GOVERNMENT OF MALTA

Government response to the **Public Consultation on the National Fisheries Strategy for Malta 2026–2036**

Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights (MAFA) / Ministeru għall-Agrikoltura, Is-Sajd u d-Drittijiet Tal-Annimali (MAFA)

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Contents

CONTENTS

Contents 4
Executive Summary 5
Introduction and overview 5
Responses to the consultation and process used to seek stakeholder views 7
Summary of responses and decisions 8
Implementation 14
Contact Details 14
Annex A: List of respondents 15

Executive Summary

Introduction and overview

1. A brief introduction about the subject.

The development of the National Fisheries Strategy for Malta 2026 – 2036 (NFS) originated from the manifesto measure "*EMP 605: Inniehdu konsultazzjoni wiesgħa mas-sajjieda li jipprattikaw tipi ta' sajd differenti sabiex nassiguraw li l-qafas legali li jirregola s-sajd f'pajjizna jippromwovi futur u sostenibilita' għas-sajjieda Maltin u Għawdxin."* Initially, the process focused on amendments to *CAP 425: Fisheries Conservation and Management Act*. However, the depth of feedback received during stakeholder consultations highlighted a wider range of challenges and opportunities within the sector. As a result, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights deemed it necessary to formulate a comprehensive national strategy to address the issues raised.

This initiative was launched in November 2022 through a press conference, followed by an extensive consultation process carried out between December 2022 and May 2023. A total of 37 consultation meetings were organised with commercial fishers operating across different designated fishing ports and using a variety of fishing gears, including trammel nets and gillnets, demersal longlines, pots and traps, tartarun, lampara, dolphinfish FADs and trawling. Out of these meetings, 35 were held in Malta and 2 in Gozo, with a total participation of 282 fishers, representing approximately 35% of the sector. Apart from these consultations, one meeting was organized with recreational fishing groups, along with a series of interministerial consultations involving various government ministries, authorities, agencies and academic institutions, selected based on whether their sectors may in any way intersect with the fisheries sector.

In parallel, quantitative data was compiled and analysed to better understand the structure and performance of the fisheries sector. This included information on landings, fishing effort, fleet characteristics, stock trends and key economic indicators. These insights, derived from both research and interministerial collaboration, were combined with the direct input from fishers to ensure that the Strategy is both evidence-based and reflective of the realities faced by the industry.

The consultation process played a central role in shaping the Strategy, identifying key priorities such as sustainable fish stock management, generational renewal within an ageing workforce, the modernisation of infrastructure and vessels and the need for improved education, training and skills development for fishers and the general public. It also underscored the importance of forward planning to reduce pressure on marine resources while safeguarding the livelihoods that depend on them.

Based on these findings, the Ministry established the overarching direction of the Strategy through its vision and mission:

- Vision: To support and maintain a sustainable, resilient and diverse fisheries sector, that protects fish stocks, conserves marine ecosystems, while safeguarding the livelihoods and well-being of fishing communities in Malta.
- Mission: To ensure the long-term sustainability of Malta's fisheries sector which prioritises ecological conservation with the socio-economic needs of fishing communities to create a resilient, diverse and forward-looking sector

To achieve this, the Strategy is structured around four key strategic pillars, supported by 20 Strategic Objectives and 86 Measures, which together outline a long-term pathway for the transformation of the sector in line with Malta Vision 2050:

- **Pillar I – Sustainable Fisheries Management:** This pillar focuses on revising and developing management plans for all fishing activities to ensure sustainable practices. It supports both

ecological conservation and the preservation of traditional methods while ensuring compliance with best practices for biodiversity protection.

- **Pillar II - Generation Renewal:** With an ageing workforce, attracting young fishers is essential. The policy includes educational initiatives, apprenticeships and the integration of modern technology to ensure the industry's sustainability. It also helps preserve Malta's fishing culture and strengthens the economic future of the sector.
- **Pillar III - Fisheries Infrastructure:** Modernising and upgrading facilities, ports, vessels and ancillary equipment, while reforming the Malta Fish Market and advancing towards more digitalised and innovative fisheries technology systems.
- **Pillar IV - Education and Training:** Enhancing access to skill development and career opportunities, fostering fisheries knowledge among younger generations and the public, creating a more skilled and trained fishing community and ensuring an adequately trained and knowledgeable recreational fisheries sector.

Together, these elements form a comprehensive and forward-looking framework designed to ensure the sustainability, resilience and long-term prosperity of Malta's fisheries sector.

2. The public consultation date. Include the objective and purpose of the public consultation.

On 28th of January 2026, the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Rights published the initial draft of the National Fisheries Strategy (NFS) for public consultation. The consultation took a span of six weeks and was published on the government's public consultation portal. In addition, three consultation meetings were held with fishers in Marsalforn, Gozo (19th of February 2026), Marsaxlokk (24th of February 2026) and St. Paul's Bay, Malta (3rd of March 2026). During these meetings, officials from the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (DFA) collected feedback on the initial draft of the Strategy.

A separate meeting with recreational fishing groups was also organised on 6th of March 2026 to ensure their perspectives were taken into account. Furthermore, additional submissions were received through the online Public Consultation Portal.

All feedback gathered from commercial and recreational stakeholders, as well as from the online consultation process, will be used to refine and amend the initial draft of the Strategy.

The objective of this consultation process was to present the 86 measures outlined in the Strategy, to gather feedback from stakeholders and the general public.

3. This consultation sought views on:

The consultation process sought feedback on four core thematic areas, as well as on the specific measures proposed under the four pillars of the National Fisheries Strategy. These areas included:

- How the commercial and recreational fisheries sectors can be regulated and managed in a more sustainable manner;
- The need to attract and support a greater number of young people to enter the fisheries sector;
- The need to improve fisheries infrastructure;
- The need to strengthen public and fisher education, training and capacity-building.

The primary purpose of the consultation meetings was to formally present the draft Strategy, explain its rationale and proposed measures and provide fishers and the wider public with an opportunity to raise concerns, share observations and contribute directly to the refinement of the Strategy prior to its finalisation.

Responses to the consultation and process used to seek stakeholder views

This document is the Government Response to this consultation and sets out the Government's decisions on these matters.

4. The closing date of the public consultation. Which methods were used to receive the feedback. The total amount of responses. From whom you received the feedback.

The consultation process closed on the 13th of March 2026. The consultation document and reply form were made available online and responses were submitted electronically through the Public Consultation Portal, allowing the public to provide their input on the National Fisheries Strategy.

In addition, a total of four in-person consultation meetings were organised for both commercial and recreational fishers, with 127 participants attending these sessions. Feedback was also received from stakeholders outside the fishing industry, including local authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and individual members of the public.

In total, 77 responses were collected through both online submissions and in-person consultations. A full list of respondents is provided in Annex A.

5. Include (if any) meetings with stakeholders and list who the stakeholders were.

Between 2022 and 2026, an extensive programme of stakeholder engagement was undertaken to inform the development of the National Fisheries Strategy. During the initial phase of consultations held between 2022 and 2023, a total of 37 meetings were organised with professional fishers operating across Malta and Gozo, covering a wide range of fishing gears and fleet segments. In addition, a dedicated meeting was held with recreational fishing groups. These sessions were attended by a total of 282 fishers and provided the foundational input for the drafting of the Strategy.

In 2026, a further four stakeholder meetings were held as part of the public consultation process on the draft National Fisheries Strategy. These meetings were organised to gather updated feedback and validate the proposed measures. In-person meetings with professional fishers were held in Marsalforn (Gozo), Marsaxlokk and St Paul's Bay, involving fishers from different ports and operational backgrounds. A dedicated meeting was also organised with recreational fishing groups to ensure their views were taken into account, particularly in relation to licensing regimes, fishing effort, data collection, education and fairness between professional and recreational fishing activities. These meetings complemented the online public consultation and played an important role in informing the Government's assessment and refinement of the Strategy.

In addition, interministerial consultations were carried out during April and May 2025 with ministries, authorities and entities whose responsibilities may intersect with or impact the fisheries sector. These included the Ministry for Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector (MIV), the Ministry for the Environment, Energy and Public Cleanliness (MEEC), the Ministry for the Economy, Enterprise and Strategic Projects, the Climate Action Authority (CAA), the Environment and Resources Authority (ERA), the Ministry for European Funds and the Implementation of the Electoral Programme (MFI), the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Tourism (MFT), the EU Coordination Department (EUCD), the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR), the Ministry for Gozo and Planning – Planning and Development Implementation Directorate (MGP-PDPID), the Ministry for Home Affairs, Security and Employment (MHSE), the Fisheries Technical Attaché, the Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Public Works (MTIP), Aquatic Resources Malta (ARM), the Malta Food Agency (MFA) and the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST).

Furthermore, written submissions were received from private individuals, government authorities and non-governmental organisations, providing additional perspectives on environmental protection, equality and social inclusion, governance, recreational fishing regulation and cultural heritage considerations.
The views expressed throughout these consultation phases have informed the Government's evaluation of the feedback received and will continue to be taken into account as the National Fisheries Strategy progresses through revision, assessment and implementation.

Summary of responses and decisions

The following is a summary of the consultation responses received. We would like to thank all those who took the time to respond to the consultation and participate in stakeholder meetings around the consultation exercise.

6. Statistics.

- Total feedback received: 77
- Total feedback received by individuals: 71
- Total feedback received by organisations: 6
- Total feedback received through email: 0
- Total feedback received through online form: 17 (including 3 anonymous)
- Total feedback received by post: 0

7. Summary of feedback received.

Report on the National Fisheries Strategy Consultations - Professional Fishers

During all three consultation meetings, officials from the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture stressed that the strategy was developed through direct input from fishers rather than a top-down approach. They stated that it reflects sector realities and sets a long-term vision for an environmentally sustainable, economically resilient and competitive fisheries sector, while improving income stability and quality of life. The strategy was also described as the result of coordinated engagement with other government entities and non-governmental stakeholders to ensure alignment with broader national objectives.

The strategy is organised around four strategic pillars and comprises a total of eighty-six measures, as presented during the consultations. The first pillar addresses the recovery and management of fish stocks, with a focus on long term sustainability. Officials emphasised that the viability of the sector depends on healthy marine stocks. Measures under this pillar include the development and implementation of management plans, the use of scientific research and data and regulatory interventions to balance fishing effort with the natural regeneration of fish populations. During the Gozo meeting, specific concern was raised regarding declining dolphinfish catches, with fishers stressing that any changes to seasons or technical measures should be based on robust scientific studies conducted by the competent scientific authorities.

The second pillar focuses on generational renewal, a concern raised across all consultations. Officials noted that the average age of fishers is increasing, with Fishing Vessel Register data indicating an average age of 52 years, while many young people are reluctant or unable to enter the sector. Fishers highlighted barriers for younger entrants, including access to bank loans, insurance and the transfer of licences and operational capacity. Officials clarified that this pillar does not aim to increase fishing effort or fisher numbers, but to prevent sectoral decline by supporting succession and continuity. Measures include financial and

administrative support, targeted training, incentives for intergenerational transfer and improvements to working conditions to make fishing a more attractive and sustainable livelihood for younger generations.

The third pillar focuses on fisheries infrastructure, identified as one of the most urgent themes across all three meetings. In Gozo, fishers raised concerns about the limited number of active vessels in ports such as Marsalforn, safety risks during adverse weather and the need for improved landing facilities. Emphasis was placed on strengthening the fish market, upgrading cold storage, addressing undeclared direct sales to restaurants and improving overall port safety. Fishers also highlighted the lack of adequate hoists and service pillars compared to Malta, with officials noting that responsibility for certain infrastructure elements lies with different ministries. In Marsaxlokk, infrastructure issues were discussed extensively. Fishers raised concerns regarding harbour safety and adequacy, the condition and need for the breakwater, dredging requirements to allow safe operation of larger vessels and the availability of ice machines and secure mooring facilities. Officials confirmed that breakwater permits had been issued but that implementation was facing challenges due to a lack of specialised contractors and that dredging works had commenced. Fishers also stressed the need to strengthen the fish market by increasing buyers and processors, opening it further to the public and considering a minimum pricing system to enhance the value of local fish. Investment in processing and export capacity, including access to international markets such as China, was also discussed as a means of maximising the economic value of local catches. In San Pawl il-Baħar, fishers highlighted severe port congestion, limited space for professional fishing operations and increasing competition from recreational and tourism-related vessels. Concerns were raised about existing infrastructure, inadequate protection from adverse weather and the repurposing of pontoons originally intended for fishers. Officials acknowledged that many of these issues fall outside the direct remit of the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture but confirmed that they would be communicated to the relevant authorities, including Infrastructure Malta, with reference to planned interventions such as the new facilities at Ġnejna.

The fourth pillar focuses on education and training, covering continuous professional development for full-time fishers and targeted initiatives for part-time and recreational fishers. Officials explained that training aims to improve regulatory compliance, professional standards, health and safety skills and understanding of reporting requirements, logbooks and support schemes, thereby reducing administrative burdens. The strategy also includes training on diversification opportunities, such as fishing tourism, to support alternative income streams within the sector.

Throughout the consultations, fishers raised a range of operational, administrative and regulatory concerns. These included high bait prices, rising insurance costs—reported to reach approximately €4,000 per year—difficulties in obtaining insurance coverage and challenges in accessing aid schemes due to data and logbook requirements. Bottom fishing operators expressed particular concern about exclusion from fish bait support measures because of the lack of quantifiable catch data, with officials indicating that alternative compensation mechanisms based on receipts were being explored. Administrative difficulties related to engine replacement, vessel modification and permit applications were also discussed, with assurances that these issues are addressed within the strategy.

A recurrent theme across all meetings was the relationship between professional and recreational fishing. Professional fishers expressed strong concerns about illegal fish sales by recreational fishers, uneven enforcement and market price distortion. They argued that recreational vessels operate with fewer restrictions, larger engines and lower compliance costs, allowing them to sell fish at lower prices and undermine the professional market. Proposals discussed included stronger enforcement, improved traceability measures such as fish tagging and regulatory reforms to ensure fairness and compliance across all operator categories.

Additional concerns included the impact of third-country fishing activity, particularly by Tunisian vessels, on Maltese fish aggregating devices, the lack of reciprocal data on dolphinfish catches by Tunisian vessels and safety risks faced by Maltese fishers operating in adverse weather to protect their equipment. Environmental concerns were also raised, notably the effects of maritime traffic, sonar use, wastewater discharge and coastal development on fish stocks and port ecosystems.

The consultations concluded with a shared recognition that, despite significant structural, economic and regulatory challenges, the National Fisheries Strategy provides a comprehensive and structured framework to address these issues in a coordinated and sustainable manner.

Report on the National Fisheries Strategy Consultations 2026–2036 – Recreational fishers

A central proposal concerns the clarification and rationalisation of licensing regimes, particularly for tuna and longline fishing. While tuna is no longer classified as a vulnerable species, the strategy confirms that international conservation obligations remain fully applicable, including the ICCAT prohibition on capturing juvenile tuna. It further clarifies that any additional national tuna quota acquired by Malta must include a fixed percentage reserved for recreational fishers, correcting an acknowledged drafting error in the strategy.

Another key proposal relates to the governance of fishing zones and marine spatial planning, notably the proposed Marine Park in the Qammiegħ area. At the time of discussion, the Department of Fisheries had not been formally consulted, prompting proposals for further discussions involving the Environment and Resources Authority, the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, the Malta Tourism Authority and Transport Malta to ensure that future marine protection measures are developed through structured consultation and evidence-based assessment.

Recreational fishers emphasised the regulation of fishing effort and gear, with particular reference to trammel nets and lampara fishing. While acknowledging the economic role of lampara fishing, especially for tuna aquaculture feed, concerns were raised about its environmental impact and disproportionate pressure on local stocks. Proposed measures include further restrictions on lampara activity, potential spatial limits beyond the 12 nautical mile zone and possible temporary cessation measures, explicitly linked to the need for detailed scientific research and fishing effort analysis prior to the adoption of binding management plans.

A recurring proposal is the formal establishment of stakeholder working groups as a prerequisite for implementing measures under the strategy. These groups would include experienced sector representatives and relevant authorities and are intended to translate high-level strategic objectives into operational policies. The document emphasises that the strategy provides direction rather than prescriptive rules and that inclusive working groups are essential for legitimacy, sectoral buy-in and effective conservation outcomes, with fish stock conservation identified as the overriding priority.

Regarding administrative reform, the strategy proposes a clearer division of responsibilities between authorities, particularly for vessel registration and licensing. It suggests transferring the registration of fishing vessels to Transport Malta, while the Department of Fisheries would retain responsibility for fishing licences. Closely linked is a proposal to accelerate the establishment of a comprehensive recreational fishers' register and to introduce an official licence for all recreational fishers, identified as a high-priority, short term measure.

The document also addresses the regulation of fishing charters, proposing a distinct licensing and regulatory category for charter operators. These would be differentiated from individual recreational fishers and subject to specific permit conditions, mandatory catch declarations and stronger promotion of catch and release practices. Concerns are noted regarding the disproportionate use of recreational tuna quota by some charter operators, reinforcing the need for clearer regulatory separation and enhanced oversight.

The use of the RecFish mobile application has commenced, with proposals to enhance public awareness through targeted information campaigns explaining its purpose and use. Initially, the application will cover only controlled species, although recreational fishers acknowledged that the list may expand in line with future multi-annual plans issued by Regional Fisheries Management Organisations. Improved data collection through RecFish is presented as a key tool for evidence-based policy development.

The strategy also outlines pilot projects and capacity-building initiatives, including a possible pilot allowing limited early commencement of lampuki fishing by professional fishers, subject to further discussion and the potential introduction of mandatory training courses for recreational fishers, possibly in collaboration with

organised diver groups. These initiatives are framed as supportive measures to enhance compliance, environmental awareness and long-term sustainability, rather than enforcement driven interventions.

Report on the National Fisheries Strategy Consultations 2026–2036 – Online Public Consultation

The online public consultation reflects widespread concern about the sustainability of Malta's marine environment and a shared view that both professional and recreational fishing require stronger management, enforcement and clearer differentiation. Contributors consistently stressed that fish stocks in Maltese waters, particularly in near-coastal areas, have declined significantly, threatening ecological balance, economic livelihoods and future generational access to fishing.

A recurring theme was the need to clearly distinguish between commercial fishing as a livelihood and recreational fishing as a leisure activity. Many respondents argued against a "one-size-fits-all" regulatory approach, warning that indiscriminate restrictions risk unfairly penalising low impact recreational fishers while failing to address the main sources of ecological damage. Particular concern was expressed about excessive pressure on small-scale or shore-based recreational fishing, such as Imrejkba, despite evidence that greater harm arises from intensive, non-selective commercial practices.

The most frequently identified causes of environmental degradation were non-selective fishing methods, including trawl nets, trammel nets, lampara fishing and large-scale pots and traps. Respondents highlighted their high bycatch levels, seabed damage and capture of juvenile and breeding fish, with lampara fishing widely criticised for depleting baitfish stocks and destabilising the marine food chain. There was broad consensus that indiscriminate fishing methods should be reduced or subject to stronger regulation.

Several submissions called for geographical restrictions on specific fishing practices, including bans on nets and pots within defined coastal bays, enforcement of minimum distances from shore, ports and bays and the introduction of rotating protected zones to allow stock regeneration. Marine Protected Areas were widely supported, provided they are realistically sized, scientifically monitored, periodically rotated and balanced with access for selective, low impact fishing. The Ċirkewwa Marine Park was cited as evidence that restricting nets and traps can lead to visible stock recovery.

Stronger enforcement was repeatedly emphasised, with contributors citing insufficient patrols, weak penalties and limited on-site inspections as drivers of non-compliance. Proposals included increased coastal patrols, spot checks at sea and landing sites, stricter enforcement of minimum catch sizes and harsher penalties for illegal gear, undersized catches and unlicensed activity. Many submissions also supported the creation of a single, well-resourced maritime enforcement entity covering fisheries, environmental protection, safety and compliance.

A further recurring concern was the lack of publicly available data and slow policy responses. Contributors warned that scientific findings often take years to result in regulation, citing sea urchin depletion and cautioning that octopus stocks may face similar collapse. Calls were made for transparent data collection, timely policy intervention and continuous stock monitoring, including mandatory catch recording for both professional and recreational fishers.

Many respondents supported mandatory licensing, education and training for all forms of recreational fishing, including harpoon fishing, viewing licensing as a means to promote safety, environmental awareness and sustainable practices. Strong support was expressed for bag limits, minimum catch sizes, catch and release practices and a strict ban on the sale of recreationally caught fish, alongside proposals for marking or traceability systems to prevent such fish from entering the commercial market.

Concerns were also raised regarding charter fishing operations, with calls for stricter permit controls, catch limits and enforcement to prevent circumvention of commercial regulations. The regulation of fish traps, particularly octopus and shrimp traps, was highlighted due to their increasing size, non-selective design, plastic construction and long term "ghost fishing" impacts. Proposed measures included limits on trap numbers per vessel, zoned offshore trap fisheries and bans in sensitive areas.

Several submissions addressed structural and socio-economic challenges, including an ageing workforce, barriers for young entrants, high permit costs and difficulties acquiring vessels or tonnage. Proposals included early retirement schemes, government buy-back of vessels and capacity, preferential access and pricing for young fishers and financial support to facilitate entry. Concerns were also raised regarding foreign labour, with calls for fair taxation, stronger oversight and measures to avoid disadvantaging Maltese fishers.

Diversification was widely supported as a means of reducing fishing pressure while sustaining incomes, with suggestions to adapt vessels for ecotourism, diver transport, educational and heritage activities, particularly during closed seasons. Such diversification was viewed as a way to preserve traditional vessels, promote maritime heritage and generate alternative income while reducing pressure on marine ecosystems.

Environmental concerns extended beyond fishing practices, with contributors highlighting marine pollution, maritime traffic safety, invasive species and marine litter, particularly in ports and fishing harbours. Proposals included improved waste management facilities, the installation of sea bins, stronger cooperation with environmental authorities and deterrents against reckless navigation that endangers fishers and fishing gear.

Report on the National Fisheries Strategy Consultations 2026–2036 – Online Submissions from Governmental Entities and NGOs

The submissions provided by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE), BirdLife Malta, the Environment and Resources Authority (ERA) and the Malta Skin Divers Club (MSDC) collectively emphasise that the National Fisheries Strategy for Malta 2026–2036 must place sustainability, inclusivity and ecosystem protection at the core of fisheries governance. While each organisation approaches the Strategy from a distinct mandate, there is broad convergence on the need for stronger management measures, improved data collection, effective enforcement and a long-term transition towards low impact fishing practices.

From an equality and social inclusion perspective, the NCPE calls for full gender mainstreaming of the Strategy in line with government policy, noting that the fisheries sector remains heavily male dominated and that this is insufficiently addressed. It recommends explicit recognition of gender disparities, targeted measures to encourage female participation and initiatives to counter gender stereotyping in fisheries and aquaculture related education and career pathways. The NCPE also proposes broadening workforce considerations beyond youth recruitment to include migrants and beneficiaries of international protection who may already possess, or be willing to acquire, relevant skills.

BirdLife Malta's submission focuses on ecological sustainability and the recovery of depleted fish stocks, expressing concern that the Strategy places disproportionate emphasis on supporting fishing activity without adequate safeguards to reverse long standing overfishing pressures. It advocates a stronger shift towards low impact, ecosystem-based fisheries supported by scientifically informed spatial and seasonal management, including strictly protected Marine Protected Areas and no-take zones. BirdLife Malta cautions that spawning closures alone may be ineffective without broader effort reduction measures and calls for greater transparency in fisheries funding, with economic incentives explicitly linked to environmental performance such as reduced bycatch, habitat protection and compliance with monitoring requirements.

BirdLife Malta further proposes targeted measures to reduce bycatch across multiple fisheries, including bottom and surface longlines, trammel nets and lampara fisheries, with particular attention to seabirds, cetaceans, turtles and elasmobranchs. It supports the use of electronic monitoring to improve data accuracy and accountability, calls for stronger enforcement against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and stresses the need to address demand side pressures through sustainable consumption, improved traceability and labelling, including in restaurants and fair pricing mechanisms that ensure equitable returns for artisanal and low impact fishers.

The ERA's submission focuses on aligning the Strategy with national and EU environmental legislation, emphasising that fisheries management plans, infrastructure projects and spatial measures must not undermine Natura 2000 sites, Marine Protected Areas or obligations under the Water Framework Directive, Marine Strategy Framework Directive and Nature Restoration Regulation. ERA calls for systematic early consultation on proposals relating to trawling zones, fish processing infrastructure, port upgrades, berthing facilities and other coastal or marine developments with potential environmental impacts.

ERA further calls for broader consideration of bycatch across fishing gears and sensitive species and stresses the need for cumulative impact assessments where multiple fishing activities overlap in the same maritime space. It supports initiatives promoting sustainable materials, reducing marine litter, managing recreational fisheries through evidence-based measures and shifting consumption towards seasonal, underutilised or invasive species, provided these remain consistent with environmental objectives. Overall, ERA emphasises strong inter-institutional coordination to ensure fisheries policy implementation does not undermine environmental protection.

The Malta Skin Divers Club (MSDC) focuses on recreational fishing, gear selectivity and ecosystem balance. While supporting the Strategy's sustainability objectives, it argues that recreational fishing requires clearer regulation and enforcement. MSDC proposes mandatory licensing and structured training for recreational gear, including spearfishing, delivered through recognised clubs and stresses that spearfishing is a highly selective, non-commercial activity that should be formally recognised as such. It further recommends bag limits for recreational fishing, stricter enforcement against illegal fish sales and enhanced monitoring to prevent unfair competition with professional fishers.

In relation to professional fishing practices, MSDC raises significant concerns about the environmental impacts of certain gears, particularly lampara fishing, trawling and specific net types. It proposes substantial restrictions or a gradual phase-out of practices considered destructive to marine ecosystems, especially those affecting small pelagic species at the base of the food chain. The Club also supports carefully designed marine protection zones that balance conservation with proportional access, including rotational closures and ongoing scientific assessment of stock recovery. Additional proposals include seasonal protections for vulnerable species during breeding periods, stricter enforcement of minimum fish sizes, improved maritime safety for fishers, incentives to control invasive alien species and inter-authority collaboration to reduce marine litter through practical measures such as port waste collection infrastructure. These four submissions collectively call for the National Fisheries Strategy to evolve into a more robust, science-based and socially inclusive framework. Shared priorities include stock recovery, a transition to low impact fishing, strengthened governance and enforcement, improved data collection and closer alignment between fisheries policy and environmental and equality objectives. While differing in emphasis, the submissions converge on the need for a long term, precautionary approach that safeguards marine ecosystems while ensuring fairness, resilience and viability for those who depend on them.

A forward-looking proposal by Marsaxlokk Heritage focused on the decarbonisation and electrification of the fishing fleet, particularly traditional vessels. Respondents supported national grant schemes for electric propulsion, shore-side charging infrastructure and pilot projects for heritage boats, presenting these measures as a means to reduce emissions and operating costs, preserve cultural assets and engage younger generations through training, restoration initiatives and sustainable innovation.

8. Your assessment and the Government's decision (list the Government's decisions).

The consultation process for the National Fisheries Strategy 2026–2036 generated broad and constructive feedback from professional fishers, recreational fishers, the wider public and governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. Overall, the feedback reflects strong engagement and a shared understanding that Malta's fisheries sector faces significant environmental, economic and governance challenges that require coordinated, long term and evidence-based responses. While perspectives varied, there was broad alignment on the need to strengthen sustainability, improve enforcement and data collection and ensure that fisheries policy remains socially inclusive and environmentally responsible.

Professional fishers generally acknowledged the Strategy as a useful long-term framework developed through bottom-up engagement. Their feedback focused on practical implementation issues, including infrastructure gaps, rising operating costs, administrative burdens, market pressures and the interaction between professional and recreational fishing. Recreational fishers emphasised governance, licensing clarity, effort regulation and fairness across fishing categories, with broad support for transparent licensing regimes,

particularly for tuna, longline and charter operations and for management decisions grounded in scientific evidence and structured consultation.

The online public consultation reinforced concerns about declining fish stocks, especially in near-coastal areas and cumulative environmental pressures. Contributors highlighted the need for clearer differentiation between commercial and recreational fishing, cautioning against uniform regulatory approaches and expressed support for geographically targeted measures, Marine Protected Areas and stronger enforcement, provided these are proportionate, scientifically informed and effectively monitored. Calls for improved transparency, timely policy responses and mandatory catch recording across sectors were recurring themes. Submissions from public authorities and NGOs placed fisheries policy within broader environmental, equality and governance frameworks. Key issues raised included gender mainstreaming and workforce inclusion, stronger safeguards against overfishing, ecosystem-based management, alignment with national and EU environmental legislation, early inter-institutional consultation and clearer regulation of recreational fishing and fishing gear.

Taken together, the feedback demonstrates general support for the direction of the Strategy, while highlighting the need for further clarification, refinement and structured implementation. Much of the feedback relates to operationalisation, governance arrangements and sequencing rather than the Strategy's core objectives. The Department is reviewing the submissions in detail and will consider how the issues raised can be addressed through clarifications, complementary measures, phased implementation or future policy instruments, within existing legal, scientific and administrative constraints. The Department remains committed to continued dialogue with stakeholders to support workable solutions that advance sustainability, fairness and the long-term viability of the fisheries sector.

Implementation

9. When you intend to implement the decisions

The National Fisheries Strategy 2026–2036 is scheduled to undergo a Strategic Environmental Assessment, to which the public consultation process will contribute. Following the completion of this assessment, the Strategy will be revised accordingly and submitted for Cabinet approval, which is currently envisaged for Q3–Q4 2026. Implementation will commence once approval is granted.

Contact Details

If you have any questions regarding this response, please contact: infofisheries.mafa@gov.mt

Annex A: List of respondents

Feedback from In-person Consultations:
Private Individuals: 60
Feedback from Online Public Consultation Portal
Private Individuals: 11
Environment and Resources Authority: 1
Bird Life Malta: 1
National Commission for the Promotion of Equality: 1
Malta Skin Divers Club: 2
Marsaxlokk Heritage: 1