



**AERA Committee – The Shellfish Gathering (Conservation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 (SR 2026/1) - Northern Ireland Marine Task Force (NIMTF Briefing – Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2026**

- Aware that many people hand-gather periwinkles in Strangford Lough and other areas - e.g. Belfast Lough where there is already prohibitions in place. Focusing solely on Strangford Lough has the potential to push intertidal hand-gatherers further afield which exacerbates the data around collections in areas where we are minimal to data deficient. (Belfast Corporation Act, 1930, specifically Section 42)

- Everyone doing this across the year can quickly become unsustainable for wild populations as the industry is currently unregulated and guarantees increased pressure on available food webs and food sources for intertidal species.

- Wild populations are drivers of food webs to support intertidal species such as waders and seabirds which are facing declines ([Seabird Count, 2023](#) and [State of Nature Report, 2023](#))

- Closed season is based on the Irish Sea influencing reproductive seasons, meaning January - April for us, whilst the period is different for rest of the UK. AFBI holds the exact specifics on this seasonality shift.

- This closed season going ahead supports current gathering, whilst supporting food webs - providing an ecosystem-based approach, as required under the [Joint Fisheries Statement \(JFS\) 2022](#)

- Periwinkles are only part of the picture, needs regulations in place for other species which are hand-gathered: Oysters, Blue mussels, cockles and razorclams – as highlighted within our response to the [Amendments to Annex A of the Joint Fisheries Statement \(2024\) Consultation](#) and the [Call for Evidence on Intertidal Hand-Gathering of Shellfish in Northern Ireland \(2022\)](#)

- These other species will be addressed through work on the Intertidal Hand-Gathering of Shellfish FMP, published in 2027, of which NIMTF continue to be a stakeholder representing the impacts to the marine environment.

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