

Minutes: Channel Scallop Steering Group meeting

Meeting Date: 17 July 2023

Location: Online

Attendees	Organisation
AB: Andrew Brown	Macduff Shellfish
BS: Bryce Stewart	University of York
CM: Caitlin McNally	Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
CN: Chloe North	Western Fish Producers' Organisation
CP: Claire Pescod	Macduff Shellfish
EP: Edward Polley	Falfish
EM: Eilidh Milligan	World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)
EB: Ella Brock	Seafish
FN: Fiona Nimmo	Poseidon
GC: Gus Caslake	SeaFish
JP: Jo Pollett	Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)
JH: Juliette Hatchman	South Western Fish Producer Organisation Ltd (SWFPO)
KB: Kyle Buchan	Macduff Shellfish
LP: Lauren Parkhouse	Devon & Severn Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority (IFCA)
LB: Lisa Bennett	Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)
LPr: Louise Price	Marine Management Organisation (MMO)
NN: Nikolai Nawri	Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas)
RL: Rebecca Lyal	Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)
RW: Rob Whiteley	Natural England
SM: Seth McCurry	Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)
Apologies	
Ben Lambden	Tesco
George Buchan	Sussex Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority (IFCA)
Sophie Jenkinson	Morrisons

Purpose of the meeting

1. Updates from Cefas on recent scallop stock assessments, and defining reference points
2. Updates from Defra on the national King scallop FMP consultation
3. Discuss actions for completion in the final year of the FIP, and next steps after April 2024
4. Discuss reassigning the English North Sea area from the UK Scallop FIP to the Channel Scallop FIP

Agenda Item 1: Stock assessment update/reference points discussion (Nikolai)

NN presented the results from the Cefas annual King scallop stock assessment in English waters (2022). In four of the six assessment areas harvestable biomass appears stable since surveys started in 2017 (27.4.b.S, 27.7.e.I, 27.7.e.L, and 27.7.f.I) and three areas have harvest rates at or below the MSY-proxy (27.7.e.L, 27.7.e.O and 27.7.f.I). Cefas developed a case study on the Lyme Bay assessment area (27.7.e.L), which showed that harvestable biomass appears stable despite high levels of exploitation,

with the possibility of enhanced recruitment through larval drift (Silva et al., 2021). Cefas also developed a case study on the English North Sea (Yorkshire/Durham 27.4.b.S) assessment area which showed that harvestable biomass appears stable but may decline rapidly within the next few years if recruitment remains low (dependent on local population).

NN explained the difficulties in gathering the necessary population dynamics data to develop biological reference points. Difficulties include management plans which only aim to control removals, natural factors influencing recruitment and mortality, and the fact that human exploitation cannot be used as a reliable criterion for assessing sustainability. Therefore, a precautionary approach is taken when generating either stock biomass or exploitation rate-based reference points. Stock biomass-based reference points will ideally require a 10-15 year dataset, depending on population variability. NN confirmed that reference points will not realistically be defined until a longer time series is obtained, and harvest rate MSY will continue to be used.

Discussion

NN confirmed for BS that the biomass estimates are for entire ICES rectangles and include biomass from outside the UK EEZ. BS and NN discussed the high biomass but low recruitment from the no-dredge zone within North Eastern IFCA, and the fact that the 6nm area is not surveyed by Cefas.

AB asked whether biological trigger points could be generated from smaller populations with less variation. NN said the lowest value could be used, but it would be preferable to have a few more years of data. NN noted that understanding larval drift would be required before establishing harvest rates. NN agreed to contact the lead author for the Channel larval drift report, and see when it could be shared with the Steering Group.

Actions from Item 1:

- NN to contact lead author for larval report and to see when the report could be shared with the Secretariat.

Agenda Item 2: National Fisheries Management Plan update (Action 2, 3) (Caitlin)

The FMP consultation and related documents were published on 17th July 2023 (<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/fisheries-management-plans-1/kingscallop-fmp-consultation/>). The consultation deadline is 1st October 2023. CM briefly discussed the FMP relevant to this FIP, the King scallop FMP in English and Welsh waters, and encouraged the Steering Group to submit a response to the consultation.

Discussion

JP agreed to coordinate a meeting to develop a Steering Group response to the FMP, using the action plan to inform the process. JP asked whether the 7d closure will be consulted upon annually as it has implications for PI 1.2.1 scoring against the MSC standard. CM said a closure strategy is being developed with the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), with later input from the Shellfish Industry Consultation Group (SICG). JH and FN discussed if harvest rate MSY would change based on the latest Lyme Bay stock assessment. FN said it wouldn't until further data on recruitment is available to be incorporated to the model, therefore the annual review assessment remains as is.

Actions from Item 2:

- Secretariat to arrange a separate meeting to develop a Steering Group FMP response.

Agenda Item 3: Habitats – I-VMS, MPAs (Action 5) (Lisa/ Lauren)*Inshore Vessel Monitoring Systems (I-VMS)*

Due to a byelaw, vessels fishing within the Devon and Severn IFCA are required to have I-VMS onboard. LB and LP have contacted the MMO to clarify the data ownership, acquisition, and formatting process to access this I-VMS data. It is still unclear who has legal ownership over the data when an external request is made. While this is being coordinated, LP may be able to provide vessel point data (without any vessel ID) to support the actions for this FIP.

Discussion

FN reiterated the importance of using this as a case study in preparation for the national I-VMS roll-out. RW suggested creating an I-VMS data ownership schematic once the D&S IFCA have clarified the process. NN said Cefas have some access to I-VMS and VMS data, though ways to filter the data are extremely limited. NN suggested that Cefas could potentially be commissioned to produce a footprint map in conjunction with the MMO.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

LB gave an overview of the MMO MPA rollout stages. The [consultation period for Stage 3](#) ended in March, which looked at the impacts of bottom towed gear in 41 MPAs; 11 of these are in the English Channel, most notably for this FIP is the East of Start Point MPA. Management measures are still expected by the end of 2024.

Actions from Item 3:

- LP to share any response from D+S IFCA chief and MMO with the Secretariat regarding access to I-VMS access.
- LP to see if D+S IFCA have access to vessel point data which can be shared with the Steering Group.

Agenda Item 4: ETP – Clean Catch (Action 4) (Bex)

This is to support Action 4 milestone 7 in the action plan, which is to demonstrate recording and reporting of fishery dependant ETP interactions via the [Clean Catch App](#). The Secretariat thanked South West Fish Producers Organisation and Macduff Shellfish for promoting vessel to trial the app; this trial should be starting over the coming weeks.

Discussion

JH raised that there were challenges in gaining participation in the app trial as she believes her members are now less engaged with the FIP than when it began. This is important to consider when discussing the next steps for the FIP, and at the forthcoming Southwest Hub meeting. CP agreed, suggesting more industry outreach would be beneficial to maintain interest in an MSC certified scallop fishery.

Actions from Item 4:

- Secretariat to discuss with CP and JH about the best way to improve MSC engagement in the South West.

Agenda Item 5: FisheryProgress.org social policy (Bex/ Jo)

The Secretariat has been supporting the FIPs with the Fishery Progress requirements on human rights and social responsibility (HRSR). Action updates are submitted every six or 12 months [on the FIP profile](#), as required. A supporting document for the Grievance Mechanism requirement was recently uploaded by the Secretariat; Steering Group members are welcome to provide comments on that document. JP noted if the FIP wishes to submit an extension in April 2024 on fisheryprogress.org, then the responsibility for the social policy reporting would need to be handed over to the new Secretariat.

Agenda Item 6: Commercial markets update (Seth)

In 2022-23 the UK & Ireland market ranks third, globally, for MSC labelled sales, ahead of most European countries (excluding the German, Austrian and Swiss grouped region). 1,350 unique labelled products were retailed in 2022-23, comprised of 52 species. Sustainable seafood 'shelves' and improved search engine optimisation on retailer websites has increased visibility of labelled products when shopping online. Southern European retailers have increasingly been announcing commitments to expand the proportion of MSC labelled products, including on fish counters, driving the need for certification to fulfil their sourcing requirements. MSC labelled scallops are sold in 22 countries from 10 certified fisheries, with a 76% increase in labelled sales since 2018, and consumer spend reaching ~£153.8 million (2022/23).

Discussion

CP suggested it would be useful to map out the scallop supply chain. JP agreed, however it would require the catching sector to share data on buyer location. SM said internally the MSC can share notifications on recently certified products and volumes within the European network.

Agenda Item 7: ITM and next steps discussion (Lisa / Jo)

The Steering Group need to consider the next steps for the FIP at the end of its current timeline. After April 2024, the MSC will no longer act as Secretariat for the FIP. This means that Steering Group meetings will no longer be scheduled, and Poseidon will also no longer be available to advise fishery stakeholders on how to deliver the FIP action plan. From May 2024, the FIP will be listed as 'inactive' or 'complete' on Fisheryprogress.org, depending on progress made against the actions, with a public statement available detailing any outstanding actions, accordingly.

Three options were proposed to the Steering Group to discuss and comment on:

Option 1: The fishery uses the time between now and the end of the FIP to address additional actions aimed at meeting Version 3.0 (v3.0) of the MSC Standard. After April 2024, the FIP aims to enter full assessment on v3.0. To do this, the next steps are to:

- Form a client group to take responsibility for the certificate
- Approach several CABs for quotes to undertake the initial assessment, as well as annual surveillance audits
- Organise funding for the initial assessment as well as annual surveillance audits
- Complete a documents checklist and gather all documentation and evidence required to demonstrate that the fishery scores on average SG80

Option 2: The FIP joins the In Transition to MSC (ITM) program, led by a client group, and continues to work on actions in the action plan to meet either Version 2.0 (v2.0) or v3.0 of the Standard. The ITM program provides FIPs with access to certification using v2.0, with the understanding that all fisheries must be certified against v3.0 by November 2028. FIPs joining the ITM program must:

- Have a pre assessment less than 36 months old and an associated action plan, both verified by a CAB (the scallop pre assessment was updated by Poseidon in April 2022)
- Have an aim to enter MSC assessment at the end of their action plan
- Have a project manager responsible for delivering the FIP action plan
- Report progress regularly

Option 3: The FIP seeks an extension with FisheryProgress.org and uses the time between now and the end of the FIP to continue to address the current actions. After April 2024, the FIP gains an additional extension to make the improvements and continue using FisheryProgress.org, under a different Secretariat. To do this, the next steps are to:

- Identify a new Secretariat from April 2024
- Approach FPO with a request to extend the FIP, with justification and appropriate timeline
- Organise any funding needed for the extension timeline
- Takes on Social Responsibility actions

Discussion

AB asked how the ITM timescale aligns with the predicted timescale of setting reference points. FN said the current reference points are relative to harvest rate for stock status, satisfying MSC requirements, however, there's only one reference point at MSY and no limit reference point, therefore an action is still required to work towards SG80.

LB explained that the ITM project manager determines how much time is required for action completion, with a maximum length of five years. A Fishery Progress profile is not required by ITM but can be maintained if the Steering Group chooses to do so. LB said that there is no deadline for joining ITM, though if the Steering Group decide soon then the Secretariat can support the process and the group can start working towards the revised action plan.

As a requirement for joining ITM is a commitment to enter MSC, GC asked what a 'firm commitment' from industry would look like. JP and LB explained that the ITM Steering Group should be developing an action plan with the intention of entering the MSC programme, though there is reasonable understanding that circumstances can change and a fishery cannot be forced to enter the MSC Programme.

FN said that she is reviewing the scores for ETP with consideration of the new v3.0 requirements. RW asked what actions could be assigned to increase habitat and ecosystem scores to SG80 in the absence of I-VMS. FN agrees that the habitats component is uncertain until I-VMS data is available to inform habitats information. BS reflected that retroactively adding I-VMS data to species distribution and sensitivity models can be a significant challenge.

LB commented that the ITM program can maintain credibility and momentum of the FIP, as the ITM process includes oversight from a CAB to ensure progress is maintained. BS felt joining ITM would be a logical choice. CP asked whether entering assessment under v3.0 is achievable next year. FN said if harvest strategy and harvest control rules are clearly defined in the second iteration of the King scallop FMP, and can be responsive to the state of the stock, then it could be plausible to enter assessment at that stage, but not before. CP maintained that Macduff are interested in seeing the fishery enter assessment and becoming certified.

Any Other Business

1. *Potential addition of English North Sea area into this FIP (JP)*

JP asked for Steering Group reflections on reassigning the English North Sea area (Yorkshire/Durham 27.4.b.S) of the Round 2 UK Scallops FIP to sit within the Channel scallop FIP. Round 1 and Round 2 scallop FIP timelines both now end in April 2024, though the delay in the development of FMPs in Scottish and Irish waters is delaying Round 2 FIP progress. Recent scoring indicates that because the English North Sea stock falls within the remit of the King scallop FMP in English and Welsh waters, it would be able to advance towards certification more quickly than the Scottish and Irish UoA's.

Discussion

CP supported the transition, suggesting the English North Sea could be tracked through the Round 1 FIP, but on paper kept within the UK scallops FIP. JH asked whether it matters how the fishery areas are allocated within the FIPs, and what is the impact of removing it. FN noted three key areas where there is a difference between the English North Sea scallop UoA, and other Round 2 scallop UoA's: (1) English North Sea stock now has MSY reference points, (2) the English and Welsh FMP informing management in P1 and P3 and (3) there are different ETP lists (e.g. Scottish PMFs are not in the North Sea ETP list). Therefore, it is more of a housekeeping process regarding where it is most appropriate to assign the stock within a unit of assessment and inclusion with the Channel scallop FIP makes the most sense.

Actions from AOB:

- Secretariate to circulate the rationale for including the English North Sea within the Round 1 Channel Scallops FIP

Meeting Closes

References

Silva et al., 2021: Larval connectivity of scallop beds in the English Channel, Cefas Report

Actions Arising	Responsibility
<i>Actions from Item 1:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NN contact lead author for larval report and to see when the report could be shared with the Secretariat. 	Nikolai Nawri
<i>Actions from Item 2:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretariat to arrange a separate meeting to develop a Steering Group FMP response. 	Secretariat
<i>Actions from Item 3:</i> LP to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • share any response from D+S IFCA chief and MMO with the Secretariat regarding access to I-VMS access. • see if D+S IFCA have access to vessel point data which can be shared with the Steering Group. 	Lauren Parkhouse
<i>Actions from Item 4:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretariat to discuss with CP and JH about the best way to improve MSC engagement in the South West. 	Secretariat
<i>AOB Actions:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretariate to circulate the rationale for including the English North Sea within the Round 1 Channel Scallops FIP 	Secretariat