



# Thrive in Fishing Hooked on Success



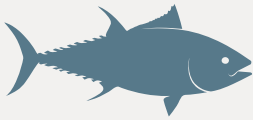


# Life at Sea

## Hard Work, Big Rewards

Life at sea isn't easy. It demands a unique blend of endurance, skill and determination. *Thrive in Fishing* is a joint initiative from The Seafarers' Charity and The Nautical Institute to support people considering a career in the UK fishing industry.

This guide shares stories from fishers with years of experience, showing what success looks like and how the fishing scene in the UK has changed over time. This report outlines what it takes to start as well as run a small-scale fishing business, focussing on vessels under 24 metres usually operated by a small crew of one to five people. This guide takes you through the challenges, the chances to grow and how to make sure that your business is sustainable for the future.



*“Fishing has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. I was just three or four years old when I started going to sea with my dad. My granddad started fishing at 14 and is still working at 85! Their passion and hard work have been passed down to me, and I’m proud to continue the family tradition. Back then, it wasn’t about business—it was about the love of the sea<sup>1</sup>.”* **Will**

# The Journey Begins

## Real Fisher Stories

*“I first went to sea at five or six, working with my dad on his 40-foot creel boat. I spent my childhood tying lobsters and hauling creels. Later, I worked on whitefish boats...”*

*“What I enjoyed most was being self-employed, making decisions and solving problems. The work was challenging but rewarding, involving everything from managing the crew and equipment to predicting weather and ensuring we sold our catch at the best price.” **Lee***

Lee’s story is typical of the grit and passion needed for success in fishing. This career is built on hard work, continuous learning and a deep respect for the sea.

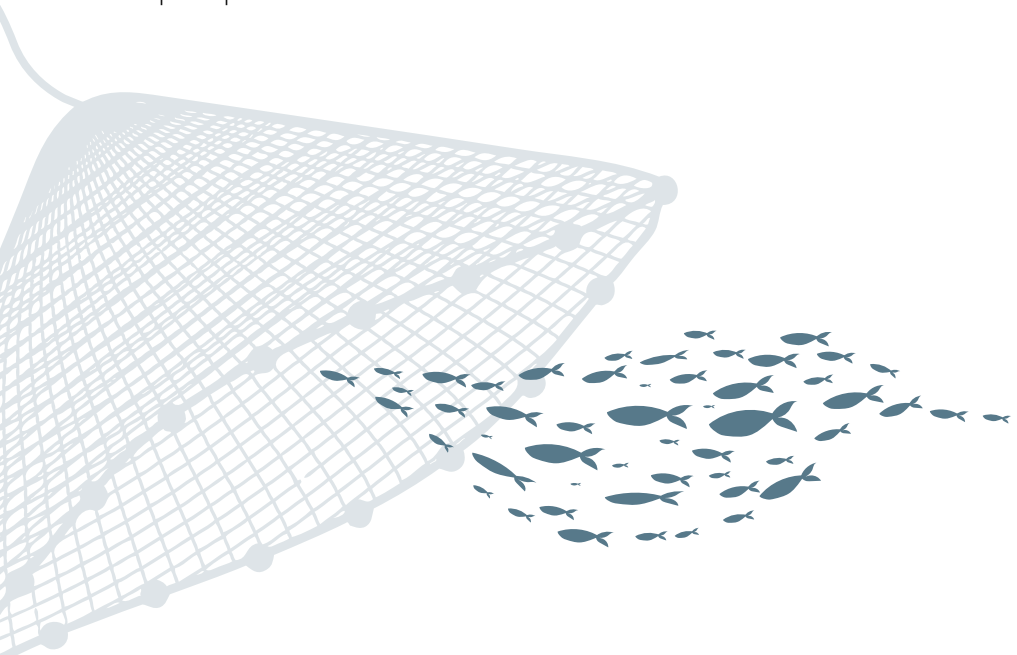







Image provided by Seafish



# Upskilling and Planning for the Future

It might feel like training is something you can put off, especially when you could be out earning a living. However, investing in your own skills as a fisher gives you a competitive edge and adds value to your product when selling your catch.

The UK fishing fleet has around 4,000 registered vessels employing 6,500 fishers. Approximately 79% of these vessels are under 10m in length. Typically, they are family owned, day-trip operations while the larger 15-24m vessels may have up to six crew and be at sea for up to five days. These vessels offer comfort, with Wi-Fi, good food, plenty of time off and a genuine career progression that can lead to real opportunities.



*“UK fishing has changed over the decades: with fishing gear innovation such as propeller technology and electric fishing. Technology and legislation have changed. The more accidents that happened, the more people had to take notice.”*

**Steve**

To crew these vessels, the modern fishing industry demands a highly skilled workforce. Supermarkets in particular look for fish caught using sustainable practises by professionally and safely operated vessels that strive to meet environmental goals. That means:



### **Safety training**

Safety is a top priority. Rigorous training alongside understanding and following industry safety standards are essential.



### **Technical expertise**

Keeping up to date on the latest navigation technology, vessel maintenance and fishing techniques.



### **Business know-how**

Developing strong business acumen, starting with a grasp of capital investment, budgeting and finance for equipment upgrades. Financial management, marketing and sales are all skills worth having. Not to mention keeping up with the admin.

In the long run, you might choose to stay at sea, maybe owning your own vessel, or you might look at taking a related position on shore. Either way, the right skills and knowledge will put you in a position to succeed and developing them will take you even further.

# Staying Safe

Fishing is a high-risk job, but all risks can be managed. Understanding regulations, safety standards and fishing quotas, are important elements of being a professional. Meeting the rules and regulations is the starting point, but keeping up with industry initiatives can take you further. Embracing higher standards keeps you safe and keeps your crew safe.

*“Safety is increasingly vital, everyone watches out for one another, especially in rough seas. Regular updates from regulators and port authorities further improve the culture of safety in the industry.”* **Lee**

For larger operations, understanding regulations such as ILO Work in Fishing Convention (2007) C188, quotas and licensing requirements are all necessary components of a good reputation that is hard won but easily lost. Non-compliance can attract substantial penalties.

*“Everything’s safety now. As a director of a company, you can be liable. Safety inductions and crew familiarisation, paperwork: 20 to 30 years ago, safety inductions would have been laughed at.”* **Steve**



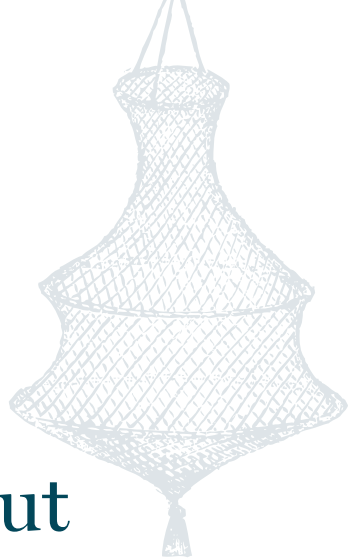




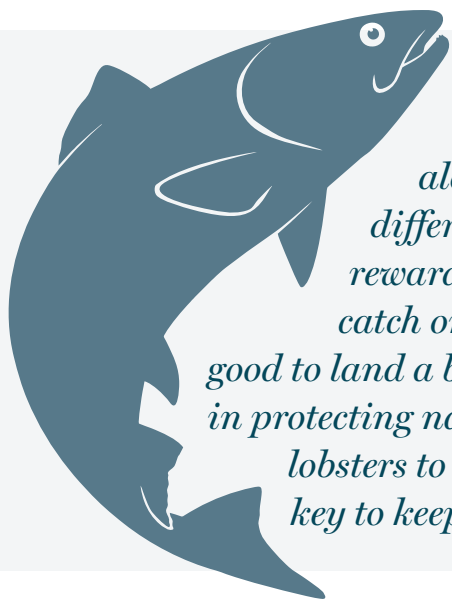
Images provided by Seafish

# Building Your Fishing Business

## A Smart Move for Fishers Starting Out



What sets successful fishers apart is their ability to balance income opportunities with the inherent risks of the trade. That makes fishing a great career choice for entrepreneurs looking to develop their own business. You're not just catching fish or running a boat; you're building a business.



*"Today, I mainly fish for crab and lobster, and I usually work alone. Every day on the water is different, and that's what makes it so rewarding. You never know what you'll catch or what the day will bring. It feels good to land a big haul, but I also take pride in protecting nature. I always return pregnant lobsters to the sea because sustainability is key to keeping this way of life alive." Will*

For small vessels especially, achieving financial stability means having a sound business plan. Some points to consider:

**Product focus**

Specialising in specific fish, such as whitefish or lobsters, can make you more competitive in the market.

**Vessel choice**

Selecting the right vessel for the type of catch you want to target is key for efficiency.

**Tech savvy**

Explore what cutting-edge technology can offer to improve navigation and locate fishing grounds.

**Eco-friendly practices**

Sustainable fishing is the future. Looking after the environment ensures the industry and your business can thrive long term.

**Financial planning**

Be smart about your money. Consider healthcare, pensions and how to maintain your income.

**Training the crew**

Invest in your team by prioritising safety and ongoing learning.

# Investing in Your Future Success Beyond the Catch

Fishing isn't just about hauling in the catch—it's about building strong community relationships, developing a skilled workforce and running a business responsibly.

*“We always chose to hire local lads. We bought supplies locally, used local engineering firms for repairs, and worked with local accountants, contributing to the wider community.”* **Lee**

By bringing fresh talent into the industry, new career paths are opened and fishing communities are kept alive across the UK. Whether afloat or ashore, investing in building fishing communities is investing in the future.

*“What did I find most rewarding? Getting the opportunity to become an owner. I worked for an owner who gave me the opportunity to buy into the boat. By my early 30's, we had three 40m beamers. It was a massive challenge and commitment.”* **Steve**





# A Rewarding Journey

*“After 16 years of fishing, I still love the moments that make it special, watching the sunrise, figuring out where the lobsters are, and being my own boss. Fishing isn’t just about catching; it’s about respecting and understanding nature.” Will*

Fishing offers a unique blend of challenge and reward. It’s a career for those who are passionate about the sea, appreciate the value of hard work and are committed to sustainable practices. Whether it’s owning your own boat or moving into a professional shore position, there’s real potential for growth. It’s not for everyone, but if you’ve got the drive, it can lead to serious rewards, both financial and personal.

*“Looking back, the only thing I wished I had done - I wish I had taken my Class 1 certificate earlier. That’s why I praise the Marine Society for giving me the scholarship [Slater Fund] to go for it. Without getting a Class 1, I wouldn’t have got into the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. I’m now a Marine Superintendent.” Steve*

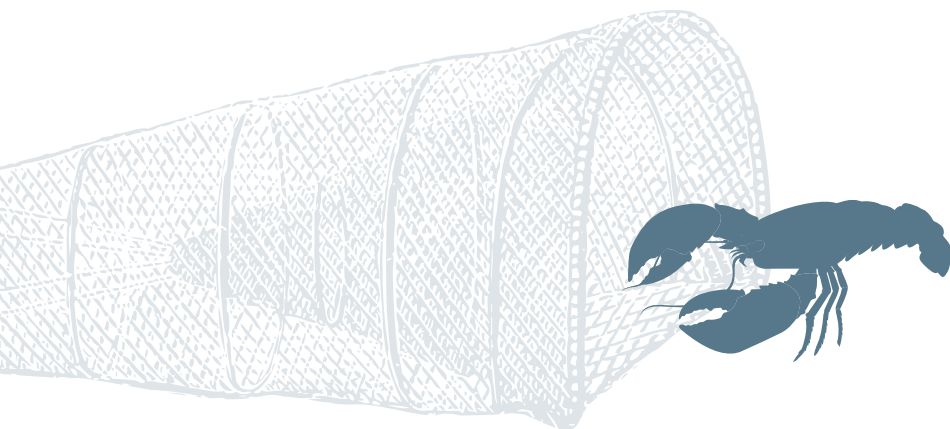


# An Opportunity Waiting

The *Thrive in Fishing* initiative is all about giving you the knowledge and tools to succeed. With the right mindset, a focus on safety and an eye for innovation, the UK fishing industry and UK fishers can continue to thrive for generations to come.

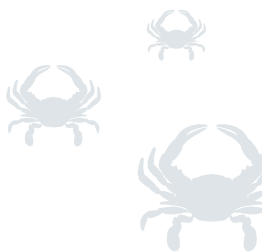
*“I loved the camaraderie, you know everyone, every boat, every crew in the area. What helped me to succeed? I saved hard when I was young, and I had the determination to succeed. If there’s anything I wish I had known back, then? I don’t think too much about it; I just went with my gut instinct. If it’s in you it’s just there. It’s a career of long hours and big risks. It isn’t for everyone, but for those that take the chance, few look back with regret.”* **Lee**

*“Fishing is effort related: the more effort you put in, the bigger the reward.”* **Steve**



In a joint statement, Deborah Layde, Chief Executive of The Seafarers' Charity, and John Lloyd, CEO of The Nautical Institute, declare:

*“A thriving fishing industry is built on the foundation of decent work, fair pay and a secure environment for all fishers. The full adoption of the ILO’s Work in Fishing Convention 188 is essential to establish these baseline protections, enabling individuals to truly thrive in fishing.”*



## With thanks to:

Lee Groat  
Steve Rogers  
Will Jaycock

Want to find out more? These organisations offer support through training and guidance, as well as potential funding solutions.

### For further information on careers in fishing

Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (AIFCA)  
[www.association-ifca.org.uk](http://www.association-ifca.org.uk)

Cornish Fish Producers Organisation  
[www.cfpo.org.uk](http://www.cfpo.org.uk)

Fishing Into The Future  
<https://www.fishingintothefuture.co.uk>

Marine Management Organisation  
[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/marine-management-organisation](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/marine-management-organisation)

Marine Society – Nautilus Slater Fund  
[www.marine-society.org/slater-scholarship](http://www.marine-society.org/slater-scholarship)

Maritime and Coastguard Agency  
[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/maritime-and-coastguard-agency](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/maritime-and-coastguard-agency)

North East Fishermen's Training Association  
[www.nefta.info](http://www.nefta.info)

Scottish Fishermen's Federation [www.sff.co.uk](http://www.sff.co.uk)

Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association  
[www.scottishpelagic.co.uk/safety-training](http://www.scottishpelagic.co.uk/safety-training)

Sea Fish Industry Training Association (Northern Ireland) [www.sfitani.co.uk](http://www.sfitani.co.uk)

Seafish [www.seafish.org](http://www.seafish.org)

Seafood Cornwall Training  
[www.seafoodcornwalltraining.co.uk](http://www.seafoodcornwalltraining.co.uk)

South Devon College (Fisher Apprenticeship)  
[www.southdevon.ac.uk](http://www.southdevon.ac.uk)

South Western Fish Producer Organisation Ltd  
[www.swfpo.org.uk](http://www.swfpo.org.uk)

The Fishing Porthole  
[www.fishingporthole.co.uk](http://www.fishingporthole.co.uk)

The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations [www.nffo.org.uk](http://www.nffo.org.uk)

The Western Fish Producers' Organisation  
[www.western.fish](http://www.western.fish)

UK Seafood Fund  
[www.gov.uk/guidance/uk-seafood-fund](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/uk-seafood-fund)

Women In Fisheries  
[www.women-fisheries.com](http://www.women-fisheries.com)

Young Fishermen Network – see CFPO

<sup>1</sup>In February 2022, The MCA published a Guidance Note that provides information about the minimum age for fishermen and the protection of young persons (under 18 years) working on board UK fishing vessels. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/msn-1882-f-ilo-work-in-fishing-convention-minimum-age/ilo-work-in-fishing-convention-2007-minimum-age-and-protection-for-young-persons-on-fishing-vessels>





The vision of **The Seafarers' Charity** is to create 'a world where seafarers and their families are valued and free of need and disadvantage'. We've been improving their lives since 1917, when we launched as the King George's Fund for Sailors (KGFS).

Conceived by far-sighted ship owners and officers, and championed by King George V, the KGFS is a key strand of our DNA and something of which we're very proud. Today, The Seafarers' Charity is an evolving, forward-looking charity – building on past successes but expanding our capabilities to make a genuine difference.

For more information visit <https://www.theseafarerscharity.org/>

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The **Nautical Institute** is an international membership organisation for maritime professionals, working at sea and ashore, and a leading authority in the maritime industry.

We are an educational charity dedicated to promoting the highest standards of professionalism, best practice, competence and safety in the maritime industry by providing professional development opportunities, training, publications and accreditation.

For more information visit <https://www.nautinst.org/>