

Minutes: Channel Scallop Steering Group meeting

Meeting Date: 11 March 2024

Location: Online

Attendees	Organisation
AH: Alex Holdgate	Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)
BS: Bryce Stewart	Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom (MBA)
CP: Claire Pescod	Macduff Shellfish
FN: Fiona Nimmo	Poseidon
IW: Imogen Wright	Southern Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority (IFCA)
JeH: Jessica Harvey	Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas)
JH: Juliette Hatchman	South Western Fish Producer Organisation Ltd (SWFPO)
LP: Lauren Parkhouse	Devon & Severn Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority (D+S IFCA)
LB: Lisa Bennett	Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)
QN: Quiterie Ng	Tesco
LPr: Louise Price	Marine Management Organisation (MMO)
RL: Rebecca Lyal	Marine Stewardship Council
TS: Tiago Silva	Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas)
ZD: Zuzanna Dusza	South Western Fish Producer Organisation Ltd (SWFPO)
Apologies	
GB: George Balchin	Sussex Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority (S-IFCA)
GC: Gus Caslake	SeaFish
RW: Rob Whitely	Natural England

Agenda Item 1: Summary of the FIP (FN) - Scallop FMP and FIP Action plan

FN presented the current progress of the FIP with respect to the action plan.

Principle 1

For PI 1.1.1 Stock status all stocks are scoring >80 except for Lyme Bay which is scoring <60, because the estimated harvest rate for the Lyme Bay stock has been above the MSY harvest rate reference point (HR_{MSY}) since 2016 and has been increasing since 2019. Given the trend in HR_{MSY} , stock rebuilding should be considered for the Lyme Bay stock. For PI 1.2.1 all Channel scallop stocks are scoring <60 for PI 1.2.1 Harvest strategy and P1.2.2 Harvest control rules and tools as there are currently no limit reference points defined for any Channel scallop stocks, and no harvest strategies or harvest control rules in place that are responsive to the state of the stock.

Significant progress was made against P1 actions in 2023 through the publication of The Strategic Environmental Assessment: Environmental Report (as part of the Proposed Fisheries Management Plan for king scallops in English and Welsh Waters) and in the Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) in July and December respectively, and many of the objectives within the FMP align well with the FIP action plan. Objective 2 is focused on developing an overarching management framework using output controls (e.g. catch limits) or input controls (e.g. days at sea limits) supported with additional measures such as technical gear measures and/or area-based management, and the development of

limit and target reference points is also highlighted as a key mechanism to deliver sustainable fisheries management. Many of these objectives are categorised as short to medium term priorities of the FMP (i.e. 1 to 5 years), and the implementation of the FMP provides a robust framework for the delivery of many elements of the FIP action plan in the coming years. However, whilst the FMP formalises the FIP action plan, its publication does not result in any score changes at this time, as many aspects have not yet been implemented.

Principle 2

There are currently no P2 PIs scoring <60. However, all PIs in both the ETP species and Habitats components score <80, and PI 2.5.1 in the Ecosystem component scores <80. There is work ongoing related to the delivery and management of the MPA network, including a recent publication on management measures within MPAs that includes sites relevant to the FIP. The Clean Catch app remains a focus of the FIP for progressing actions on habitats and ecosystems, and there is work ongoing to understand the footprint of the inshore/U12m fleet segment, which remains a significant data gap in the FIP.

Work completed in the lifetime of the FIP includes the habitat assessment for king scallops in the English Channel carried out by Steven Newstead at Bangor University which included mapping VMEs and benthic invertebrate ETP species relevant to the FIP. The associated report also identified concentrated fishing effort that overlapped with the East of Start Point MCZ and highlighted the generally higher abundance of sensitive species and habitats in inshore waters, where the negative effects of scallop dredging are expected to be the greatest. The report also explored the use of remote cameras to identify sensitive species and habitats but highlighted several difficulties with using this approach *in situ*. Given these findings, the FIP is focused on using the Clean Catch app (still in development by Cefas) to record interactions with sensitive species and habitats instead of using video recordings.

FN also noted that Objective 5 of the FMP is to assess the interactions with the marine environment and potential impacts associated with king scallop fisheries and to develop an action plan with appropriate measures to reduce damaging impacts, which aligns well with the FIP action plan. The FMP also includes additional ecosystem elements around marine litter, blue carbon and CO₂ emissions which are beyond the scope of the current FIP action plan.

Principle 3

Whilst there are currently no P3 PIs that score <60, there are several PIs scoring <80 (i.e. P3.1.2 Consultation, roles, and responsibilities; P3.2.1 Fishery specific objectives; P3.2.2 Decision making processes). FN suggested the greatest potential for score changes relate to P3 and the associated actions (i.e. Action 6) which are to develop, consult on, and implement the Fishery Management Plan. FN reiterated that 8 specific management objectives were published as part of the king scallop FMP and these will be considered as part of the final annual review for the FIP to demonstrate some of the aspects covered in the FMP.

Discussion

Industry representatives asked for more explanation on the stock status, harvest rate and PRI of the Lyme Bay stock. FN reiterated that biological limit reference points are not currently defined for the Lyme Bay stock and are required to achieve both SG60 and SG80 for PI 1.1.1. Currently, only fishing

mortality-based reference points are available for Lyme Bay (i.e. HR_{MSY}), and the harvest rate is estimated to be above this reference point for the entire available timeseries. As such, it cannot be ruled out that the stock is at or below PRI given the trend in harvest rate combined with the lack of defined biological limit reference points for the Lyme Bay stock.

FN commended the FIP's key role in the development of the FMP, noting that given many aspects of the FIP action plan have now been formalised by the FMP. Industry representatives highlighted a recent recommendation by the SICG for the FIP to be formally represented on the recently established FMP implementation support group being led by Defra. Industry representatives suggested a meeting should be organised between Cefas scientists involved in the SICG project steering board (PSB) work, the consultant, and interested members of the FIP Steering Group to identify ways in which the PSB can best support the delivery of any outstanding FIP actions.

Actions from Item 1:

- Secretariat to discuss with CP the best way for the FIP to feed into the SICG implementation support group. Wait for final FIP annual review where Poseidon will summarise where scores have improved as a result of the FMP and also highlight gaps

Agenda Item 2: SICG update (JH)

The SICG met recently to approve the latest Cefas stock assessment, due for publication in the coming weeks. The next steps of the FMP were also discussed, including the potential structure, purpose, remit, and membership of the new FMP implementation support group being led by Defra. JH reiterated that there should be a FIP representative on this group given the close alignment between the FIP action plan and FMP objectives. JH relayed the desire from the SICG to revive the scallop science group that fed into the FMP development and incorporate them in the FMP implementation support group moving forward.

CP shared that JH has been elected the new chair of the SICG following Jim Portus' retirement.

Actions from Item 2:

- Secretariat to facilitate a meeting with relevant Cefas scientists, FN and interested SG members to discuss SICG PSB work in detail after next scallop stock assessment (due to be published in April)

Agenda Item 3: Future structure of the FIP discussion (LB, all) - Timelines remaining

The Steering Group needs to consider the next steps for the FIP at the end of its current timeline, due to finish in April 2024. A final annual review meeting with FN is planned for May 2024, after which Poseidon are no longer contracted to the FIP to advise on the action plan, and Steering Group meetings won't be scheduled by the MSC. The MSC will still technically act as Secretariat until July

2024, when the final update on fisheryprogress.org is due. Given the FIP is unlikely to complete all outstanding actions before July 2024, the FIP will then be listed as 'inactive' on fisheryprogress.org.

In the context of next steps for the FIP, LB updated the group on work ongoing to explore the feasibility of a 'sustainability hub' being established in South West (SW) England (including The Channel), of which several Steering Group member organisations are actively involved. The group also discussed the potential of the FIP to apply to enter the MSC's 'In Transition to MSC' (ITM) programme, either within or outside of the SW sustainability hub structure.

Discussion

There was broad industry preference to see the FIP continue making improvements in the fishery in some form of formalised structure. This was summarised as either 1) extending the FIP on fisheryprogress.org or 2) the FIP applying to enter ITM. Some members suggested the ITM route as more credible than extending on fisheryprogress.org, given the FIP has already had a 2-year extension on fisheryprogress.org.

Some industry members expressed a preference for the FIP to be incorporated into the SW sustainability hub, subject to the development of a formal organisational and membership structure with clear aims and objectives. Industry expressed the need for more input from both domestic and international retail sector stakeholders on their needs to help guide the future direction of the FIP. Retailers in attendance were generally supportive of the FIP progressing so long as there is a credible plan in place and independent reporting of progress against objectives.

FN suggested that if the Steering Group intends for the FIP to be incorporated into the SW sustainability hub, the group needs to consider a way to continue progressing the FIP until the hub has been formally launched and is ready to incorporate the FIP into its remit.

Actions from Item 3:

- Secretariat to follow up by email with UK retailers to get their perspective on the preferred future direction of the FIP. Recommendation to contact retailers beyond the FIP group to get wider UK/EU perspective

Agenda Item 4: Fishery Progress Social Policy requirements (RL)

As part of being listed on Fishery Progress (FP), the Secretariat has been supporting the FIP with the requirements on human rights and social responsibility (HRSR). Action updates are submitted every six or 12 months on the FIP profile, as required, and discussed at Steering Group meetings where relevant. The HRSR policy laid out by FP is comprised of two components. Component 1 is a requirement for all FIPs listed on Fisheryprogress.org and consists of five elements which must be completed:

1. Demonstrate they have a public policy statement outlining a commitment to human rights and social responsibility
2. Provide information about the vessels and/or fishers included in the FIP
3. Undertake best efforts to make fishers aware of their rights
4. Demonstrate there is a grievance mechanism available to all fishers in the FIP
5. Complete a self-evaluation against the FP criteria for increased risk of forced labour and human trafficking

Component 2 is an additional requirement for FIPs that meet one or more FP's criteria for increased risk of forced labour and human trafficking and consists of two elements which must be completed:

1. Complete a risk assessment
2. Complete a social workplan (if applicable)

This FIP is required to complete component 2 due to one or more vessels within the FIP having a significant foreign migrant workforce (defined as 25% or more of fishers who are not citizens of the vessel's flag state).

A self-evaluation against the FP criteria for increased risk of forced labour and human trafficking was submitted and approved in 2021. A 12-month extension was granted in May 2023 to allow the FIP to work on the remaining 4 elements in component 1, and a 12-month extension was also submitted in November 2023 to allow the FIP to work on the two elements in component 2. As such, in June 2024, the FIP is required to provide an update on the outcome of the actions listed in the extension request granted in May 2023 and provide a summary of progress for the actions listed in the extension request granted in November 2023 to FP. Failure to do so will result in the FIP being listed as 'inactive' on Fisheryprogress.org.

Discussion:

It was noted that hesitancy in providing vessel ownership information is not unique to this FIP given the personal nature of the data being requested, and this has been explained to FP by the Secretariat. The Secretariat noted that Fisheryprogress.org has a confidentiality waiver whereby they won't publish the skippers' names on the website, however the FIP is still required to gather this information and send it to them. Industry representatives explained that vessel ownership often changes, and there were concerns about the potential resource costs associated with regularly updating this information on Fisheryprogress.org. RL reiterated that any changes in vessel ownership would be submitted as part of the routine six- or 12-month updates to the FIP profile as required by Fisheryprogress.org.

Actions from Item 4:

- Secretariat to contact relevant SG members for information on progress towards Fisheryprogress.org social policy requirements

Agenda Item 5: Update on larval distribution report (TS & JeH)

TS presented the results of a report on larval connectivity in the English Channel, which looked at the flow of larvae between different scallop fishing grounds and the relative contribution of larvae from undredged grounds to dredged grounds. Larval dispersal rates between different grounds were estimated using a particle tracking model driven by high resolution hydrodynamic modelling of currents coupled with information on the life cycle of scallops in the English Channel. Six simulations were run in total, each assuming one of three different wind conditions (i.e. low, medium, high) and one of two different larval settling behaviours (to quantify uncertainty). Spawning rates were assumed to be proportional to the density of adults/harvestable biomass within the population. The results show strong evidence for the presence of two geographically isolated broad meta-populations in the Channel i.e. the Eastern Channel & Western Channel, with stronger larval connectivity observed within these two areas than between them. Stronger internal recruitment was observed in grounds in the Eastern Channel than the Western Channel where stocks are more reliant on their connectivity to

external grounds for larval input. Several grounds that receive significant larval input from undredged grounds were also identified in the Western Channel and Celtic Sea (i.e. 7.e.3, 7.e.6 and 7.f.1). The remaining dredged grounds received low contributions from undredged grounds i.e. 13% or less.

Discussion

FN commented that the Lyme Bay stock appears to sit within the 7.e.4 grounds which has been identified in this study as having high internal larval recruitment. Given the harvest rate has been increasing in Lyme Bay, any management measures that are introduced within the local area should directly benefit the productivity of the Lyme Bay stock.

JeH reiterated that the spatial extent of the beds that Cefas survey are redefined every five years based on VMS data from the fishery, and so any discrepancies between stock areas in the report and areas previously considered by the FIP are likely due to the updated survey areas.

Actions from Item 5:

- TS to share slides from their presentation, tables of simulation results split by stock area, and published report with the group

Agenda Item 6: ETP guides update (RL) - Clean catch

This is to support Action 4 in the action plan, which is to define where direct effects of the fishery remain a concern for Endangered Threatened and Protected (ETP) species (including identifying ETP species and location). To meet the requirements for certification, fishers are required to report interactions between their gear and ETP/VMEs. RL updated the Steering Group on identification guides which have been designed in collaboration with Mindfully Wired Communications to help fishers identify ETP and Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VME) species at sea. The guides include information on the distribution and frequency of the species in UK waters alongside a summary of relevant fishing regulations. The final designs have now been reviewed, and a handheld A6 size prototype made from waterproof and tear-free paper with a rust-free ring binder has been produced. A2 sized posters displaying the top twelve elasmobranch species that fishers interact with in UK waters have also been produced, and these are intended for use on the quayside or on larger vessels.

Discussion

LB reiterated that the guides were initially developed for Project UK R2 FIPs but are also relevant to this FIP as they cover all UK waters. Any SG member wishing for a copy of the guide should contact the Secretariat and they can be provided.

Actions from Item 6:

- Steering Group members to contact the Secretariat should they want copies of either the guide and/or poster

Agenda Item 7: Habitats – I-VMS update D+S IFCA

The introduction of legislation to make I-VMS mandatory on all vessels under 12m in length operating in English waters is expected to come into force in April 2024. Due to a local byelaw, vessels fishing within the Devon and Severn IFCA district are already required to have I-VMS onboard.

LP presented seasonal heat maps of vessel point data (without any vessel ID) for all vessels with Mobile Fishing Permits operating in the D&S IFCA district, overlaid with the boundaries of MPAs within the district. From these maps, it is possible to visualise the extent of vessel activity – including both transiting and fishing – from fishing vessels under 12m in length using scallop gear within the district. LP noted that given the underlying I-VMS data is not currently linked to landings data, the maps likely include activity from vessels using trawls as gear switching is common for some vessels fishing for scallops within the district.

Discussion

FN noted that, subject to more detailed analysis, the seasonal heat-maps seem to demonstrate good compliance with the seasonal and full time MCZ/MPA closures in operation within the district. FN commented that the heat-maps are likely more environmentally precautionary as the inclusion of data from vessels using trawls means a wider footprint of vessel activity are being presented. FN proposed that the methods used by D&S IFCA to access the I-VMS data for their district should be rolled out across/shared with all other IFCA districts in The Channel so that heat-maps of scallop dredge vessel activity can be produced for the entire FIP area.

Actions from Item 7:

- LP to share slides and maps of the work undertaken on I-VMS in D+S IFCA with Secretariat
- FN to compare heat map of I-VMS vessel activity with other data sources to explore if the maps are representative of overall scallop dredge fishing activity
- LP to look at anonymising the D+S-IFCA IVMS data, and check whether this can be shared
- Secretariat to contact LP to further discuss I-VMS work

Agenda Item 8: Additional information to submit

LB reminded all Steering Group members that the final review meeting will be in May, and this is where the consultant will consider any new information or evidence which may contribute to score changes. The rollout of some management measures in MPAs for example is something that has changed in the last 12 months and will be considered in line with the remaining actions.

Discussion

The group discussed next steps for the FIP again and whether it was necessary to consider Version 3 of the MSC Standard, particularly when thinking about the plan for future improvements. As there are still several actions to be completed which are tied into the FMP implementation, it would be wise for the FIP to now focus on Version 3 for any future action plan. LB suggested that as part of the work for the final annual review, it might be possible for the consultant to look at Version 3 of the Standard and consider the remaining actions in that context. However, this needs to be discussed with the consultant to consider the cost, as well as capacity to undertake this work.

The group also discussed the potential for the Secretariat to communicate the progress made over the lifetime of the FIP and 'celebrate the successes' through a formal communications output.

Actions from Item 8:

- Secretariat to speak with FN to understand costs and capacity to create an action plan against Version 3 of the MSC Standard for this FIP
- Secretariat to consider best way to promote the progress and successes of the FIP over its timeline through communications

Meeting Closes

Actions Arising	Responsibility
Secretariat to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - discuss with CP the best way for the FIP to feed into the SICG implementation support group. Wait for final FIP annual review where Poseidon will summarise where scores have improved because of the FMP and also highlight gaps - facilitate a meeting with relevant Cefas scientists, FN and interested SG members to discuss SICG PSB work in detail after next scallop stock assessment (due to be published in April) - follow up by email with UK retailers to get their perspective on the preferred future direction of the FIP. Recommendation to contact retailers beyond the FIP group to get wider UK/EU perspective - contact relevant SG members for information on progress towards Fisheryprogress.org social policy requirements - to contact LP to further discuss I-VMS work - speak with FN to understand costs and capacity to create an action plan against Version 3 of the MSC Standard for this FIP - consider best way to promote the progress and successes of the FIP over its timeline through communications 	Secretariat; CP
TS to share slides from their presentation, tables of simulation results split by stock area, and published report with the group	TS
Steering Group members to contact the Secretariat should they want copies of either the guide and/or poster	All
LP to share slides and maps of the work undertaken on I-VMS in D+S IFCA with Secretariat	LP
LP to look at anonymising the D+S-IFCA IVMS data, and check whether this can be shared with the Secretariat	LP
FN to compare heat map of I-VMS vessel activity with other data sources to explore if the maps are representative of overall scallop dredge fishing activity	FN