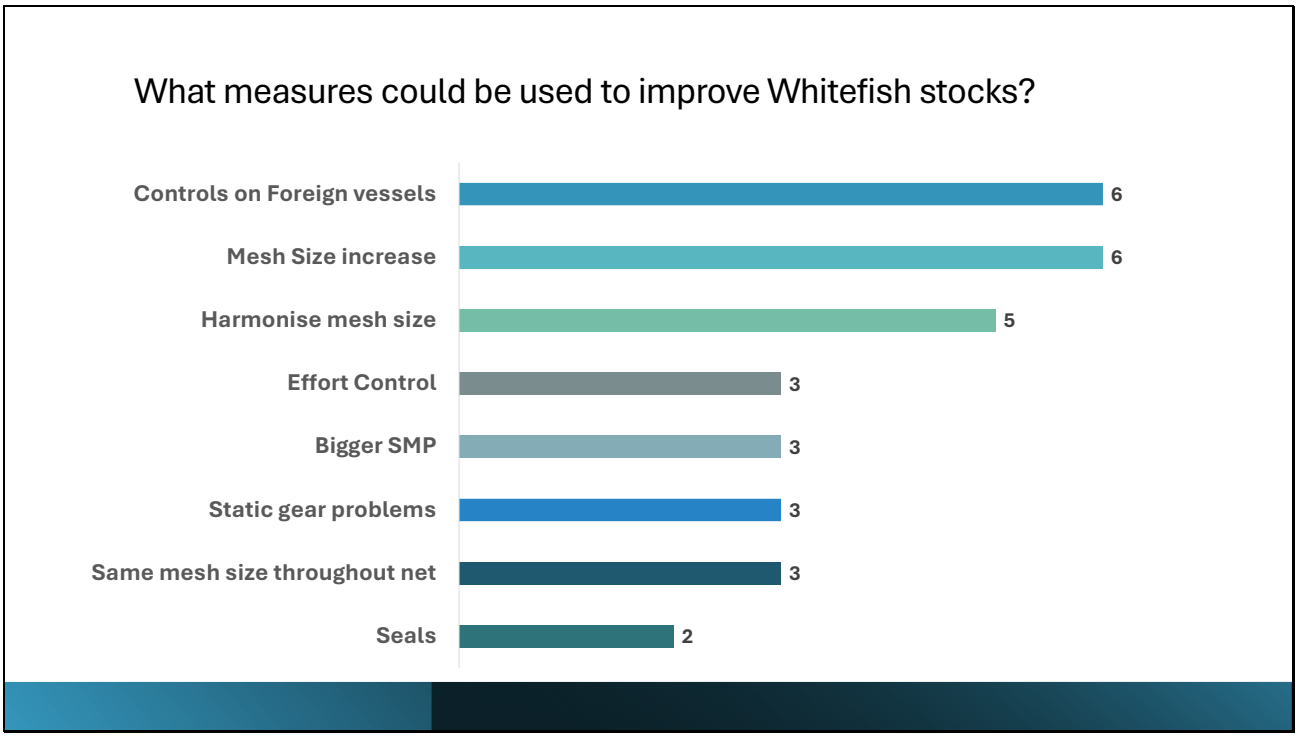


- The survey has highlighted how complex the mesh size and Technical Conservation Measures (TCMs) are in this area.

- This is clearly evident in the respondents overwhelming preference for harmonisation of rules across fishing areas.

Simplification of Gear Regulations – sample responses

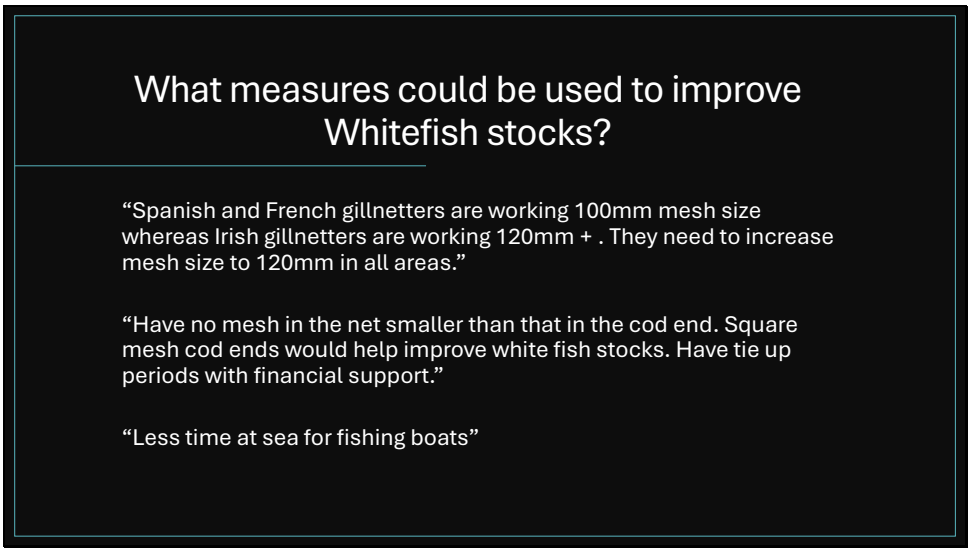
Measures to improve whitefish stocks



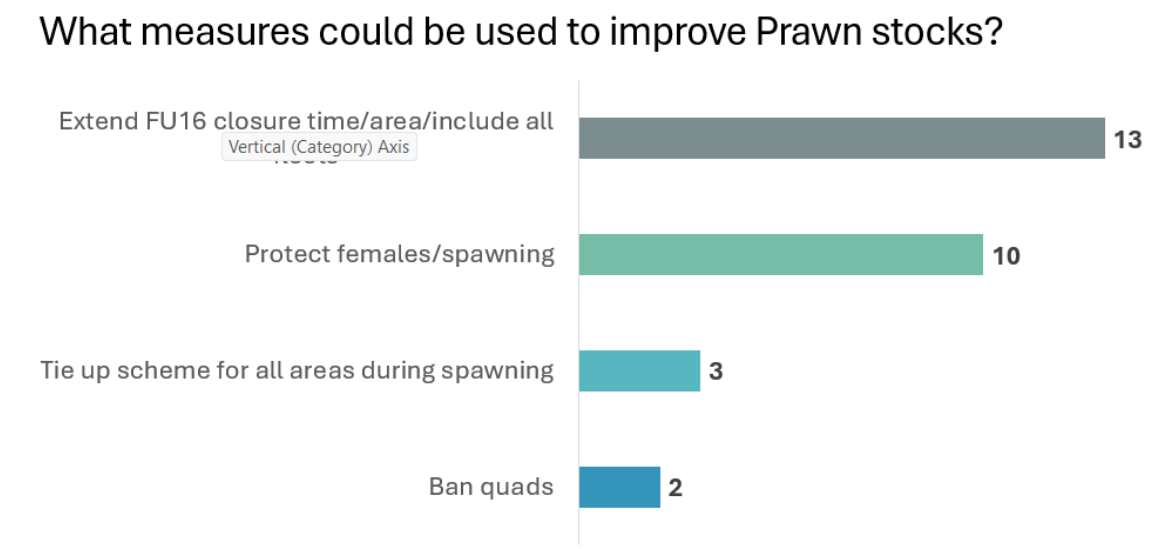
- The prevalence of responses mentioning mesh size increase indicates a level of support from fishermen for this type of measure. This will be particularly relevant in light of the 2025 Commission proposal in relation to TCMs.

- The number of mentions of "foreign vessels" in response to this question indicates respondents concerns about a perceived lack of enforcement for non-Irish vessels.

Measures to improve whitefish stocks – sample responses



Measures to improve Prawn Stocks

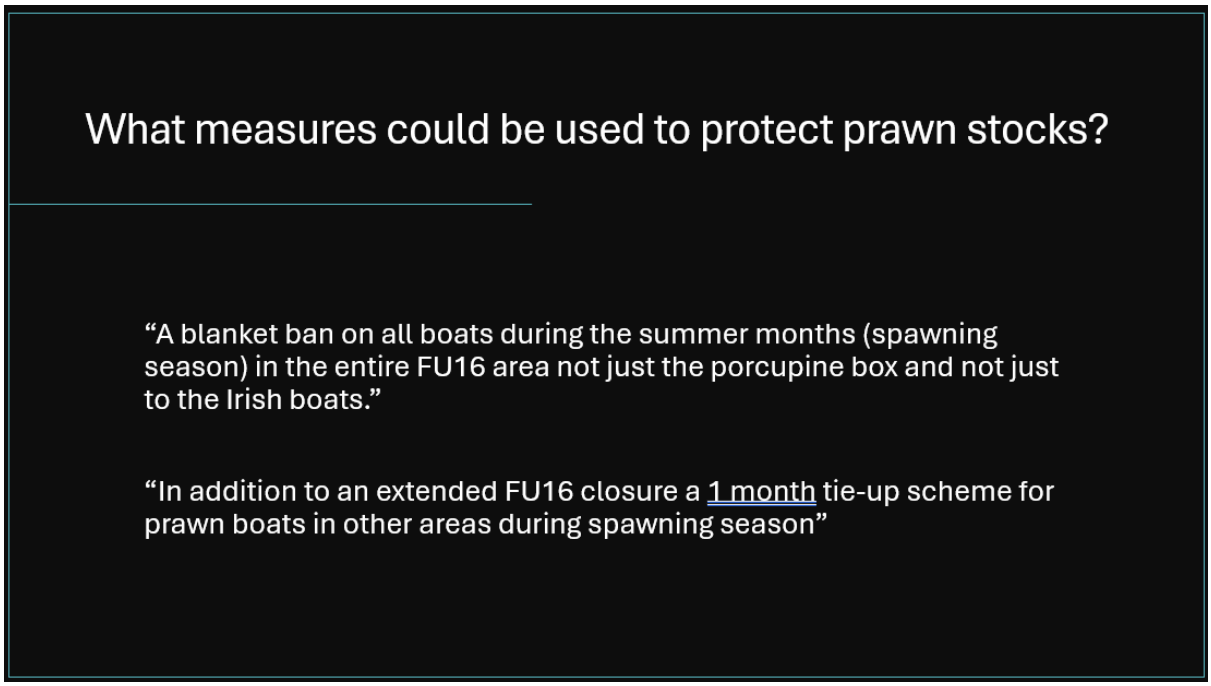


- The main emphasis in responses to this question were focused on the Porcupine Fishery.

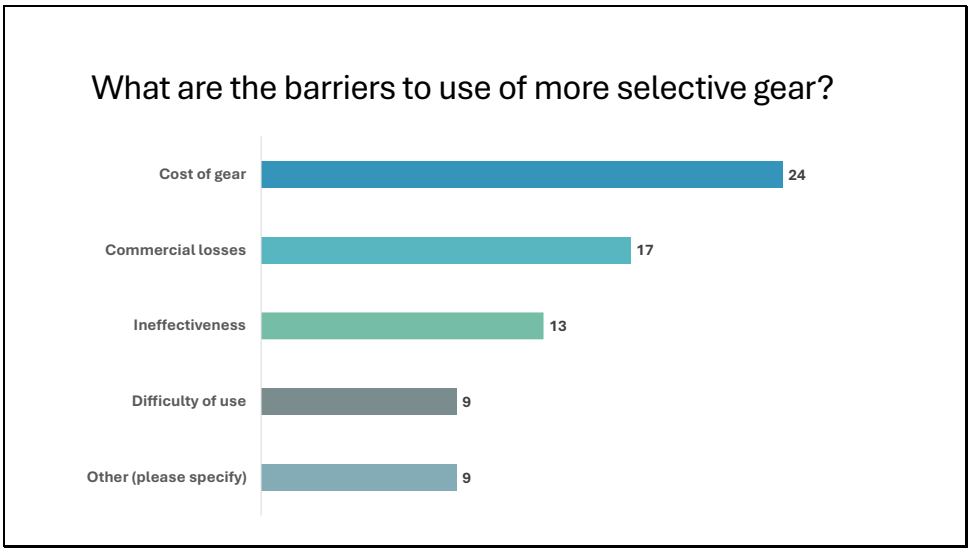
- Respondents mentioned an expansion of the current closure in terms of geographic area, duration and fishing fleets covered.

- Some respondents also were of the view that further closures for other areas should be put in place during spawning times and covered by a funded tie up scheme.

Measures to improve Prawn Stocks – sample responses



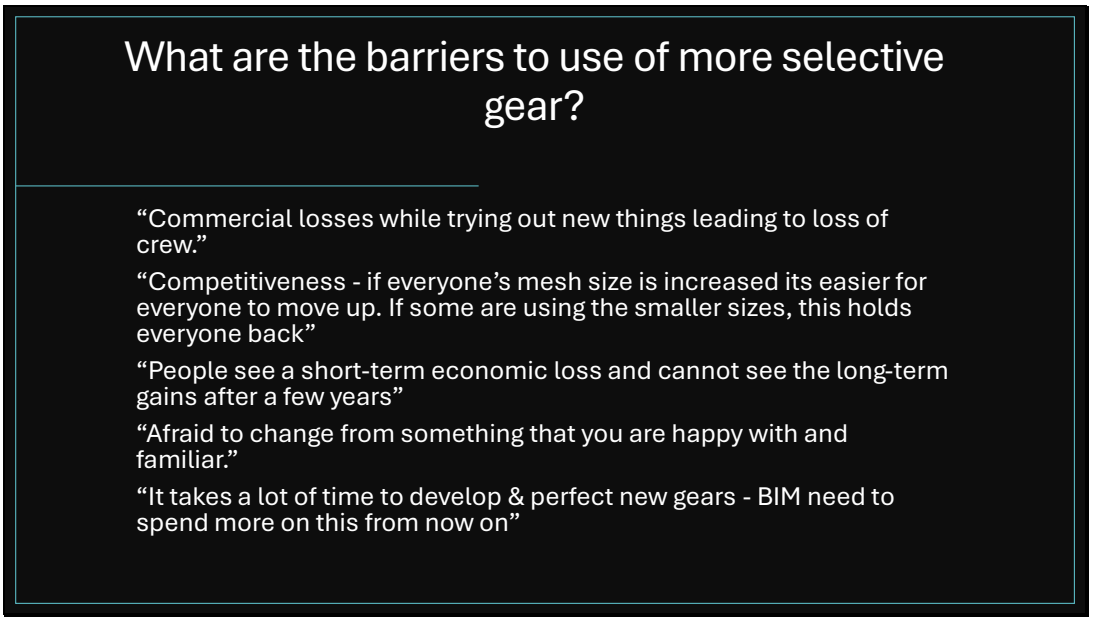
Barriers to the Use of more Selective Gear



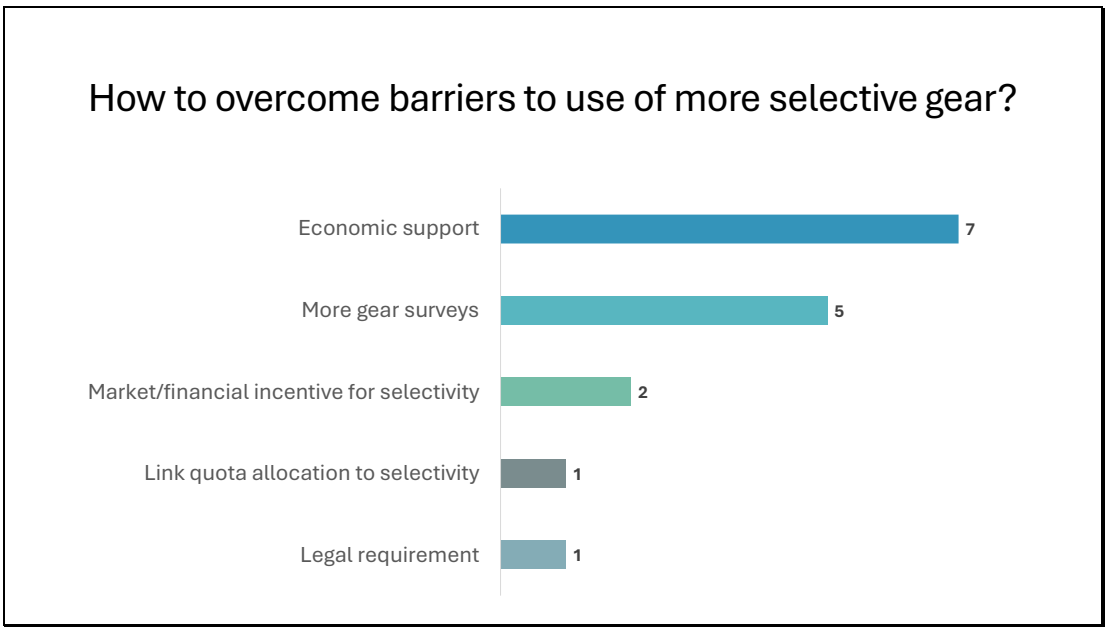
- It is evident from the response to this question that the economic effects of using new, more selective gear are the main barrier.

- Operational factors such as ineffectiveness and difficulty of use are a somewhat lower priority.

Barriers to the Use of more Selective Gear – sample responses



Measures to Overcome the Barriers to the Use of more Selective Gears

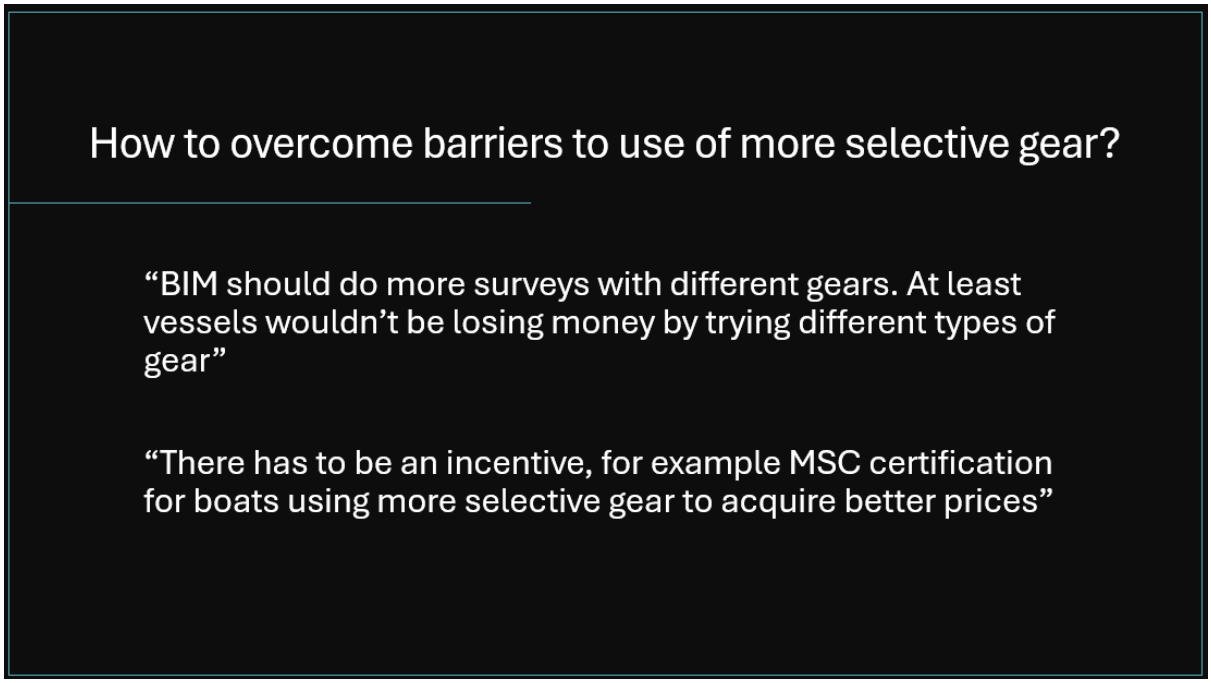


- Given that the economic effects of using new, more selective gear was identified as the primary barrier it is unsurprising that economic support was the most popular response to this question.

- The second most popular response, more gear surveys, is indeed linked to the first as it was mentioned as a means to de-risk the sometimes-costly learning curve associated with new gears.

- Economic support potential sources mentioned included:
    - Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) – the Irish Fisheries Development Board
    - European Union funds
    - Community Development Funds from Offshore Renewable Energy.

Measures to Overcome the Barriers to the Use of more Selective Gears – sample responses



Additional Comments – sample responses

Conclusion

- The data gathered in the survey represents new data in relation to gear in use in the Irish Whitefish and Prawn fisheries which is not captured in logbook data.
- From the survey responses it is clear fishermen have already made considerable changes to improve the selectivity of the gear they use.
- Many of the respondents anticipate and support further changes including increases in mesh size.
- A majority of respondents prefer smaller cod-end mesh size with selectivity option to the option of using a larger mesh cod-end without additional selectivity measures.
- 4 respondents support restrictions on quad rigging including some currently using quads.
- Good insights have been provided into industry supported measures to improve Whitefish & Prawn stocks.
- Fishermen provided significant information in relation to the barriers to implementing new, more selective, gear.
- Most of the points made here are contingent to some extent on the outcome of TCM negotiations at December Council and in EU/UK negotiations which are ongoing.

Next Steps

- The FIP will circulate this report and summaries of the survey results to FIP members and any other interested parties. The FIP will utilise this data as part of upcoming meetings with the Marine Institute.
- The survey results are particularly relevant given the new TCM measures recently proposed by the EU Commission and being discussed at EU and EU/UK level. The data collected allows for a rough assessment of change required across the fleet in preparation for. For example, only 4 vessels are currently using the measures which will be allowed under the new proposals for prawn gear (3 Seltra, 1 sorting grid).
- There is currently a gap in the catch profile data for the gear types used in the survey and this gap will continue to exist when new gears are agreed and thus it is an area that will require further work.

- The FIP could also look at the potential benefit in requesting the Marine Institute to carry out an analysis of the new Technical Conservation Measures for the Celtic Sea which the Commission are proposing and to use the data collected in this survey as a baseline to compare this analysis against.
- The data collected in the survey is relevant to the recently established ICES Working Group on innovative fishing gear (WGING)

    - https://www.ices.dk/community/groups/Pages/WGing.aspx and to a Seafish UK initiative on supporting the commercial uptake of innovative fishing gear

    - https://www.seafish.org/media/nbrev1ox/final25-0903_supporting-commercial-uptake-innovative_fishing-gear_v6.pdf. The FIP coordinators will be engaging with these initiatives to inform further work that will be undertaken in this area.