

Minutes: UK Nephrops Steering Group meeting

Meeting Date: 14th July 2022

Location: Online

Attendees	Organisation
AC: Annika Clements	Ulster Wildlife Trust
AH: Adam Holland	Northern Ireland Fishermen's Federation
BC: Ben Collier	Northern Ireland Gear Trials
BP: Bally Philps	Scottish Creel Fisherman's Federation
BL: Bill Lart	Seafish
CJ: Clara Johnston	ScotLINK/Marine Conservation Society
CD: Calum Duncan	Scottish Environment Link
CM: Cameron Moffat	Young's Seafood
CMo: Claire Moore	Hilton Seafood
CP: Claire Pescod	Macduff Shellfish
DW: Daniel Whittle	Whitby Seafood
EMS: Eva Middleton-Smith	Aldi
EW: Elaine Whyte	Communities Inshore Fisheries Alliance
FN: Fiona Nimmo	Poseidon
GB: Giles Bartlett	Whitby Seafood
JGH: Jan Geert-Hiddink	Bangor University
JP: Jo Pollett	Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)
KK: Katie Keay	Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)
LB: Lisa Bennett	Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)
LH: Lief Hendrikz	World Wildlife Fund
LW: Linda Wood	Marks and Spencer
MP: Mike Park	Scottish White Fish Producers Association (SWFPA)
SC: Simon Cummings	Whitby Seafood
SM: Simon Macdonald	West Coast Regional Inshore Fisheries Group
TF: Teresa Fernandez	Hilton Seafood UK
TW: Timothy Whitton	Bangor University
Apologies	
Amelia Harper	Lidl
Kenny Coull	Scottish White Fish Producers Association (SWFPA)
Melissa Tillotson	Waitrose
Roy Griffin	Daera

Purpose of the meeting

This meeting focussed on the updates from the annual review, a summary of recent gear trials and an update on the habitat impact research by Bangor University. Discussion is required on the next steps for completing the Principle 2 actions.

Agenda Item 1: Update from annual review

The annual review for the end of Year 3 has been circulated to the Steering Group. Overall, the fishery has made improvements from Year 2 to Year 3, although the actual Benchmarking and Tracking Tool (BMT) is behind target due to the impacts of Brexit and Covid-19. Score increases from SG60-79 to SG>80 were seen in: Information and monitoring (PI 1.2.3) specific to Functional Units 10 and 34, secondary species management (PI 2.2.2), legal and customary framework (PI 3.1.1) and consultation roles and responsibilities (PI 3.1.2). Score increases from SG<60 to SG60-79 were seen in primary species outcome (PI 2.1.1) and management (PI 2.1.2) for Functional Units 11 - 13, and for habitat outcome status (PI 2.4.1) for trawl gear.

Overall, harvest strategy (PI 1.2.1) and harvest control rules (PI 1.2.2) require further work to establish and define reference points and agree remedial management measures. Regional management groups have been set up to agree appropriate technical measures that could be applied if the stock falls below predetermined reference points. While most Principle 3 performance indicators now meet SG>80, actions remain to address the fishery specific objectives, and to ensure management is well documented within the fishery management plans (FMPs).

Discussion

CD asked for more detailed feedback on the annual review process and time scales for stakeholders to provide input. FN offered to discuss the annual review one-on-one with any stakeholders who have feedback, and reminded the group that the environmental subgroup also provides a forum to discuss the Principle 2 actions in depth. CD stated the need for the Marine Conservation Society to consider Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs) when reviewing their Good Fish Guide.

Agenda Item 2: Harvest Strategy discussion

FN summarised Paul Medley's (PM, a Principle 1 specialist) most recent harvest strategy feedback. The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) has provided effort data on *Nephrops* landings from 2010 – 2022. PM will whether this is sufficient for use in biomass/production models, which may provide an opportunity to fit $B_{trigger}$ and B_{target} reference points for each Functional Unit. FN said further discussion is needed from the science bodies on the Steering Groups to determine whether this method would generate suitable reference points for *Nephrops*. If they agree to this approach, the Steering Group would need commission an expert, such as PM, to undertake this work.

FN discussed two options for progressing the harvest strategy:

- 1) continue requesting reference points from International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES)
- 2) explore MMO data to develop an independent model, which would be led by the FIP Steering Group.

FN asked the Steering Group to agree on one preferred option, or whether it would be better to progress with both options simultaneously.

Discussion

DW updated the Steering Group on his conversation with the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) about the correct process for requesting reference points from ICES. The Defra representative for ICES explained that the process might not be straightforward as it is likely the reference points do not exist due to lack of data. ICES may not accept the request until the data exists.

FN explained that both options should lead to the same conclusion, but Option 2 includes independent input from PM, and links the MSC requirements with available data.

FN suggested that ideally there would be a workshop between Cefas, MSS and AFBI to discuss whether Option 2 is feasible before the Steering Group commissions any work. AH and AC explained that the B_{lim} reference points may not be a priority for AFBI because the Irish Sea stocks are above Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) and is unlikely to ever reach a hypothetical B_{lim} . DW offered to follow up with Defra for more information on the missing data, and suggested progressing both options at the same time and letting Cefas, MSS and AFBI know so that the approach can be coordinated. JP offered to speak with the science bodies to clarify what data is missing.

JP asked whether Option 1 would include developing technical measures and FN suggested that this could be achieved once Option 1 is complete. The Steering Group agreed that progressing with both options is best way forward.

Actions from Item 2:

1. Secretariat to:
 - Arrange a workshop with AFBI, Cefas, Marine Scotland Science and Paul Medley to discuss the feasibility of using MMO data for modelling reference points (Option 2).
 - Speak with AFBI, Cefas and Marine Scotland Science for more information on the data that might be missing before reference points can be defined by ICES (Option 1).

Agenda Item 3: Primary species: cod and whiting

There is a requirement in the action plan to review stock assessments for whiting and cod in West of Scotland (WoS), North Sea and Irish Sea. FN updated the Steering Group on the most recent ICES advice that was published on 30 June 2022. Overall, there has not been any change to stock status, and the primary species scores for the FIP mostly remain the same as last year.

Whiting: However, primary species outcome status (PI 2.1.1) and management (PI 2.1.2) for the West of Scotland functional units (11, North Minch; 12, South Minch; and 13, Clyde & Jura) increased from <60 to 60-79 due to the improved status of whiting stock in that area. The North Sea scores remain at $SG > 80$, and Irish Sea scores $SG < 60$.

Cod: Cod in WoS and Irish sea remains <60 (fail). Cod in the North Sea has increased to $SG 60-79$, which recognises that the SSB is below B_{lim} but there is a FIP and management in place which meets the $SG 60$ level. The ICES advice for the Irish Sea now notes that the Southern extent of that cod stock has been taken into the English Channel and Southern Celtic Sea stock, and that represents about 40% of the Irish sea landings. The new fishing mortality reference point, F_{eco} , is equivalent to the lower range of F_{msy} (i.e. is more precautionary) and something to keep an eye on as stock assessments progress each year.

Discussion

MP noted that there is a benchmark coming up for WoS and North Sea cod, likely to happen next year. This will look at the northern component of the WoS stock which is thought to be the same as the North Sea stock.

DW said he has been speaking to AFBI about the reduced size of whiting in the Irish Sea. There was a recent study on the impact of sea temperature on the size of haddock, but as there has been such a stark change in the biology of whiting, rather than a gradual change like in other gadoids, AFBI does not consider that the same factors are impacting whiting.

Cod in the WoS and Irish Seas

DW said that in other external stakeholder meetings he has attended there has been discussion about how environmental factors, rather than fishing pressure, are driving the low level of Irish Sea cod stocks. BP asked for clarification on the statement that there is nothing fishing can do to improve cod stock levels because it is so far below the current advised level. He said that in the Clyde the fishing mortality of cod in *Nephrops* trawls equates to just below 1% (of *Nephrops* weight) and this is estimated to be half to two thirds of the Clyde's entire cod population, so any fishing pressure, even as bycatch, will have a negative impact on the stock and should be considered as an important variable in the sustainability of the *Nephrops* fishery.

DW explained that he was referring to meetings he had attended with fisheries scientists that work on the Irish Sea, as well as the ICES report for the Irish Sea, which states that the fishing mortality was so low that it is not a driving factor in the recovery of cod.

FN said that the MSC Standard requires that there are measures in place to ensure that the fishery does not hinder recover of a species. ICES stock assessment modelling can be used to show different scenarios of different catch levels and what change that will have on the SSB of the primary species. FN agreed to review this report to understand whether the findings could justify a score increase for the Irish Sea.

EW added that the 1% in the Clyde figure came from observer programmes run by Marine Scotland and several universities and noted that Mike Heath had also commented that 1% is a small bycatch but this is significant in a small cod population. At the moment there is more research going on in the Clyde, especially given the cod closures. She noted that the current work is also looking at sea temperature because the Clyde sea bed is about 8°C, whereas cod are normally found in areas of 4-7°C. It is not known whether the cod populations in that area have adapted to this change.

Actions from Item 3:

1. FN to review the ICES advice for Irish Sea cod to understand whether the reduction in cod stock is being driven by factors other than fishing mortality.
2. FN to contact AFBI for a copy of their report on the impact of historical fishing pressure on Irish Sea cod stocks.

Agenda Item 4: Progress on Northern Ireland gear trials.

BC provided an update on gear technology trials in Northern Ireland which focus on reducing whiting bycatch in the *Nephrops* fishery by using coverless trawls. Since last meeting, two more trials have been conducted with some success – 11% reduction in whiting bycatch in one trial and possibly a 30% reduction in another (to be confirmed after full analysis by AFBI). BC said there appears to be little effect on the target species, but more data is needed on this.

Discussion

GB asked about the process to move from gear modification in a trial to approved gear for use in the fishery. BC explained that previously gear modification was approved for use by the EU Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries, but since the UK left the EU the process is less clear. The devolved administrations are probably responsible for the decision now, but this may be a barrier to adoption of the gear because of complications with fishing in multiple jurisdictions where the gear may or may not be approved. BC agreed to share the final report from the project with BL to add to the review of alternative measures.

DW asked if the gear trial could be implemented in the Clyde. EW asked DW to provide the request in writing for discussion with the Board of the Clyde Fishermen's Association.

Actions from Item 4:

1. BC to send the final report from the gear trial project with BL to add to the alternative measures report.
2. DW to send a written request to EW regarding conducting gear trials in the Clyde.

Agenda Item 5: Update on SafetyNet technology trial

LW provided an overview of the Safety Net trial funded by Marks and Spencer, Young's Seafood and Associated Seafoods. The project aims to reduce bycatch by using light technology to deter non-target species from entering the net. Since March 2021, they have trialled 16 different light settings, done 68 hauls, taken the lengths of 7000 fish, and captured 200 hours of camera footage. LW said the light trials have had limited success, but the biggest output of the project has been from showing the skipper the video footage from a camera attached to the trawl gear, which caused him to change fishing behaviour and lift his gear off the seabed. This resulted in a reduction in seabed detritus in the net and lower fuel costs. LW summarised that the position of the lights in the trials is crucial, and they will be conducting further trials with different light configurations. The report from this research is published on Medin.

Discussion

BC and LW discussed what control gear was used, and discussed the similarities between their trials. LW suggested that her, BC and the SafetyNet Technology project lead Tom Rossiter connect to learn from each other. BL asked if anyone had contacted Paul Fernandez from the Smart Trawl trial, which can measure fish length from video footage. LW said that the project has evolved and at the moment the biggest concern for skippers is fuel costs, not necessarily sustainability.

Actions from Item 5:

1. LW to share the Safety Net project report with the Secretariat.
2. Secretariat to contact Paul Fernandes for an update on his Smart Trawl project.

Agenda Item 6: Bangor habitat impact research

TW provided an update on his Post Doc research on the habitat impact of *Nephrops* fisheries – both creel and trawl - using the Bangor University benthic impact tool. The aim is to estimate relative benthic

status (RBS) and recovery of benthic communities. The RBS changes depending on the amount of fishing in the area, and the habitat sensitivities.

The research requires a significant amount of data, including fishing intensity, biomass, and recovery rate. A challenge has been getting biomass data for some areas, and quantifying swept area for the creel fishery. TW asked the Steering Group for information on creel fishing beyond the West of Scotland. TW stated that he would soon be seeking feedback from the Steering Group on the accuracy of the creel data used in the analysis so far.

Discussion

EW said there are creel fishermen in the Clyde, and BP suggested several sources for corroborating the location of creel fishermen. AC has information on the presence of creel fishing in Loch Torridon, and the group also discussed the presence of creel fishermen in the Moray Firth and Northumberland.

BL asked if TW was comparing data from all European vessels or just the UK fleet. TW said the trawling data is from ICES, including all vessels operating in that area, regardless of nationality. BL highlighted the Bangor University research on the trade offs between gear design and seabed impact, which will be published by Claire Szostek. BL said this information may be useful in future and he would email TW to further discuss. BP added that the impacts of trawl gear will be different depending on the specific type of trawl used, and the frequency between trawls, and suggested this should be considered in the research. JGH explained the limitations of the data: the database does not distinguish between trawl gear types, and there are not currently any studies which compare different trawl gear.

DW reminded the Steering Group that if the fishery entered MSC assessment, there would be an opportunity for stakeholder input, and that there could be a lot of NGO input because of the sensitivity around trawling.

CD discussed infaunal (the organisms living in the sediments of the ocean floor) data and mentioned research which looks at the distribution of emergent epifauna vs what might have been there in the absence of swept area. TW acknowledged this, and said the plan is to use recorded distribution of those species, rather than modelled because of the certainties involved. DW encouraged CD to raise these concerns directly with TW to ensure these topics were addressed by the research.

Actions from Item 6:

1. BL to contact TW to discuss ongoing benthic habitat research
2. CD to send any concerns regarding infauna data directly to TW

Agenda Item 7: Environment subgroup update

JP reminded the group that within Round 2 Steering Groups there is a joint environmental subgroup, which will reconvene to try to progress the Principle 2 actions identified in the FIP action plans. The focus for the *Nephrops* FIP will be on 'ETP outcome, information and management', and anyone who wants to join the subgroup is welcome. JP asked the Steering Group to raise any other topics for discussion, and reminded the group of the discussion points for the subgroup to consider: the wheelhouse guide and missing images, ETP section of alternative measures report and the potential historic distribution of priority marine features (PMFs) and fishery footprint.

Discussion

BL requested the subgroup arrange a face-to-face meeting. BL added that the ETP section of the alternatives measures report needs more content. A Doodlepoll will be circulated to find a date for the meeting in the next couple of months. GB requested to join the group, as did EW in the chat.

Actions from Item 7:

1. Secretariat to add GB and EW to the environmental subgroup list.

Agenda Item 8: Update on the West of Scotland outreach

GB provided an update on his trip to the West of Scotland, where he visited ports and merchants to increase regional engagement and awareness of the *Nephrops* FIP. GB explained that the *Nephrops* industry are facing many difficulties, such as the availability of crew and increasing fuel costs, so they do not currently see the necessity for certification. GB suggested finding out where their markets are and whether there is interest in MSC *Nephrops* there. Many of the fishermen are also concerned about critical eNGOs trying to shut down fishing in the Clyde, and said their focus is on economic survival, not the FIP. GB said there is a clear need to build support and engagement with fishermen.

Discussion

BP asked for more information about the eNGOs, and said he did not believe they were their views were extreme. GB noted that this was a term that had been used by some of the fishermen and not intended as a reflection of his own views. BP said he felt there was a lot of pressure to move away from trawl fishing in the Clyde, and to bring in management plans for the fishery. GB, CD and EW discussed the work being done on FMPs for the Clyde. There are lots of different bodies interested in drafting management plans for the Clyde and EW said the Joint Fisheries Framework should be the priority. GB also discussed the challenge of meeting people in remote areas, and the difficulty that presents to sharing information.

DW commented that if there are lots of groups in the Clyde working on FMPs then the FIP Steering Group could reach out to them to offer their expertise in drafting FMPs, with the aim of aligning the Clyde FMP and the requirements of the MSC Standard.

Actions from Item 8:

1. GB to contact agents in WoS to gather more information about possible MSC markets
2. Secretariat to contact other organisations in Scotland who may be working on FMPs, to ensure there is no duplication of effort

Agenda Item 9: Monitoring and compliance update

The FIP action plan identifies the need to review the risks of non-compliance associated with fishery including landing obligation. This action involved understanding from Marine Scotland Compliance whether there have been any incidences of non-compliance. FN said this is a condition across many MSC certified fisheries and the Scottish Fisheries Sustainable Accreditation Group (SFSAG) Northern Demersal fishery has a client action plan in place to address this issue. FN said because this is already a

focus for Scottish fisheries, the Steering Group should ensure there is not duplication of effort, and should consider the compliance levels across wider UK fleet.

JP mentioned that Matt Spencer (previously at the Marine Stewardship Council) contacted Marine Scotland Compliance to obtain data on compliance but they were unable to share due to data anonymity requirements. She requested that anyone with data that might help gets shared with the Secretariat.

Discussion

BP said the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation (SCFF) had submitted several Freedom of Information requests (FOIs) to Marine Scotland Compliance, and after a number of appeals the data was shared with them and the data indicated there was almost no compliance with the Landing Obligation since it was introduced in 2015. JP agreed to investigate whether this data can now be accessed for the FIP as well. The data showed that since the introduction of the Landing Obligation, only two inspections were carried out in the West of Scotland and this is why the data set was not large enough to anonymise. BP discussed the difficulty of using 'improvements in enforcement' as a metric to improve the FIP's score if the fishery is starting from a zero baseline because it would not take much evidence to show significant improvement. He also noted that if enforcement is not taking place, there are arguably no infringements, but this would not be an appropriate way to demonstrate there is compliance (by implication) and would be a skewed metric. BP also asked if the new Scottish future catching policy proposals are going to be a significant enough diversion from the Landing Obligation that there is no longer an incentive to move towards more selective gear, and also whether the lack of the Landing Obligation would remove the requirement to show compliance or non-compliance

FN explained that this performance indicator requires the fishery to demonstrate compliance and enforcement of legislation, and lack of enforcement does not equate to compliance. If the legislation changes then the fishery will still be expected to apply with national or international legislation relevant to the area being fished. BP said the FOI was likely to be available on the Marine Scotland website, or that he can see whether he can share with the group.

BL asked if this applied to the whole stock, or for each functional unit. FN said that compliance and enforcement specifically refers to the vessel list. DW said that even if Marine Scotland remove the Landing Obligation, the high levels of discards in the fishery would still be a problem within the MSC standard.

Actions from Item 9:

1. Secretariat to contact Marine Scotland Compliance again and request compliance data on the Landing Obligation for the *Nephrops* fishery, including the number of inspections for compliance carried out since the legislation was introduced.

Any Other Business

JP provided an update on the Fisheries Standard Review. V3.0 of the MSC Standard was signed off by the MSC Board and is expected to be published in October 2022. JP explained that new fisheries entering the MSC program after May 2023 will need to be assessed against V3.0. The next annual review

will involve updating the action plan to address any new requirements in V3.0. JP will also schedule a meeting for all Steering Groups to update on changes.

Meeting Closes

12:10 pm

	Actions Arising	Responsibility
1	Secretariat to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) arrange a workshop with AFBI, Cefas, Marine Scotland Science and Paul Medley to discuss the feasibility of using MMO data for modelling reference points (Option 2) (b) speak with AFBI, Cefas and Marine Scotland Science for more information on the data that might be missing before reference points can be defined by ICES (Option 1) (c) contact Paul Fernandes for an update on his Smart Trawl project (d) add GB and EW to the environmental subgroup list (e) contact other organisations in Scotland who may be working on FMPs, to ensure there is no duplication of effort (f) contact Marine Scotland Compliance again and request compliance data on the Landing Obligation for the <i>Nephrops</i> fishery, including the number of inspections for compliance carried out since the legislation was introduced. 	Secretariat
2	FN to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) review the ICES advice for Irish Sea cod to understand whether the reduction in cod stock is being driven by factors other than fishing mortality. (b) contact AFBI for a copy of their report on the impact of historical fishing pressure on Irish Sea cod stocks. 	Fiona Nimmo
3	BC to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) send the final report from the gear trial project with BL to add to the alternative measures report. 	Ben Collier

4	DW to: (a) send a written request to EW regarding conducting gear trials in the Clyde.	Daniel Whittle
5	LW to: (a) share the Safety Net project report with the Secretariat	Linda Wood
6	BL to: (a) contact TW to discuss ongoing benthic habitat research	Bill Lart
7	CD to: (a) send any concerns regarding infauna data directly to TW	Calum Duncan
8	GB to: (a) contact agents in WoS to gather more information about possible MSC markets	Giles Bartlett