

News release from FLTC

25 Years of FishSAFE: transforming safety for fishermen at sea

FLTC, along with SFF, NFFO, Offshore Energies UK (OEUK) and Seafish, are proud to celebrate the 25th anniversary of FishSAFE, an innovation that has fundamentally improved safety for fishermen working in the challenging environment of the UK Continental Shelf.

Developed in response to the tragic loss of the Westhaven and her crew in 1997, FishSAFE was created with a clear and vital purpose: to prevent fishermen from unknowingly encountering subsea hazards that could endanger lives, vessels and livelihoods. Today, that mission remains at the heart of everything FLTC does.

FishSAFE provides fishermen with accurate, up-to-date information on oil and gas infrastructure, helping them avoid dangerous interactions with pipelines, wellheads and other subsea obstructions. These hazards, often invisible beneath the surface, have historically posed a serious risk of gear snagging, vessel instability and even capsizing.

Executive chairman of FLTC (which stands for U.K. Fisheries Offshore Oil and Gas Legacy Trust Fund Limited) Charles Scott said:

“For 25 years, FishSAFE has been making a tangible difference to the safety of fishermen working in some of the most challenging conditions anywhere in the world. What began as a response to tragedy has become a vital, trusted tool that helps crews avoid unseen hazards and return home safely.

“This milestone is a testament to the power of collaboration between industries, and to our shared commitment to protecting lives at sea. We’re incredibly proud of what’s been achieved, and even more determined to keep building on that success for the future.”

Managed by Seafish’s Kingfisher team, the service provides data on thousands of offshore oil and gas structures and hazards within the UK EEZ. The information is sourced from oil and gas operators and delivered free of charge every six months and comes directly to vessels.

Matt Frow, Kingfisher and Geospatial Services Manager, said: “FishSAFE shows what can be achieved when very different industries share a strong desire to collaborate, improve practices, and commit for the long term.

“The Kingfisher team has been involved from the start, and this milestone is not just about longevity, but about the real impact the service has had in reducing risk at sea.”

Chief executive of the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation Elspeth Macdonald added: “FishSAFE has become an essential part of everyday life for many fishermen, giving them the confidence to work safely in areas where offshore infrastructure is present.

“Having clear, reliable information right there in the wheelhouse makes a real difference, not just in avoiding costly gear loss, but in protecting lives. The system reflects what can be achieved from the fishing industry working closely with the oil and gas industry, along with others to address shared challenges, and its impact over the past 25 years has been hugely positive for our sector.”

The introduction of FishSAFE units has been central to delivering life-saving information directly to the wheelhouse. Installed onboard vessels, these units act as a constant, hands-free safety companion. By linking the vessel's GPS position to a comprehensive database of offshore infrastructure, the system continuously monitors the surrounding area and provides clear, timely warnings of potential danger.

When a vessel approaches a hazard, the FishSAFE unit triggers both visual and audible alarms, giving skippers critical time to take evasive action. The system displays nearby structures and safety zones on-screen, often within a six-mile radius, enabling crews to make informed decisions and avoid costly or dangerous incidents.

Over the years, continuous innovation – including modern Mk3 units with high-resolution displays and automatic data updates – has ensured fishermen always have access to the latest, most reliable safety information.

Since FLTC's subsidiary company, FLTC Services Limited, assumed responsibility for distributing FishSAFE data and units in 2007, the initiative has gone from strength to strength. Hundreds of units are now in operation across the UK fleet, providing re-assurance and protection to those working in proximity to offshore installations.

OEUK has supported the governance and management of FLTC (two directors are representatives from the oil and gas industry) and has collaborated closely with the fisheries organisations (who also appoint two directors) from the outset.

Both OEUK and oil and gas operators have contributed substantially to the projects, building up an investment fund intended to finance operations in perpetuity when of a sufficient size.

The success of FishSAFE reflects the strong partnership between the fishing and oil and gas sectors, working together to share critical information and safeguard lives at sea.

FLTC also acknowledges the invaluable financial support provided by the European Union and the Scottish Government, which has helped make this technology widely accessible.

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