

# Supporting the Development of Ireland's Seafood Processing Sector

## **BIM's Work Programme 2025-2027**



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland



Arna chomhchistiú ag  
an Aontas Eorpach  
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# Introduction



BIM's strategy 'Turning the Tide' underpins the actions and activities of the agency for the development of the Irish seafood sector

 Our mission	 Our vision
To support and enable an increase in value creation of an Irish sustainable seafood sector, across the supply chain, from catch to consumer.	We will partner with the Irish seafood sector in every possible way, with intent and urgency to identify and drive the changes needed to ensure its sustainable future. This vision is our benchmark for a new set of ambitious and far-reaching strategic goals, and for new approaches to how we will deliver these goals.

## Four strategic themes provide the direction for BIM's Work Programmes to support the seafood sector:

**Lead and nurture leadership** to become a proactive and unifying force for positive transformation. This will be supported by developing industry expertise and informed by data-driven insights.

**Deliver results with solutions that effect change.** Our people and our actions will focus on specific outcomes for the seafood sector. This will be powered by our innovation, and by fostering sectoral innovation and training.

**Invest for long-term growth as active partners to help the seafood sector reach strategic goals.** We will fund measurable change and will coordinate and collaborate with external funding sources.

**Protect our environment and our sector.** Develop a marketable sustainability standard, reduce and reuse waste, and mitigate the consequences of climate change. In short: secure the future of Irish seafood.

## **BIM's Work Programmes from 2025-2027 specifically addresses four goals within Food Vision 2030, Irelands national strategy for the Irish agri-food sector and its ambition to become a world leader in Sustainable Food Systems:**

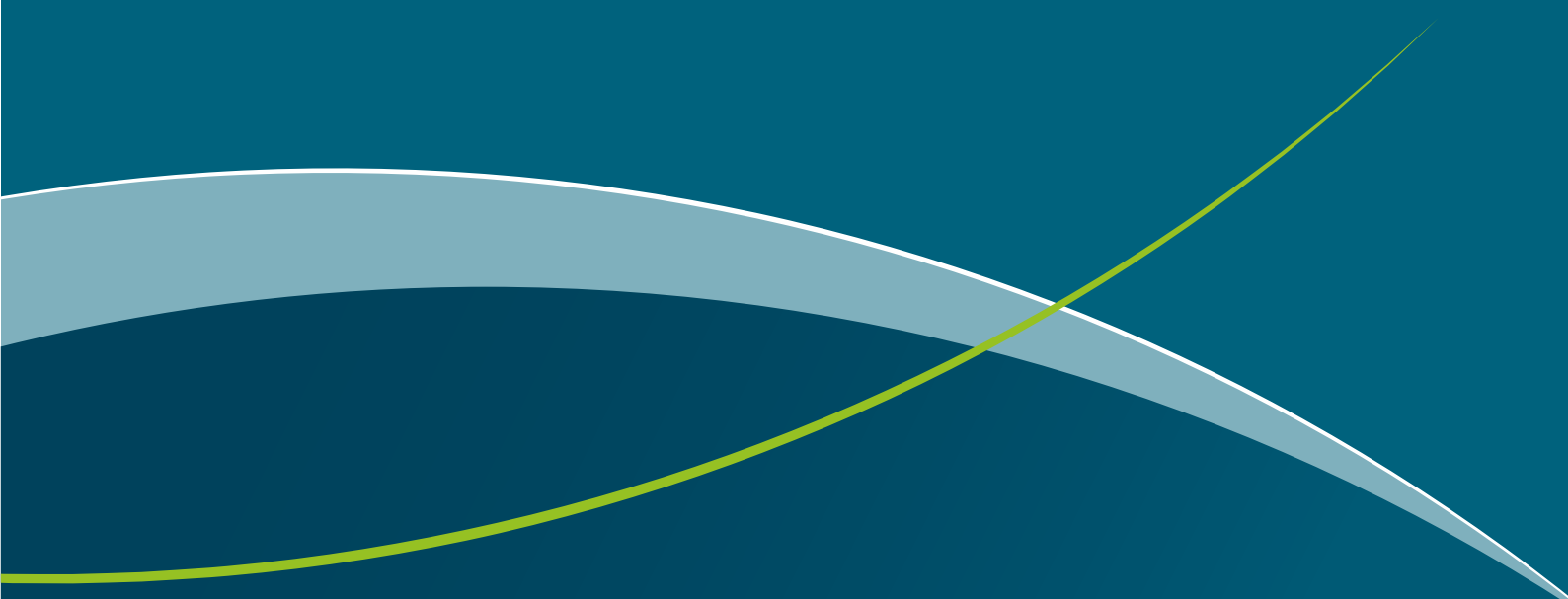
- Maintain and Improve Competitiveness and Resilience
- Create Value-Add in Food Through Insight, Innovation and Product Differentiation
- Move to a Challenge-Focused Innovation System
- Attract and Nurture Diverse and Inclusive Talent

Developing data-driven insights with targeted outcomes; identifying, trialling and implementing new innovations, practices and new thinking that delivers more for clients; delivering a renewed suite of training that gives the sector the skills needed to compete in a fast-paced environment and to attract and retain talent; significantly increasing the economic potential of co-products; communicating clearly and directly with our stakeholders. These are some of the actions set out in BIM's strategy that must be progressed to achieve this ambition.

This document details how the themes in 'Turning the Tide' will be actioned through BIM's work programmes. It provides clear and detailed targets for BIM's business development, business intelligence and innovation services. These actions will enable the Irish seafood processing sector to continue to develop and grow for a sustainable future.



# 1 Orienting the Irish Seafood Sector in a Global Market







## Fish accounts for about 17% of animal protein consumed by the global population

The global seafood sector is worth €160bn annually and is expected to reach €202bn by 2031. The global demand is rising exponentially as demand from the emerging middle class in Asia, driven by urbanisation and rising incomes, driving increasing demand for higher valued species, increased capacities for fish production, as well as increased international trade.

Total exports from Ireland were valued at €677m 2024, and although this is much lower than neighbouring countries such as the UK, Iceland and Norway, it is a very significant food sector in Ireland and one which has potential for further growth. It is heavily reliant on imports to meet demand.

Ireland's main seafood export markets are France, the UK, Italy, Spain and Nigeria. Although France is our main export market, Ireland is responsible for just 2% of France's €7bn imported seafood. With the range of products that Ireland exports, in particular organic salmon and shellfish, we are positioned in the higher end of the seafood market which exposes us to market volatility and the need for significant market support to maintain our position in this segment of the market. There is also a predominance to service the food service market as this is the niche in which these products are most sought after.

With ever more complex supply chains, disruptions due to the global context, increasing prices and cost of doing business as well as the difficulty in accessing scarce raw materials and the impact on consumer demand and preferences, the Irish seafood industry must adapt quickly to these challenges. Without swift adaptation, Ireland's seafood sector will have less bargaining power due to its smaller scale and fragmented structure and will have challenges in future-proofing its structure and growth potential.

The global demand for raw material places increasing pressure on processors to secure supply at a competitive price. This coupled with other inflated input costs such as labour and energy has continued to erode margins, which in turn reduces the opportunity to invest in innovation.

This pressure is particularly acute for the pelagic sector who have the twin pressures of significantly reduced quota available to them post-Brexit and a reductions in landings in Ireland due to a myriad of factors that are outside of the control of the processing companies.

On the demand side, there is increasingly diverse consumer and customer needs, driven by trends in consumption, quality, consumer behaviours, sustainability, and technology changes.

This creates several value creation opportunities areas for Irish seafood processors; internationalise and scale up the offer through integration, efficiencies and market responsiveness; specialise in a specific market niche or maximise the return through using technology to lower costs and valorise every aspect of the business. In all cases the use of market knowhow, appropriate technology and capital investment is required to take advantage of this new market orientation.

In addition to the issues of scarcity, internationalisation and innovation that apply globally in seafood processing, the following characteristics present additional challenges for Ireland:



## Lack of Scale

In an international context, Ireland's seafood processors are small. The number of Ireland's seafood processors have reduced over the past ten years. This is driven primarily by small enterprises leaving the sector. These small enterprises are vital to many coastal and rural communities and it is vital that supports are available to enable them to exploit these niche market opportunities. The number and scale of our larger processors are limited in number and capacity but have proven to be very innovative and competitive. For them to continue to exploit domestic and international opportunities successfully they need to continue to be competitive, innovative and scale.



## Fragmented structure of the Irish seafood sector

Fishers compete with first point of sale, who compete with processors to gain the best price on any given day, season, and year. There is strong competition within the processing sector itself. Whilst competition is healthy; combined with the relatively small scale of individual companies, this leads to a fragmented, complex supply chain that can change frequently according to price fluctuations. For potential stakeholders or investors from outside the Irish seafood sector, this can lead to a reluctance to invest as decision making and achieving common goals across the supply chain proves more difficult.



## Traditional company structure

A lack of a clear imperative to transform, often driven by family ownership structures makes it more difficult to drive change. These traditional company structures can lead to challenges in terms of growth and responding to changing customer needs.

There are also opportunities available for Ireland that can be optimised:



## Availability of capital for investment

Funds are available through the State and private sector to support businesses including the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI). ISIF is managed by the National Treasury Management Agency and has a progressive Food and Agriculture strategy that supports the development of seafood. It provides funds on a debt or equity basis, or a mixture of both, and aims to be a long-term partner to businesses it funds. The Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme operated by the SBCI encourages the growth and resilience in small and mid-cap businesses and offers loans up to 10 years at low rates and very favourable terms. The European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), established by DAFM, provides grants across the entire seafood sector.

In the private sector there have been a small number of ongoing collaborations, mergers and investments from within and outside the country. While individual transactions may be small, it is an indicator of the potential attractiveness of the sector to domestic or overseas investment.



## Innovation Mindset

Ireland made significant investment in processing capability in 2022 and 2023 and has one of the most modern seafood processing sectors in Europe. Huge strides in innovation have been made and the sector has seized on individual market opportunities at home and abroad. Irish seafood processors are well regarded internationally and have built solid relationships with international customers, albeit on a small scale. Individual companies have added world leading innovations in the use of processing technologies and automations.

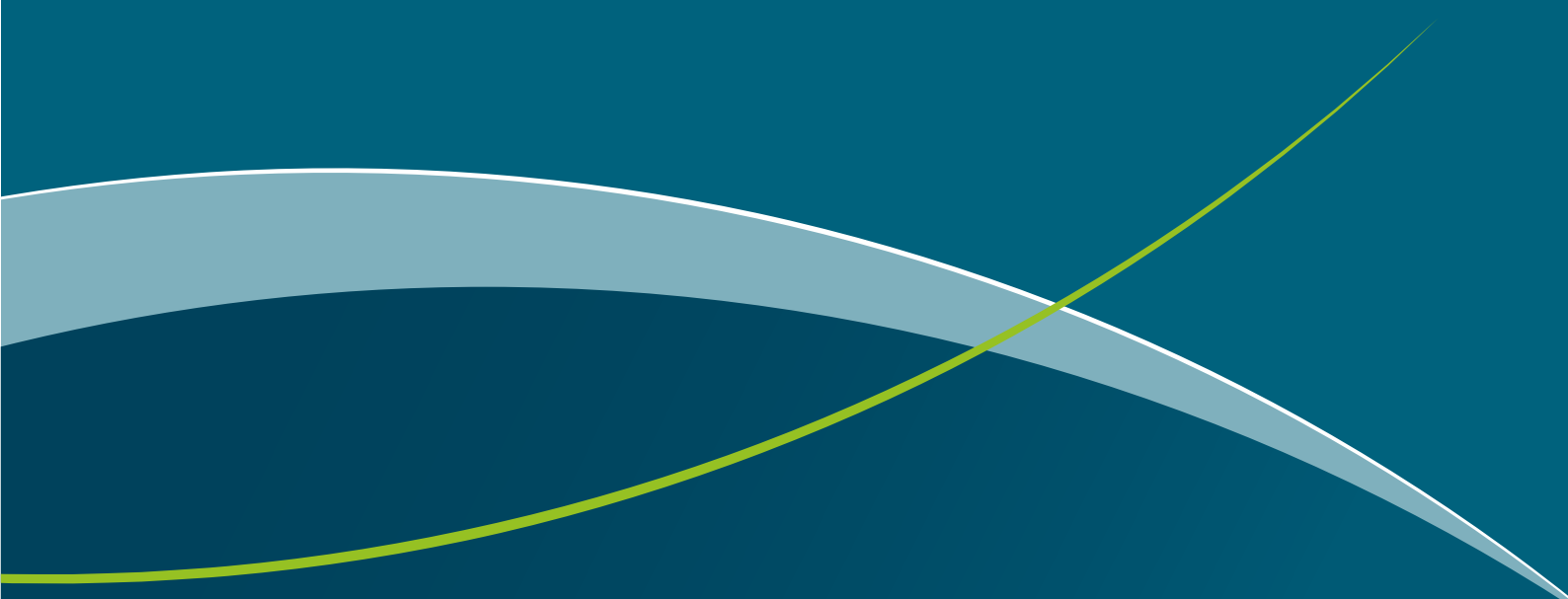


## Pathfinders

Ireland has produced many successful international food processors; from Glanbia to Kerry Foods and ABP. The experience of these pathfinder companies, and the supports provided by other state bodies such as Enterprise Ireland, can be leveraged to guide and support Ireland's seafood processors to a more profitable orientation through the right mixture of know-how, technology and capital.



## 2 Challenges and Opportunities in a Global Seafood Market





# Global Seafood Sector Challenges and Opportunities: Scarcity, Internationalisation and Innovation

The seafood sector is highly internationalised and with a value of €160bn presents numerous opportunities driven by increasing demand, evolving consumer preferences and advancements in aquaculture. With an open economy, Ireland is competing with global companies and this competition will increase as the sector consolidates. These opportunities sit within the context of the global challenges that all seafood companies face: scarcity, internationalisation and innovation. How these are navigated will dictate the successes that Irish seafood companies will have over the next five years and beyond.





## Scarcity

### Increased supply chain complexity

Consumer tastes have evolved towards a mix of local and non-native seafood with increasingly complex and globalised supply chains meeting this demand. This has created a global shift in supply chains, from a simple, linear, domestic oriented supply chain to greater complexity and integration. More complex supply chains have been developed with brokers and importers actively sourcing seafood globally. For this system to work smoothly, access to opportunities to build international supply chains is vital to protect competitiveness.

### Increased costs and scarce raw materials

Seafood is becoming a scarcer commodity with difficulty in meeting global and domestic demand causing fish prices to increase. Increased cost of doing business is also factoring into increased seafood prices.

In recent years, rising costs of energy, labour, raw materials along with Brexit and its effects on input costs is increasing the cost of fish by approximately 5% annually, with the cost of frozen fish in particular up 18.9% y-o-y in 2023 (RTÉ / Consumer Price Index September 2023 – CSO).

### Increased regulation

Consumers look for high quality, safe to eat and fresh fish with standards to ensure this. Increased regulation as a result of a globalised fishing policy approach, starting with the CFP within the EU must also be managed. The FAO Code of Practice for Fish and Fishery Products is now enforced by the Regulators with regular inspections of factories, freezers and vessels which has caused some disruption to and challenges for the catching sector and seafood processors.





## Internationalisation

### Supply chain power shifting from catchers to retailers

Changes in consumer tastes and affordability as well as the availability of other protein alternatives have allowed retailers to gain supply chain power and advocate for demands for their customers, while seeking to maintain their margins. Due to their position as the source of seafood and as fishing has been a localised business, the catching sector has traditionally held supply chain influence. As a result of the consolidation of the industry there has been a greater shift in supply chain power away from raw material suppliers. Retailers lead the way in advocating for changes in the supply chain that suit the needs of consumers – in particular changes in sustainability and traceability standards and pricing. This puts pressure on fishers, farmers and fish processors by reducing market access for products that do not meet retailers' demands.

### Consolidation has become the key to survive and thrive in the sector

Retailers of scale want to work with a single provider to increase their efficiency. Processors are willing to consolidate to build collective capital and bargaining power with retailers.

The orientation of the business landscape for the seafood sector from small scale, local, family owned businesses to fewer, larger consolidated businesses is underway. In Europe there has been a consolidation of processors since 2014, starting with the UK and now emerging in the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal as well as Ireland.

The number of seafood companies with workforces of less than 50 employees has reduced whilst, the number of seafood companies with workforces of 50-250+ employees is increasing (The EU Fish Processing Sector - Economic Report – 2022 - European Union).

### Increasing Global Demand

As the global population grows and incomes rise, particularly in developing countries, the demand for seafood will increase. Seafood is a healthy source of protein and a sustainable resource for providing a health food source for these growing populations. Consumers are becoming more health-conscious, this is likely to result in higher consumption of seafood due to its perceived health benefits.

### Emerging Markets

The Asia-Pacific region, especially China, Vietnam and the Philippines and Southeast Asia more generally show significant growth potential due to increasing seafood consumption and investment in aquaculture. There is also increasing demand in these markets for high end luxury seafood.



### **Automation for increasing efficiency and minimising labour costs**

Retailers and processors are becoming more automated to streamline supply chain management, increase efficiency and decrease costs. The seafood industry and the seafood processing sector in particular has traditionally been labour-intensive across the supply chain however advances in automated inspection, artificial intelligence and robotics are transforming food production. Automation in the seafood processing industry will minimise costs, increase throughput and yield and increase efficiency by reducing labour. AI-driven data analytics will improve consumer insights. Although skilled labour will always be needed, lower skilled labour will likely be reduced in the sector (Automation and the UK seafood industry – Seafish). Developments in aquaculture technology, such as recirculating aquaculture systems, offshore farming and genetic improvements offer significant growth opportunities to maintain supply for seafood processors.

### **Innovation towards more versatile products that give more value**

Consumer Trends are shifting towards healthier foods that are ready to cook and ready to consume. In the past “Boat to Counter” and raw fish dominated sales. There is a rising demand for ready to eat and easy to prepare seafood products. Opportunities exist in diversifying product offerings to include lesser-known species and innovative seafood products. There is an opportunity to innovate in packaging, reducing plastic use and offering eco-friendly alternatives that appeal to environmentally conscious consumers. At-home cooking is also on the rise as consumers become more price-conscious due to inflation and the rise of demand for other protein alternatives (Year of Innovation in Fish and Fish Substitutes – 2022- Mintel /Overall of The Irish Take Home Fish Market 2023 – Kantar).

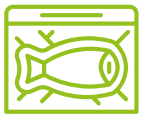
### **Requirements for more sustainable and quality practices determined by retailers**

With cost-conscious consumers trending towards own brand products, retailers are exacting in their demand for quality. Consumers are increasingly looking for sustainably sourced seafood, driving the market for certifications such as MSC (Marine Stewardship Council) and ASC (Aquaculture Stewardship Council). Quality has traditionally been managed by the fishers who knew the source and quality of the fish they caught, however the gatekeeping of quality has shifted towards the retailers who are meeting consumer demand by providing assurance on food products through quality management, traceability systems and sustainable sourcing. This demand is coupled with pressures from retailers to meet ESG targets and requirements for their suppliers to do more.

A wide array of standards can also make navigating this area complex, with different standards accepted in different markets. There is an increasing need to provide information along the whole supply chain and not rely solely on general certifications. Implementing blockchain for traceability can enhance transparency in the supply chain, ensuring the authenticity of sustainably sourced products and improving consumer trust.

There is a growing emphasis on sustainable aquaculture practices to meet demand while minimising environmental impact. Aquaculture producers for key species such as salmon and prawns have been making consumers increasingly aware of the benefits of sustainable source farmed seafood.





## Key trends shaping the future of seafood retailing

The global seafood market offers considerable opportunities for growth and innovation. Companies that invest in sustainable practices, technological advancements, and value-added products are well-positioned to capitalise on the increasing demand for seafood. Additionally, expanding into emerging markets and leveraging regulatory support can further enhance market presence and profitability.



### Need to Increase and Prioritise Efficiency

- Use of technology
- Automation where possible
- New ways of working



### Maximising customer satisfaction

- Via speed of service, convenience and seamless experience, price offers
- Wide range of products that excite consumers



### Creating value beyond price

- Improved customer experience
- Providing convenience



### More technology use

- Redefine retail digitalisation
- Innovation and new business models emerging on the retailer side



### Help shoppers achieve their health-related goals

- Making healthy choices affordable
- Support consumers achieve their health goals with healthy products range



### Embracing more sustainable solutions

- Meet ESG targets
- Embrace more sustainable solutions

Food Vision 2030 has an ambition for Ireland to become a world leader in sustainable food systems over the next decade. It sets out a range of actions to achieve a sustainable future for our seafood sector and the coastal communities. Through enhancing the sectors environmental sustainability, and the development of seafood sustainability programmes which the majority of the sector would participate in. In conjunction with a quality assurance programme.

Over the last five years seafood supply chains have become more burdened; the sector has become more burdened by increased regulation as well as the necessity for the adoption of new codes and standards.

Sustainability has become a key driver for retailers, with whom the majority of the power resides. Multiple disruptions to the supply chain over the past three years have resulted in continuing challenges in accessing scarce raw materials as well as tighter margins as the cost of operating has increased. Leading seafood businesses are more automated and are consolidating to grow and create higher value.

There is an urgent need for Ireland's seafood processing sector to react to these changes, to take advantage of the opportunities presented by it and to adapt their business models to these developments to enable the creation of consistent sustainable value for their shareholders and for the sector.

# Summary of Key Sector Challenges and Trends

## Context and consumer needs inform sector trends

### Overall Context / Industry Challenges

- Disruptions in supply chain and geopolitical conflicts
- Increased cost of doing business, increased cost of raw materials
- Scarcity of labour capacity and capabilities (post-COVID)
- Consumer/retailer price sensitivity – input cost increases cannot be reflected in consumer prices



### Consumer Behaviours, Needs and Trends

- Adapting to increased cost of living:
  - » Socialising/spending less
  - » Increased tendency to cook from scratch, if possible
  - » Seeking foods that are more versatile (frozen, meal processed)
  - » Purchasing less, seeking discounts, switching to PL
- Seeking convenience/responsiveness/seamless purchasing and consumption experience, adopting technology solutions in new categories (food)
- Quality
  - » Freshness, locally sourced and better shelf life
  - » Taste – new taste trends continually emerging
  - » Sustainably sourced, safe and traceable food
- Well-being – the importance of diet and eating well to maintain physical and mental health



### Sector Trends

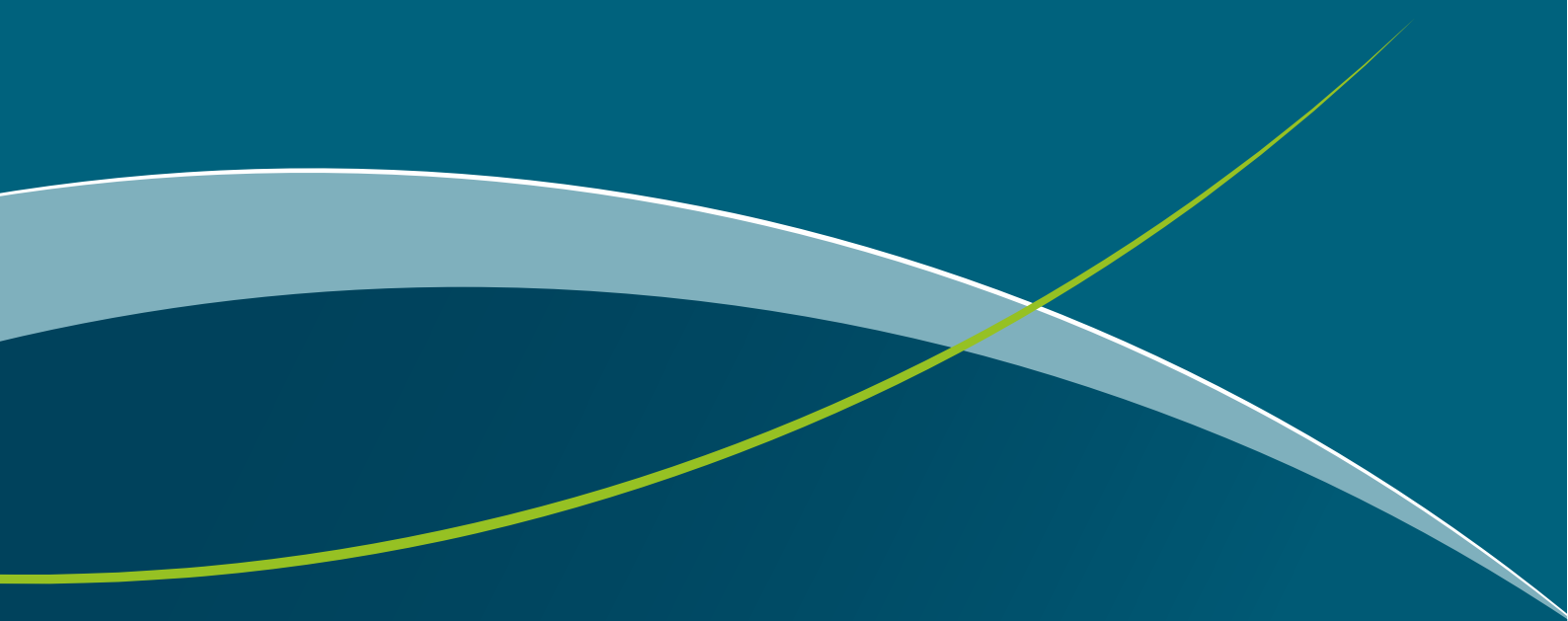
- Globalisation and more complex supply chains
- More regulations and codes being introduced
- Automation – to minimise labour costs
- Consolidation
- Scarcity of raw material – international raw material transactions as a means to gain access to processing
- Increasing sustainability practices, i.e. green badging vs long-term governance, moving towards a more focused realistic version of sustainability and working together (coalition between different parts of the supply chain etc)



### Retailer/Foodservice Behaviours, Needs and Trends

- Automation/technology – improving efficiency, consistency and cost reduction
- Convenience to maximise consumer satisfaction
  - » Speed of service, responsiveness, and price offers
  - » Broadened range of food choices/tastes, NPD
- Promoting affordable healthy choices
- Embracing and branding sustainable solutions

# 3 Ireland: A Context of Challenge and Change





# The seafood sector in Ireland is worth €1.2bn annually

Seafood is an important sector to the economy, providing almost 16,000 jobs, predominantly in coastal communities. The resilience of the sector has been thoroughly tested over the past four years with an unprecedented scale and pace of change. In addition to market changes as a result of Brexit both imports from and exports to Britain reduced and new markets have been developed, such as Japan and South Korea. Domestic sales in Ireland have remained relatively static. The structure of the sector in Ireland has also changed and is continuing to evolve.



Fall in the number of processing companies from

**161**  
in 2015  
to  
**103**  
in 2024



Total of  
**103**  
companies providing a total of  
**3,505**  
jobs



**71%**  
of the processing companies have turnover less than  
**€10m**



**70%**  
of national turnover is contributed by  
**20%**  
of the companies



Average turnover has increased from  
**€6m**  
in 2015  
to  
**€9m**  
in 2024

In 2023 the Irish seafood processing sector consisted of 103 companies providing a total of 3,505 jobs. 71% of companies have a revenue below €10m. There has been a significant reduction in the number of seafood processing companies over last decade, falling from 161 enterprises in to 2015 to 103 in 2023. Most of the companies that no longer trade are in the cohort of <€1m turnover.

The reduction is primarily a result of consolidation, lack of succession and some reclassification. The number of companies trading above €10m has increased and now turnover from the top 20% of companies account for over 71% of total turnover in the country. The average turnover has increased for the overall processing sector from c.€6m in 2015 to c.€9m in 2023.

In terms of foreign direct investment this has remained relatively low within the sector apart from some examples such as Mowi Group, Iceland Seafood International, Pelagia Seafood Group and most recently Mericq.

## Irish Seafood Companies by Turnover Category

Category	<€1m	€1m-€10m	>€10m	TOTAL
TOTAL	31	52	21	103

Supply is the cornerstone for these processing businesses and comes from three sources: aquaculture, domestic landings and imports.

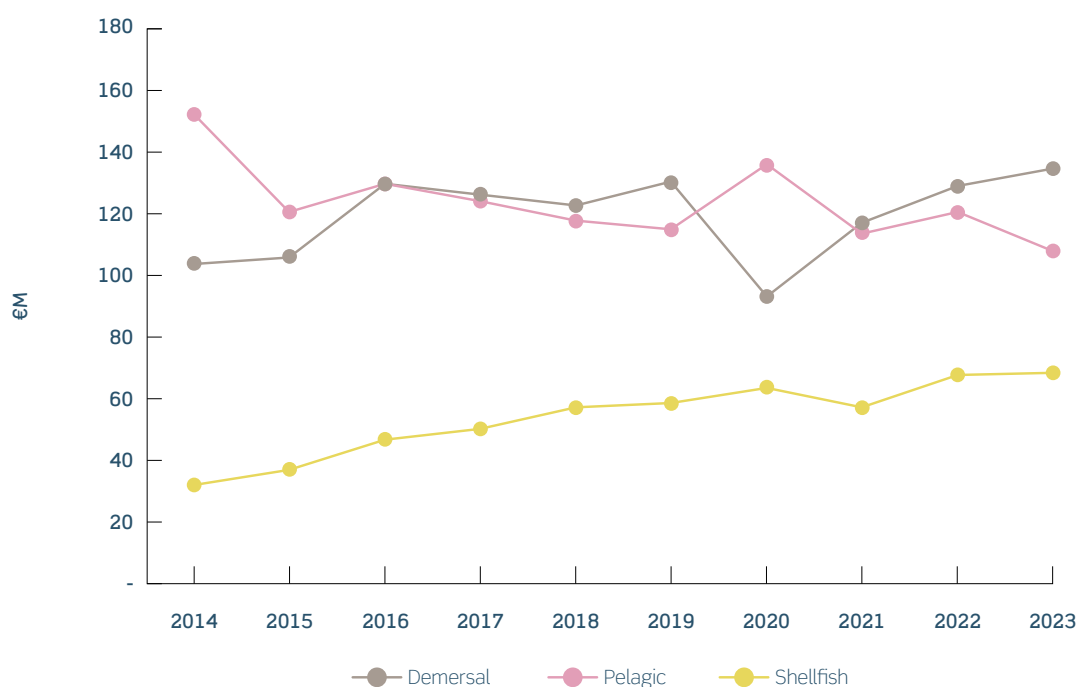
In terms of processing of Irish aquaculture products this is focused on organic salmon and mussels. Irish organic salmon is predominately exported in headed and gutted (66%) and smoked format (4%). Most of the smoked organic salmon processing is conducted by operators with less than €1m turnover. Mussel processing is limited to a few operators with the vast majority exported in a whole fresh format as is the case with oysters.

Therefore, Irish seafood processors rely predominately on wild catch and imports.

The supply base for wild catch can be divided into three main categories: shellfish, pelagic and whitefish. The graph below illustrates a significant drop in the value of all three categories in value in 2023. In contrast imports increased overall by 16%. These imports were dominated by salmon, whitefish and warm water prawns.

The reduction in raw material supply for pelagic processors is of particular concern. The volume graph shows that there is a 40% reduction from landings in 2014 when compared to 2023.

### Landings of Irish vessels (value) by key species categories

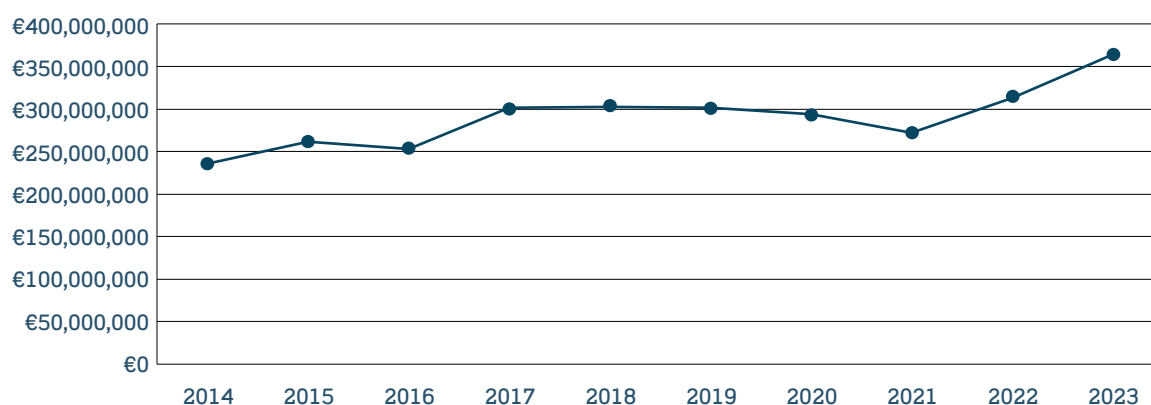


Source: BIM

The processors associated with the wild catch are focused on pelagic, shellfish and to a lesser extent whitefish. The pelagic and shellfish processors are focused mainly on export markets. Imported species supplement the whitefish processors and are mainly destined for the Irish retail and food service markets.

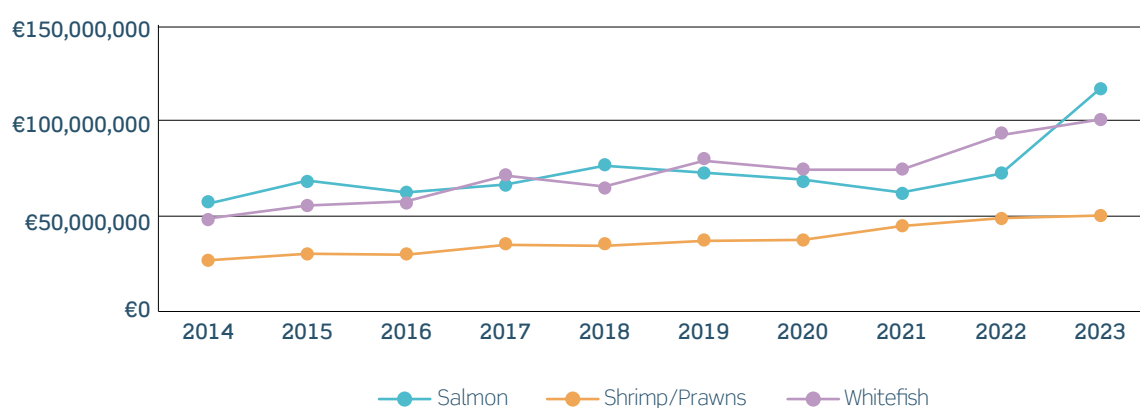


## Total Imports of Seafood to Ireland 2014-2023



Source: Eurostat

## Primary Species Imports 2014-2024



Source: Eurostat

In 2024 processors faced increasing challenges of price inflation coupled with the backdrop of ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the after-effects of Brexit. Energy costs remained stubbornly high throughout 2023, although are beginning to fall in 2025. Fuel and energy are not only a key input to food processing but also affects upstream costs - the cost of raw material - and downstream logistics and transport costs

Ireland is at near full employment; the seasonally adjusted rate of 4.4% in December 2024 places additional pressures on recruiting and retaining staff for the processing industry.

With a likely uptick in employee requirements in adjacent industries such as construction, this is a pressure point that is likely to continue. However, it also creates and opportunity for seafood companies to invest in automation of processes where possible.

The global context for seafood continues to be positive, with modest growth predicted for capture fisheries and more robust growth trajectory for aquaculture predicted to 2029 (<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/4dd9b3d0-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/4dd9b3d0-en>)

# 4 Strategic Opportunities

An abstract graphic featuring a light blue wave-like shape and a yellow line that curves upwards from left to right, set against a dark teal background.



# Strategic Market Opportunities

**The global and retail trends present significant market opportunities for Ireland.**



## Increasing Domestic Sales

Seafood sales in Ireland have remained relatively static with national seafood consumption at 23kg per person per year, just below the EU average of 24kg per head and far below the European leaders, Portugal, at 60kg per person per year. With high quality seafood being landed in ports all around the country, seafood should be eaten and enjoyed much more widely, especially around the coast. Over the past three years national consumption of seafood has plateaued and increasing the attractiveness of seafood by promoting its local nature, health benefits as a natural and healthy source of Omega 3 as well as its delicious taste is vital in increasing the demand from our domestic market. Working with Bord Bia, we will promote local seafood nationally and within our coastal communities. This will increase the visibility of the sector and put seafood at the forefront of high quality, local, sustainable food production in Ireland.

Through a Seafood Academy, and supported by BIM's fishmonger programme, we will increase understanding of retail and food service operators about seafood both from a biological and nutritional point of view, providing them with the tools in how to prepare, cook and talk to customers about seafood. Working in partnership with Bord Bia, we will assist processors both individually and collectively to strengthen the profile and footprint of their seafood brands to capitalise on market opportunities.

Supply from aquaculture is crucial to the Irish processing sector, in particular salmon and warm water prawns which dominate sales in Irish retail and food service outlets. In Ireland salmon is the key species farmed and is the number one species exported but is also a vital input of the Irish smoked salmon sector.





To grow this and other aquaculture species it is essential that local communities, and other relevant stakeholders are informed fully of the process of aquaculture. The term used for this is 'Social License'. BIM has embarked on an EU wide programme to promote the sustainable expansion of aquaculture in the European Union. BIM has been at the forefront of this campaign and will continue to develop this through programmes such as the Aquaculture Remote Classroom (ARC) and the Taste the Atlantic Initiative.

The ARC is a mobile classroom that can travel to local schools both nationally and within the communities where aquaculture is practiced and give a full and transparent educational course on all aspects of Irish aquaculture. The Taste the Atlantic is a joint project with Fáilte Ireland on aquaculture development and education aimed at the tourist industry both locally and internationally. This is also integrated with a 'Young Chef Ambassador' programme to increase the consumption of Irish grown fish and shellfish in Ireland.





## International Markets

After the domestic market Europe is the key destination for Irish seafood exports accounting for 58% of all exports by value (Eurostat 2023). While market conditions in Europe have been difficult in recent times there is an increasing demand for organic seafood (EUFOMA 2023) and an opportunity to highlight locally caught and farmed seafood of EU origin. Several national campaigns are already underway to highlight this by other member states.

There are also new market opportunities in the Asia-Pacific Region, especially China and Southeast Asia where there is significant growth potential due to increasing seafood consumption and investment in aquaculture. There is also increasing demand in these markets for high end luxury seafood. Ireland currently exports on average over 10% of the total value of its exports to Asia. In addition, several larger pelagic customers in Japan are increasingly interested in sourcing higher-specification value-add products directly from Ireland, rather than outsourcing processing to China or Vietnam.

Ireland exports in the region of €70m (Eurostat 2023) to the whole of Asia. China in 2023 imported over €18.5bn worth of seafood in 2023 (China Customs data 2023) and Japan €9.6bn (Japan Ministry of Finance 2023) worth of seafood. With increasing demand and affluence in this region there is potential to exploit this opportunity both in retail but due to our volume of supply more effectively in food service channels.

Irish seafood exports are in the high-end luxury segment of the market with key products such as organic salmon, mackerel and shellfish. The route to market for these products which are destined for retail or food service are often handled by intermediaries. While these can be beneficial at times more direct routes to market should be initiated.

Coupled with targeting sales channels that demand the quality seafood from Ireland such as speciality retailers and high-end food service outlets. Food service offers a real opportunity due to the limited volumes that Ireland can supply and the ability of exporters to offer high quality products, customer relationships and innovative offerings.

Working with Bord Bia, BIM will undertake international market studies to examine best practice internationally. Market opportunities will be driven by a suite of business development, business intelligence and innovation services that will provide clients with global market trends and insights, competitor analysis and commercial business opportunities such as mergers and acquisitions.





## Innovation and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Significant investment in innovation and new technology was made by the sector, supported by the Brexit Adjustment Reserve, in 2022 and 2023. Ireland now has one of the most modern seafood processing sectors in Europe. The sector is now well placed to optimise this investment to meet Irish and global consumer demand for ready to eat and pre-packaged fish fillets and shellfish. The market for frozen product offers huge potential, particularly in Europe. Utilising innovative technology to efficiently move product to mainland Europe and extend shelf life also offers opportunities for processors of live shellfish.

Applying artificial intelligence to develop new product specifications, formats and branding for markets and segments in a fast and highly cost-effective provides a significant commercial opportunity. BIM will work with processors to develop new product delivery systems to integrate into the virtual shelves of retailers.

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) consistently reports that many SMES do not have the scale, expertise, capability or resources to innovate internally, but that providing access to this will drive the sectors competitiveness internationally.

Companies can use these innovations to develop their employees and move them to higher value roles within their businesses, which will help with labour challenges and provide opportunities for employees. BIM will develop a comprehensive innovation programme, working in partnership with Teagasc, Bia Innovator and other relevant partners, to provide the facilities and expertise to develop innovative products and techniques sharing knowledge transfer of best practice global processing techniques including robotics, processing technology and product development.

BIM is leading a Seafood Innovation Network with regular industry meetings to collaborate on common areas of interest such as reducing operating costs and advising BIM on annual work programmes.

In addition to leading international visits to see new technology in operation, BIM is developing a programme to enable companies to cost-effectively and rapidly develop their own innovation expertise and will hold workshops and report monthly on global trends and innovations that will be of commercial importance to clients.





## Waste Valorisation

Between 30% and 50% of seafood product being processed in Ireland is categorised as waste. The price being achieved for this by processors varies hugely by species, location and season. It also varies significantly by processor. We now have an opportunity to develop a national research and development-led approach to valorising these co-products and by-products and to achieve the highest possible price for them, with opportunity to increase this revenue stream significantly.

High value products must be developed and appropriate markets for these products must be secured. Valorising these products will increase the margins achieved by processors, reduce waste, increase sustainability and diversify income.

BIM will work with Teagasc and international experts to develop world-class waste valorisation expertise and facilities to develop high value co-products that provide maximum return for this raw material.

BIM will also work with the pelagic sector in particular, to progress product opportunities for under-utilised resources such as blue whiting and boarfish.







## Strategic Development Opportunities

The following initiatives will be key in ensuring that seafood companies are in a position to capitalise on the market opportunities.



### High Quality, Sustainable Seafood

High quality product, underpinned by a robust sustainability programme, is vital in ensuring that we are optimising the raw material caught by Irish vessels. BIM will expand the successful quality programme piloted in 2023 across the industry, to provide easily accessible tools and training to vessels that delivers quality products from the source to the processor. Irish seafood industry needs to have higher sustainability standards to grow sales directly to retailers and into target markets.

The nine Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs) that provide assurance on the sustainability of Irish seafood species will be extended as necessary and will be strengthened to ensure that they meet the needs of retailers into the future. BIM will provide clear information to processors to navigate the myriad of quality schemes available to them through a Seafood Assurance Pathway tool to enable clients to confidently make the right choice for their business.





## Security of Supply

Securing raw material at the right price with an effective logistics and supply chain that is responsive and resilient business development and is a key objective for the sector. Through a business intelligence service, BIM will provide clients with market information and profiling on sourcing to give seafood processors a competitive advantage when sourcing raw material. This will be delivered through both from domestic and international markets.

BIM will map and pilot new approaches in packaging, transport solutions as well as traceability. Raw material supply from the Irish fleet is a vital resource for the majority of Irish processors, with pelagic operators relying almost entirely on this supply. Ensuring that the majority of Irish quota is returned to these processors is key to their viability. Currently 11% of the Irish catch by volume is landed outside the State (SFPA 2023). Landing as much Irish catch as possible in Ireland is critical.



## Research and Development

Working with the Marine Institute and other relevant State bodies we will look to solve biological challenges through applied research programmes and collaborative work programmes.

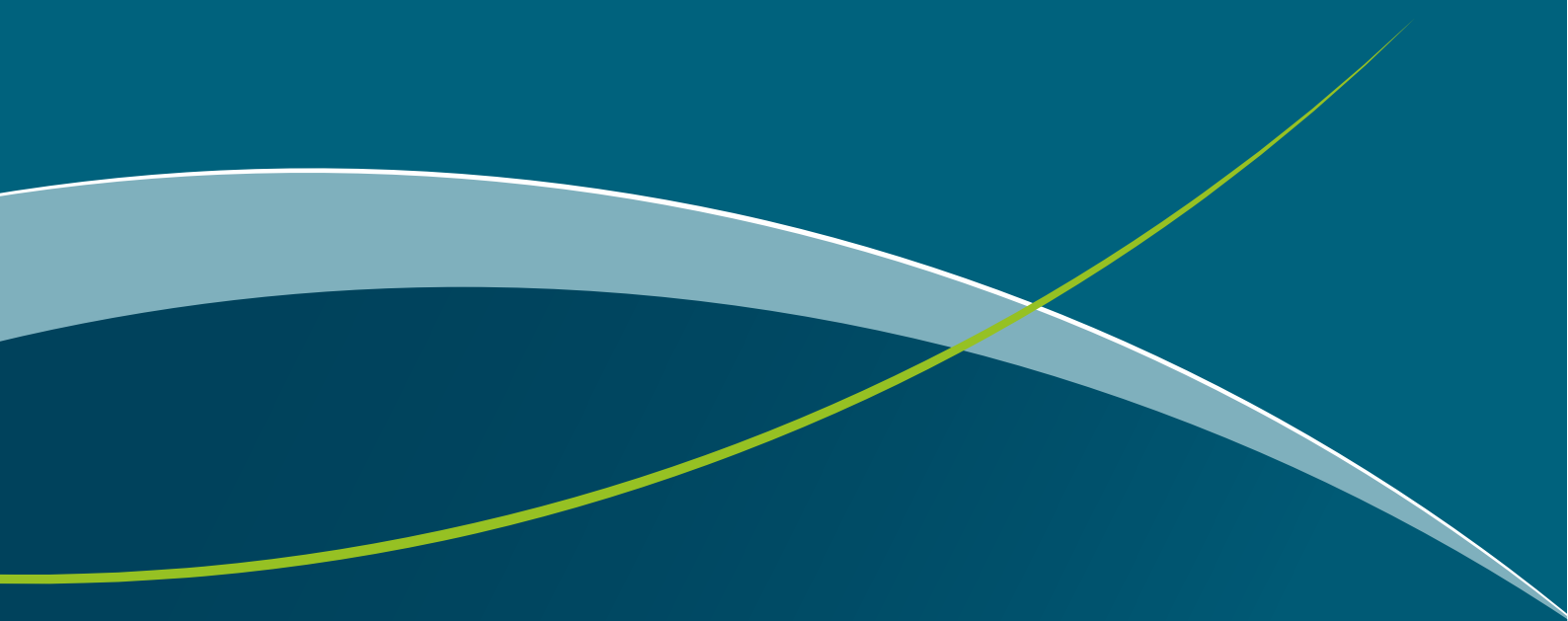


## Strengthening Seafood Businesses

Increasing revenue and profitability, improving market position and competitiveness, seizing opportunities for innovation and diversification as well as attracting the right people to both lead and operate businesses are all essential for processors to succeed in a global marketplace. BIM will work with companies on their growth strategies, facilitating access to investors and providing the technical support so that companies are in a position to take advantage of strategic market opportunities. We are committed to providing businesses with the tools to lower their carbon footprint, improving both environmental and economic sustainability. Growing the ambition and capability of the leadership teams within seafood processing companies is a key element in driving businesses forward, and BIM will provide access to the skills and expertise to enable businesses to develop this.

Attracting and retaining staff is a key priority for the sector and BIM will work with companies to identify their training needs through an innovative skills diagnostic tool, with short bespoke courses delivered to clients on their premises in a format that is accessible and cost effective. Building and nurturing a pipeline of new and prospective entrants to the sector through showing the seafood sector as an attractive and rewarding career choice for young people is a key objective of the BIM Skills Strategy 'The Next Wave'. Under this strategy we will deliver a range of programmes including a Seafood Fellowship Programme, a Careers in Seafood vehicle and innovative, engaging programmes for both Transition Year and Third Level students. We will support companies to introduce digital systems – such as blockchain – to reduce costs and provide a competitive advantage and we will run at least two trials on these new systems every year. All of these programmes will be underpinned and supported by responsive grant schemes under the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF).

# 5 BIM Work Programme





# BIM's Development Role



Bord Iascaigh Mhara helps to develop the Irish Seafood Industry by providing technical expertise, business support, funding, training and promoting responsible environmental practices. These areas of support underpin our role in developing and supporting the Irish seafood processing sector.

## **Prioritise**

BIM's work programmes aim to create impact across the whole value chain in the short, medium and long term. These work programmes have definitive goals and success measured with clearly defined key performance indicators (KPI's). BIM will also invite the right stakeholders into project collaborations to bring these work programmes to fruition.

## **Facilitate and Support**

Through the resourcing capabilities of BIM, working in partnership with other agencies, sharing learnings from other countries and sharing developments in global markets.

BIM will develop and upskill dedicated teams to provide support on Business Development, Business Intelligence and Innovation services to the processing sector.

## **Share learnings**

With implementation projects across the sector, to iterate better for further projects and initiatives.

Where projects and initiatives of scale have progressed, create communications channels and material to bring the wider sector up to speed on developments, thus creating wider buy-in to the process and ultimately bringing more participants into value-adding projects and initiatives.

BIM's role is to work alongside processors to assist them in creating resilient profitability, applying deep understanding to underpin the necessary collaboration, focus and prioritisation required to reorient Ireland's seafood processing sector.

## Implementation Programme

The three meta themes of scarcity, internationalisation and innovation have been mapped onto four delivery pillars:



### Programme Progress Reporting

BIM will report quarterly on progress against the targets and performance indicators through a briefing with industry and a written report.

### Overall targets:

Currently the Irish seafood processing sector is comprised of a total of 103 enterprises. It is estimated that the total turnover of these companies is c.€850m the ambition is to continue to increase the overall turnover in the next three years to a value of €1bn. Small niche enterprises are vital to our coastal communities and the implementation programme is directed at supporting and developing these companies. The development of larger enterprises is also critical as the top 20% in terms of turnover account for over 70% of this value.





## Securing Supply

Supply of seafood globally is limited and Europe is heavily dependent on imported raw material to drive the processing industry within the Union. Current estimates are that 72% of total supply for European seafood processors is imported from third countries (AIPCE Finfish Report 2022). Ireland is no exception with a significant reliance on imported salmon, whitefish and warm water prawns as the cornerstone species for the Irish domestic market processing industry. There are three key drivers that will help maximise the return and meet consumer demand that Irish processors can focus on:

Driver	Work Programme	Performance Indicator
Availability of high-quality catch from Irish vessels	An industry-wide vessel quality programme for handling the catch from source to processor that delivers quality product  Examine opportunities to fully utilise the Irish catch for Irish processors	A quality vessel pilot programme
		Vessel quality programme with training for all Irish whitefish vessels  Percentage of Irish catch landed to Ireland as a percentage of the total Irish catch. Currently 11% of the Irish catch is landed outside the State.
Sustainable seafood products with internationally recognised branding	Fishery Improvement Schemes in operation that meet the needs of retailers	A minimum of nine FIP's in place
	Unified seafood branding accepted by major retailers	A sustainability scheme for the Irish seafood industry
	Seafood Assurance Pathways tool to easily navigate available quality schemes	Seafood Assurance Pathways tool
Cost effective raw material sourcing from international markets	Logistics and supply chain mapping and pilot of new approaches in packaging, transport solutions and traceability	Test three new technologies annually to improve quality of Irish catch and products to the market
	Market information and profiling on sourcing - a market trend and business intelligence service to allow seafood processors a competitive advantage when sourcing raw material	A bi-monthly report on key species and market trends.
	Access to market price forecasting	Monthly market price forecasting and briefings



## Market Focused

Seafood processors have highlighted the challenges of operating in an environment where it is difficult to get real time market information to help make informed business decisions. As inflationary pressures drive consumers from the seafood category to other lower cost proteins, there are three key drivers that will improve market performance for Irish processors:

Driver	Work Programme	Performance Indicator
A world class market intelligence service	A comprehensive suite of intelligence services including global market trends and insights, consumer drivers and competitor analysis and monthly reports made available to the industry.	A dedicated business development and intelligence team focused on delivering key species and market information for clients.
		Monthly trend and innovation reports
		A digital business intelligence centre
		A bi-monthly bulletin for industry with news and updates
	International market studies to examine best practice internationally	Two international market studies annually
	Market field-trips and conferences	Three market field trips annually Three conference reports from BIM annually A calendar of events and key contacts published on bim.ie
	Advice and guidance on business development and growth strategies with a dedicated business intelligence team	A dedicated BIM team assisting companies with business development and growth

Increased promotion of seafood on the Irish market	Work in tandem with Bord Bia to develop the Irish domestic seafood market.	Develop a range of new and innovative promotional activities to drive domestic consumption of seafood both at retail and food service outlets.
		Increase seafood consumption as a direct result of these activities.
	Provide knowledge transfer to the retail and food service sectors in Ireland through a Seafood Academy, providing supports on filleting, nutritional and biological information.	A Seafood Academy with 50+ members, driving uptake in demand
	Deliver and grow the Fishmongers Training Programme	Fishmongers programme with at least 20 people trained annually
A unique identity for Irish processors to compete in the international marketplace	Support processors in partnership with Bord Bia to strengthen the profile of Irish seafood brands individually and collectively in domestic and international markets	Develop two new collective brands propositions for Irish seafood with Bord Bia



## Creative Solutions

The seafood sector is constantly evolving and Irish seafood processors are not isolated from the global trends of consolidation, product development and consumer sentiment. To keep pace in this dynamic space four key areas have been identified to support the industry.

Driver	Work Programme	Performance Indicator
Innovative processing techniques to increase market share and reduce costs	Knowledge transfer of best practice global processing techniques from robotics, processing technology and product development	Three workshops annually
	A Seafood Innovation Network to collaborate on common areas of interest such as reducing operating costs and advising BIM on annual work programmes	Seafood Innovation Network meeting three times annually
	Access to world class innovation facilities and expertise to develop innovative products and techniques	At least four seafood companies using a national innovation centre annually
	BIM-led international visits to look at innovations as part of a capacity building programme	Three international visits annually supported by accessible grant funding
	Increase innovation capability within processing companies	An effective innovation programme, supported through EMFAF grant aid
Maximise the return	Development of a National Waste Valorisation project developing high value co-products that provide maximum return	A National Waste Valorisation Programme with Teagasc
	Develop companies' by-product utilisation by examining best in class examples and implementing them in the Irish seafood processing sector	Doubling the value of by-products and co-products by 2028
Digitalisation to drive improved processes	Introduction of digital technologies that will provide a competitive advantage to the sector	Support for at least two new technologies annually
		Use of AI in plant efficiency operations to reduce costs and improve efficiency



Artificial Intelligence for competitive advantage	Use of AI for product development and consumer insights	One AI project each year in this area
	Intuitive customer portals	Development of a customer portal pilot project
	Market research and product development	Development of an AI market research and development pilot tool



## Building for the Future

The challenges of climate change, labour and investment are key concerns for companies in building a long term, sustainable seafood processing business. Four key areas have been identified to support companies in developing and executing growth strategies, while also maintaining focus on operational efficiency.

Driver	Work Programme	Performance Indicator
Measuring and reduce carbon footprint	Climate Action Programme providing the tools to companies to lower their carbon footprint	A carbon measuring tool with supporting measures. Increasing awareness about the low carbon footprint of the seafood sector.
An effective business model	BIM to assist companies on growth strategies and facilitating access to investors	BIM to provide professional mentoring support to companies to drive growth and assist in securing investment
	Effective grant schemes to support capital investment	Positive client surveys on the effectiveness of the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)
	Social License Programme including Aquaculture Remote Classroom, Taste the Atlantic and Young Chef Ambassador programmes	Social license programme with state agencies, operators and local stakeholders
Research and Development	Applied research programmes with the Marine Institute addressing biological challenges	Development of a work programme with the Marine Institute to address agreed challenges. Mitigation programmes with recommendations and guidelines.
	Research programmes on potential new species	New species research reports

A skilled and engaged work force	Transforming the ambition and capability of the leadership teams within seafood processing companies	Corporate leadership with strategic vision; innovation adoption; leadership capability and decision-making effectiveness
	A diagnostic tool to identify training needs and deliver training to seafood processing companies	Skills Diagnostic Tool used by at least 20 clients annually
		Training delivered to at least 20 clients annually
	Promoting seafood processing as an attractive career choice for potential employees through a Careers in Seafood programme	Seafood apprenticeship bursary scheme
		A Seafood Fellowship Programme
		Careers in Seafood Programme
		Increase in staff retention



