

Responsible Fishing Scheme (RFS)

Questions and answers

What is it?

The RFS is a membership scheme for commercial fishing vessels.

What does it do?

The RFS helps vessels identify themselves to customers across the supply chain as being amongst the best and most responsible vessels in the UK fishing fleet.

How does it do it?

The strength of the RFS lies in the fact that it is somebody else who is confirming to vessel customers that vessels and their catches are the best of the best. Customers buying from member vessels can then use this fact to show their customers that they source from the best vessels landing the highest quality catch.

Do other industries have similar schemes?

Yes, virtually all other animal food production industries in the UK already have schemes. The fish catching side of the UK seafood industry is one of the last to have a system to independently identify and recognise the best operators.

Does the on shore supply chain have anything similar?

Yes; nearly all of the large, major multiple outlet supermarket suppliers and many of the smaller companies that supply them have factory equivalent schemes, without which many would lose their contracts for supplying the supermarkets.

Are these sorts of schemes just a UK thing?

No; far from it. Fish and shellfish are globally traded commodities. Many nations including many of the UK's major competitors have or are developing similar schemes for their fleets to satisfy the growing demands of customers. For this reason the RFS is a scheme of growing importance for the UK fleet as it will ensure that it can compete with other fleets catching similar species and supplying common markets.

Do countries outside of the UK recognise schemes such as the RFS?

Yes; The pressures and scrutiny put on seafood suppliers by organisations dedicated to the protection and preservation of the marine environment are global in nature. In consequence sourcing policies of companies around the world are increasingly taking into consideration the behaviours and attitudes of the vessels that supply them.

What things are looked at?

The RFS is a vessel based scheme so looks at things that vessels do during their fishing operations. The main areas that are looked at include environmental interaction and impact, catch handling and storage practices, vessel, equipment and crew hygiene standards and crew knowledge, awareness and qualifications.

Will vessels have to do lots more work to reach the standards required?

Provided that vessels already operate to a good standard no. Many vessels already comply with most parts of the scheme and therefore will already be near the standards required. Depending on the type of fishing operations undertaken there may be a small amount of additional paperwork but blank documents are provided to make things easy.

How do vessels train for and get assessed for the RFS?

The easiest way to explain this is by comparing the RFS to car driving tests and MOT's. To start with each vessel is given an instructor, known as a coach who will work with the vessel and identify activities and areas that need working on prior to assessment. This part of the process can be likened to driving lessons and a pre- MOT, the coach providing the vessel with a report to help vessels prepare themselves for their full test and MOT.

The second part is undertaken by independent inspectors who will look at exactly the same things as discussed with the coach. There should be no hidden surprises as both the coach and the inspectors use the same assessment forms. As long as the vessel has taken note of the report and advice given by the coach it should pass it's test and MOT with flying colours.

How often do I need to be "tested"?

The independent auditors need to "test" vessels approximately every three years. In between these tests vessels have to undergo mid term MOT's to make sure things are still OK. These mid term MOT's are usually undertaken by coaches, which may, or may not be the same as the coaches who originally worked with the vessels.

Perhaps most importantly how much will it cost me?

All of the pre MOT coaching and associated documents **are provided free of charge** by Seafish. The only elements that are charged for are the independent assessments and the mid term MOT's. Costs vary according to the size of the vessel and the number of other vessels assessed and on every occasion every effort is made to minimise the costs to each vessel. Before any discounts the costs vary from approximately £1.10 per week to £3.30 per week, the latter price being the maximum chargeable and very rarely applied.

Are there any discounts/rebates available to reduce the costs of the assessment?

Yes, Seafish currently have funds to provide a 50% discount to first time entrants to the scheme. This discount is available to all vessels up to and including March 2012. In addition Seafish have also secured additional funding from the Shipowners Mutual Protection Society who are supporting skippers of applicant vessels who have attained their Seafish under 16.5m skippers ticket. This discount is offered in addition to the 50% discount above and is currently £75 per vessel. ***Where both these rebates apply the costs per week typically reduce to less than 50p per week (exclusive of VAT and tax rebates which will reduce costs further)***

Can vessels claim back the costs of joining the RFS as a business expense?

Generally yes, but individual vessels should check with the appropriate authorities. Vessels or companies that are VAT registered can claim the VAT back and costs associated with joining are generally recognised for tax purposes.

What do I get when I qualify?

Upon qualification every vessel (unless declined) is provided with 2000 RFS vessel tallies for use on displayed catches, which are worth approximately £40 per vessel. These carry the vessel name and PLN and also the RFS logo to enable buyers to easily identify RFS catches in the market place.

In addition each vessel is provided with a Seafish managed webpage on the dedicated RFS website. The pages contain information about catch species, ports of landing, agent and vessel contact details together with links to sites as requested by the member vessels (eg restaurants/hotels that sell their catch). In addition pictures and information that will assist in raising the profile of the vessel can also be posted. (see www.seafish.org/rfs for examples).

Also each vessel is provided with a uniquely numbered certificate, an adhesive RFS logo for display on the vessel or vehicles, an RFS flag and lapel badge. Although not free members can also purchase RFS themed T shirts, sweatshirts and hats etc which can be used by staff where vessels or their agents want to further publicise their links with the RFS

Finally should vessels wish, they (or their agents) can be provided with a series of promotional leaflets currently printed in English, Spanish, French and Italian which can be used to promote the RFS with either UK or non English speaking customers.

Are there any other benefits?

Yes RFS qualified vessels have exclusive access to vessel and crew insurance premium discounts. Subject to claims history vessels will automatically qualify for a 7.5% reduction in premiums on like for like hull and machinery insurance policies when they qualify for the RFS. In addition further savings of an extra 2.5% can be achieved (total 10%) when personal and indemnity insurance are jointly lodged with the insurance provider. For more information contact Phillip Oliver at Phillip@DOAinsurance.co.uk

In addition Seafish periodically produces RFS newsletters that are distributed to every UK fish and shellfish wholesaler, processor, importer and distributor (as well as other aligned businesses) to help raise the profile of the scheme.

Will I get more money for my catch?

As Seafish have no control over the market place this cannot be guaranteed. Some vessels have secured consistently higher prices for their catch as a direct result of being in the RFS but not all. Perhaps of growing importance is the increased chance of continued access to markets should customers elect to include membership of schemes such as RFS in their future sourcing policies. Similarly membership of schemes such as the RFS may in future present preferential opportunities for vessels to engage in research and development projects, or access to fishing grounds.

How do I apply to join or get more information?

In either event please contact Jim Hyam on j_hyam@seafish.co.uk or phone on 07876035749.

In addition information can be obtained by visiting either the Seafish main website www.seafish.org or the RFS website at www.seafish.org/rfs