

Minutes: Crab and Lobster Steering Group

Meeting Date: 7th September 2022

Location: Online

Attendees	Organisation
BP: Beshlie Pool	South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen
CR: Chris Ranford	Cornish Fish Producers' Organisation
DM: David Markham	Blue Sea Food Company
EB: Ella Brock	Seafish
GC: Gus Caslake	Seafish
HG: Hubert Gieschen	Marine Management Organisation
JP: Jo Pollett	Marine Stewardship Council
KK: Katie Keay	Marine Stewardship Council
LB: Lisa Bennett	Marine Stewardship Council
RM: Rosslyn McIntyre	Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science
SB: Sarah Birchenough	Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
SC: Sarah Clark	Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
TH: Tim Huntington	Poseidon
Apologies	
CP: Claire Pescod	Macduff Shellfish
JB: John Balls	North Devon Fishermen's Association

Purpose of the meeting

This meeting was to update the Steering Group on the stock assessment process and to discuss the crab workshop report and harvest strategy. There was an update on the National Fishery Management Plan and Crab Management Group, and the group discussed how to make progress with the Endangered, Threatened and Protected species performance indicator.

Agenda Item 1: Stock assessments

RM updated that the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) is working on a new stock assessment model for crab. This year they will publish the results of the new assessment model for one region (North East) and publish assessments from the old model for rest of the country; it will be a half/half approach until they move to the new model.

Cefas is also working on improving data to put into stock assessments and considering developing an app where fishers could take photos of individuals in their catch, which could provide length frequency distribution data. There are concerns over how to ensure fishermen randomly choose the animals to photograph, and trying to ensure broad participation instead of only a few fishermen sending in photos. GC agreed that it can be challenging to get broad participation to use app based systems, and estimated only 5% of fishermen would be very comfortable with using apps to submit data. RM will send out a flyer with basic information on the potential app to be distributed.

Discussion

The Steering Group discussed different app ideas and how to best use them for data collection. The Clean Catch app has been developed for ETP species and may be useful for collecting biological species information as well. RM said she would discuss this with Stuart Hetherington, who is leading on the Clean Catch app at Cefas. GC has experience with this kind of technology and thinks it may work well. CR commented that some of their members have tried the Clean Catch app already and it has been largely successful.

Actions from Item 1:

1. RM to
 - (a) send flyer with information on app to Secretariat to distribute to Steering Group
 - (b) explore use of Clean Catch app for length frequency data with Stuart Hetherington

Agenda Item 2: Harvest Strategy – workshop report and discussion

The Secretariat updated the Steering Group on the crab management workshops held in March and April, and the next steps in putting forward the reports (slides available). JP discussed that the group can only present the options and measures collated from the workshops, but it is up to the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Crab Management Group (CMG) to decide on implementation of any measures. Technical measures, input control and output control were all considered within the workshops and there was a lot of agreement among attendees. Some of the suggested measures will need additional science and data collection before they can feasibly be implemented, there were some clear options which were ruled out by industry as unviable.

Management measures that were discussed at the workshops were categorised under fleet, effort and technical measures, each with multiple recommendations in each category. There were also recommendations for further science and research – for example, reviewing the accuracy of Catch per Unit Effort (CPUE) data, determining existing pressure in the fishery and appropriate pot limits, reviewing minimum landing sizes, reviewing life history traits for consideration of seasonal closures and further research into soft shell crab determination. There was general agreement on the importance enforcing the landing and selling of high-quality crab.

Any potential intervention or management measure will need to be consulted on and the potential implications considered. The report from the Project UK management workshops gathers together fishermen's thoughts on management to be fed back to Defra and the CMG to inform future management decisions.

Discussion

RM and JP discussed the range of engagement from large and small vessels in the workshops, and the potential for resistance from vessels who have not been engaged thus far. SC asked about the range of representatives for different vessel sizes who attended the workshops, and commented on the large amount of management measures suggested in the report which may cause conflict in adopting any one measure as different stakeholders will prefer different management interventions. SC discussed

the need to consider the variation in effort of the different métiers of vessels. JP has requested some data from MMO on vessels around the 14.99m size and will follow up on the response.

HG noted that as this is predominantly to do with policy ('rule-setting'), it would therefore be the responsibility of Defra, rather than the MMO, although some measures which were operational would be relevant for the MMO.

SC updated about a project with Seafish and South Devon and Channel Fishermen they are hoping to get funding for which looks at finding a methodology to measure the softness of crab shell which could be used as a management or compliance tool. However, UK fisheries legislation has allowed soft crab to be used as bait since 1967 and this is an ongoing concern.

TH said the FIP's draft harvest strategy must continue to evolve towards a level of greater consensus. It is unlikely the Steering Group will reach an agreement for a harvest strategy by the end of this year (as per the action plan), but it is important to keep making progress until the end of the FIP to support the Crab Management Group (CMG) by showcasing the South West as a case study for management that can be considered as part of their national harvest strategy.

GC commented on the need to consider the economic impacts of implementing some of these measures. Pot loss is expensive so reducing the number of pots may save the fishermen in their initial and ongoing pot maintenance costs. If the Steering Group can show how a management measure might save the fishermen money, it will be more likely to succeed.

SC, BP and JP discussed the use of escape gaps, and the discussions that were had at the various workshops. There was good support for escape gaps at the north Devon workshop from inshore vessels, however at other workshops, questions were raised from offshore vessels as to whether escape gaps were of any value to them. BP said there is confusion over what is considered a 'larger' vessel, and suggested referring to them as 'more efficient' or similar. BP wanted to publicly thank the Secretariat for organising the Crab Management Workshops and said her members provided feedback that they felt their views were being heard, which was appreciated. SC agreed that the workshops sounded very successful, and acknowledged the difficulties in trying to get representation from all of the stakeholders in the fishery.

JP requested any final comments on the crab workshop reports are returned by the 16th September.

Action from Item 2:

1. Secretariat to follow up on MMO data request for 14.99m vessels, and share with SC
2. Steering Group to provide feedback on the report by the 16th September

Agenda Item 3: National Fishery Management Plan (FMP)

EB updated on behalf of the Crab Management Group (CMG). The four current work packages (projects) focus on the English and Welsh FMP and are: (1) examining landings across different métiers, (2) improving size/frequency data and input into stock assessments, (3) determining hardness of soft-shell crabs and (4) benthic impacts of the crab and lobster pot fishery.

EB said targeted stakeholder engagement events are being planned in September and October 2022 and that once the dates and locations were confirmed she would share with the Project UK Steering Group via the Secretariat.

EB went through each of the ten draft objectives for the crab and lobster FMP (slides available) - these have not yet been signed off by the CMG. The timeline for the FMP runs throughout 2023, beginning with the preparation stage in March 2023 and ending with the publishing on 22nd September 2023.

Discussion

TH discussed Objective 4 regarding interactions with other fisheries, and whether the objectives can also consider other maritime economic activities, like wind farms. EB agreed that the stakeholder engagement phase will allow for any suggestions like this to be raised and considered.

CR asked if the outcomes from the Project UK crab workshops held in spring will be fed into the objectives and how future workshops will align with what has already been done. EB agreed they were conscious of not duplicating any work, and that the workshops were quite regionally specific whereas the FMP will be nationwide. JP confirmed that there have already been discussions with the CMG about how the Project UK management workshop outputs can contribute to the draft national harvest strategy consultation withing the FMP process. CR said having a 'roadmap' would be useful to clarify the FMP process and when stakeholder input will be requested.

Actions from Item 3:

1. EB to:
 - (a) check if the FMP objectives have been signed off by CMG and let Secretariat know
 - (b) share informaiton on upcoming stakeholder engagement meetings
 - (c) consider creating a 'roadmap' of the FMP process and when/how input will be sought

Agenda Item 4: Endangered, Threatened and Protected (ETP) species

At the end of last year most of the ETP performance indicators met the best practice level (SG80) of the Fisheries Standard. However, this year based on the pre-assessments that have been commissioned for Round 3 FIPs (one of which was for brown crab in the southern North Sea), and also in recognition of the new MSC fisheries standard which will raise the evidence requirements for some performance indicators, the scores for ETP species have dropped to a more precautionary 60-79. The work that the Steering Group has done so far is relevant and valuable, but there are some additional actions to provide extra evidence to ensure the new requirements are met.

The updated FIP action plan suggests undertaking a risk assessment to consider the likelihood and impacts of lost gear, as well as any mitigation measures in place. Other Project UK FIPs have discussed introducing the Clean Catch app to demonstrate a recording protocol, even if very few interactions are recorded.

Discussion

BP agreed that trialling the Clean Catch app might be helpful to provide the data the Steering Group needs to demonstrate that there are not ETP interactions in this fishery, but proving the negative is always going to be a challenge. GC raised frustrations about continuously revisiting the ETP species issue when the risk is so low for this fishery. There is the mandatory requirement to report bycatch of cetaceans to Defra and he questioned if that could be used instead of introducing something new.

TH acknowledged the issue, and reiterated the importance of preparing for the more stringent evidence requirements expected in the new versions of the MSC Standard. TH suggested the first step should be revisiting and possibly formalising the risk assessment that BP conducted for the FIP a number of years ago. TH offered to create a matrix template for the Steering Group to complete, which will formalise the risk assessment.

BP wanted to reiterate that ghost fishing is not a significant issue in the South West crab fishery, and it is important not inflating the issue. TH said he did some work with DG MARE a few years ago looking at lost gear in the South West fisheries, and there is evidence that gear does get lost. The Steering Group will need to provide something in the FMP like a risk assessment which analyses why gear might be lost and potential mitigation measures. TH discussed the Global Ghost Gear Initiative best practice framework which includes mitigation measures which may be useful, and he will circulate to the group to help with the risk assessment matrix.

BP discussed the differences in pot construction how that affects ghost fishing, for example the netted pots which are known not to ghost fish because crabs can cut their way out of them. KK talked about Ghost Fishing UK, a dive-based NGO which trains volunteer divers to collect information on ghost gear. The Secretariat recently spoke to them about fishing gear they have retrieved over the last 18 months in the South West and they were willing to support any additional work that helped reduce ghost gear in our waters. KK suggested that they may have useful data on lost fishing gear, or on netted pots which have been cut through by crabs for example. SC said SD&S IFCA have used Ghost Fishing UK in the past to retrieve lost wrasse pots in the Plymouth sound. She agreed it is useful to include any organisation that could assist with ghost gear retrieval as control measures within the risk assessment. GC talked about fishing gear that is not abandoned but is stuck (i.e. between boulders), and is unable to be retrieved by fisherman. It is important to consider that this gear can sometimes be retrieved by divers so it does not become ghost gear.

Actions from Item 4:

1. TH to
 - (a) create risk assessment table for Steering Group to fill in to improve evidence requirements for ETP species outcome
 - (b) share risk assessment template for abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear with Steering Group
 - (c) circulate the Global Ghost Gear Initiative best practice framework

Any Other Business

N/A

Meeting Closes

11:38min

Actions Arising	Responsibility
Rosslyn McIntyre to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Send flyer with information on app to Secretariat to distribute to Steering Group 2. Explore use of Clean Catch app for length frequency data with Stuart Hetherington 	RM
Secretariat to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Follow up on MMO data request for 14.99m vessels, and share with SC 	Secretariat
Steering Group to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide feedback on the crab workshop report by the 16th September 	Steering Group
Ella Brock to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Check if the FMP objectives have been signed off by CMG and let Secretariat know 2. Share information on upcoming stakeholder engagement meetings 3. Consider creating a 'roadmap' of the FMP process and when/how input will be sought 	EB
Tim Huntingdon to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create risk assessment table for Steering Group to fill in to improve evidence requirements for ETP species outcome 2. Share risk assessment template for abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear with Steering Group 3. Circulate the Global Ghost Gear Initiative best practice framework 	TH