**Project UK Stage One: Crab and Lobster**

**(Facilitated by the MSC)**

Wednesday 12th February, 10:00 – 14:00

Reed Hall, Streatham Drive, Exeter, Devon, EX4 4QR

**Attending:**

BP: Beshlie Pool SD&C Shellfishermen

CS: Chloe Smith Southern IFCA

DM: Daisy May MMO

GC: Gus Caslake Seafish

JB: John Balls NDFA

JP: Jo Pollett MSC

KK: Katie Keay MSC

MS: Matt Spencer MSC

MY: Martyn Youell Waterdance

TH: Tim Huntingdon Poseidon

**Dial-in:**

CP: Claire Pescod Macduff

JM: Jenny Murray Defra

JoM: Joanna Messini Defra

RM: Ros McIntyre Cefas

SC: Sarah Clarke Dev&Sev IFCA

**Apologies:**

Estelle Brennan Labeyrie

Joe Prosho Morrisons

Laky Zervudachi Direct Seafoods

Rachel Irish MMO

Robyn Cloake Labeyrie

Theresa Redding Natural England

**Guest speaker:**

GeC: George Clark MSC

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss progress on the Stage 1 Action Plan for scallops; to discuss the updates to governance and branding; and to develop the work plan for the year ahead. No feedback was received on the previous meeting minutes from 13 August 2019 so they will be uploaded to Fishery Progress. Based on the conversation during the last steering group meeting, George Clark, Senior UK Commercial Manager at MSC, presented on global markets for brown crab and the presence of the MSC in Asia.

**Presentation by the MSC on global brown crab markets**

GeC explained that MSC certified catch is growing globally with 395 fisheries currently in the programme. The UK is a prominent market and consumers spent over £1 billion on MSC products in retail outlets in the last year, representing approximately two-thirds of all wild caught seafood sold in UK retail.

A recent MSC survey of over 1,000 seafood consumers in the UK (and more than 22,000 globally) showed that consumers are highly concerned about ocean plastics and overfishing. There is consumer demand for better protection of the oceans for future generations. Since 2016 the demand for independent verification of sustainability has risen and 68% of respondents indicate a high level of trust in the MSC label.

There is very little MSC certified crab globally, so there is a lot of opportunity for crab to enter the programme both in the UK and internationally. Shetland currently has the only certified brown crab in the world, producing approximately 200 tonnes per year, which is sourced by John West for one of their canned lines.

China is a huge seafood processing nation, and there had been a big increase in Chain of Custody holders, with 150% increase in MSC product sales in 2018-2019. Currently in China there are more than 20 retailers engaged in the MSC program, and with the total engagement in Asia expected to rise this year with the Olympics in Japan. China went from 12 labelled products in 2014 to 579 in 2019, and this looks set to continue increasing.

Based on the recent survey, Chinese consumers vary from UK consumers, with safety and traceability being the priority to them; sustainability ranked fifth in their survey results. The MSC label covers traceability as well as sustainability, and the situation with coronavirus will only make these concerns more important. GeC said the MSC label is something that can add real value to seafood products, particularly in the case of crab in Asian markets. GeC also provided the example of the Cornish hake fishery adding 90p to every kilo of fish landed since its MSC certification.

**Action 1 and 2: Harvest Strategy and Harvest Control rules (HCRs)**

The Year 3 action was to have a harvest strategy proposal for consultation, but this is not ready due to the need for alignment across the many different management areas. There needs to be a clear, overarching strategy for the fishery, that relates and makes reference to the UK, IFCA and MMO strategies. Currently the strategy for managing crab is based on input controls, which is fine if they are proven to be robust and responsive. The group discussed the MSC certified crab from the Shetlands and their harvest strategy, which details the specific harvest control rules in use. Matt Bamping (MSC) had previously summarised the Shetland harvest strategy and control rules, and this can be recirculated to the Steering Group.

JB felt the big concern was the volume of gear on the seabed, and that despite these pots having with escape gaps to prevent them from ghost fishing, they were still a concern. There was a need to get reliable data on how many vessels are part of the fishery and how many pots are being deployed, for all sizes of vessels and all management regions (inshore and offshore). Devon and Severn (D&S) IFCA has a permit system, but there is no clarity around what happens outside of the IFCA jurisdiction and how many pots there are. The data D&S IFCA work with is based on what fishermen tell them, and the only way to verify this would be to ensure all pots are tagged and then hauled to check, which would be unfeasible. Southern IFCA uses data from the monthly shellfish reports, which are currently being updated to include the under 10m vessels through their catch app. In Cornwall there was a requirement to submit the number of pots a fishermen uses, so in some areas it might be possible to work out the fishing pressure but in others, such as outside the 6nm, it won’t.

Simon Dixon (MMO) may be able to provide data for outside the 6nm limit, but information for the under 10m fleet may take a bit of time to acquire while the app is configured. In due course there should be a rich data set to look at. There could be a way to estimate the maximum number of pots being used per day, but as this is not currently a requirement by the management authorities fishermen would have to be willing to do so voluntarily. CS stated Southern IFCA recently had an intern look at their pot data and they did a very broad assessment but the data was poor because only 10 vessels in their district filled in the correct forms. GC believed that this alignment of management is Defra’s responsibility and that it needs a national approach.

Action 1 comes down to understanding and reacting to fishing mortality. There are proxies available for the crab stock, such as Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE), and stock assessments are undertaken, but there still needs to be a mechanism to limit effort. MY announced that these issues would be addressed in a newly formed group, the Shellfish Industry Advisory Group (SIAG), comprising of industry representatives and Defra, akin to what is being done for scallops by the Scallop Industry Consultation Group (SICG). The SIAG:

* The SIAG first met on the 25th January 2020 (minutes available) and will next meet on 3rd March;
* Defra plans to develop UK-wide management strategies for crab, lobster and whelk, focusing not just on the inshore fleet but all those involved with shellfish fisheries;
* Defra could not confirm a timeline for a UK-wide shellfish harvest strategies;
* There is an overlap of members of the SIAG and Project UK (e.g. BP, CP, MY, JB and JM sit on both groups) and membership is still being developed. Seafish is the secretariat (Aoife Martin is the contact) and Barrie Deas (National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations) chaired the January meeting. SC asked for the details to be shared with D&S IFCA and the group felt it is important to understand more about the SIAG and how best for Project UK to interact with that group;
* The aims of the SIAG and Project UK seem to align; perhaps this FIP could be a regional subset of the SIAG. The FIP’s Fishery Management Plan (FMP) would have to fit in with the SIAG’s overall management approach. Similarly, this FIP could contribute to the SIAG, as the Steering Group has undertaken a lot of research to address data gaps in the fishery.

The Devolved Administrations (DA) are responsible for drafting the FMPs but they will require input from groups such as Project UK and SIAG. BP welcomed the news that Defra is working on a shellfish strategy as for years shellfish have not been a priority. The harvest strategy for this FIP may depend on the national shellfish strategy, and it is encouraging to see the Fisheries Bill mention a move towards species specific FMPs, as this represents a fundamental change. A UK-wide harvest strategy and control rules will address the scoring for this FIP covering both crab and lobster in Principle 1.

JB suggested the next step would be to let the SIAG agree with Government what reduced effort would look like, then bring details back to this FIP to work on implementing regionally with local fishermen. The timelines need to be considered as the FIP only has two years left, and it may take the SIAG and government longer than that to legislate for the necessary management. Hopefully through the SIAG co-management process, the consultation actions for the FIP will be addressed, which should mean that the FIP year 4 aligns with the progress being made by both groups.

**Actions:**

* **Secretariat to share Matt Bamping (MSC)’s review of Shetland crab harvest strategy**
* **MY to send SIAG minutes to secretariat**
* **Secretariat to understand membership overlap with SIAG and determine the best process for engaging with the SIAG**
* **JM to share any information on SIAG with the secretariat, along with timelines for the shellfish strategy and details of roles and responsibilities for the FMPs mentioned in the Fisheries Bill**
* **Secretariat to speak with Simon Dixon (MMO) about what data on effort the MMO are collecting and whether we can access it**
* **CS to circulate the report undertaken by the Southern IFCA intern**

**Action 3 & 4: Primary & Secondary Management and Secondary Information**

These actions focus on mitigating bycatch and considering alternative measures to reduce species interactions and ensure species are released alive where possible. GC has finished an alternative measures review which needs summarising for the FMP. Matt Voller’s (MV) report may need to be looked at in further detail as his numbers are by individuals and not by weight and didn’t take survivability into account. GC didn’t think that any of the species MV listed would reach the 5% mark if survivability was incorporated. The report acknowledged that bycatch was only one aspect to consider, and net mortality is the important consideration. GC was also concerned about the assumptions made in the report, which are not clearly identified to the reader. If this work is included in the FMP, it will be important to ensure it is also shared with the SIAG so they know what progress has already been made. GC suggested that the group might be better waiting on the progress of the SIAG before continuing with this action.

Currently the FIP looks like it would score below SG60 for the harvest strategy and HCRs, and this problem will be exacerbated with all this extra effort coming in. Even if the score were above SG60 for this action the FIP would still need to average above SG80 for Principle 1 (P1) or it would fail. Currently there are mostly 60-79 scores elsewhere in P1 so the fishery would likely fail an MSC assessment. KK proposed that the steering group wait until the outcome of the next SIAG meeting to understand their direction for management before going further.

BP mentioned that Brexit may still create access issues, with up to 15 large crabbing vessels set to come back into UK waters. For P1 there remains a lot of uncertainty, but there is plenty of P2 work that can be addressed in the meantime.

The work the steering group are doing is about improving the sustainability of the fishery rather than specifically achieving MSC certification, and it will be up to the group themselves to decide if, and when, they want to enter the MSC program. It will be important for any decisions to be driven from industry groups such as BP’s and MY’s as it will be industry that would take this on as a client group. GC suggested that the FIP could enter full assessment soon, with the understanding there will be conditions in place to be addressed throughout the five year certificate. TH thought that under the MSC’s new fishery certification process, a fishery could enter assessment and once the Announcement Comment Draft Report (ACDR – a desktop review) is published, ‘pause’ the assessment temporarily to address any outstanding issues.

**Actions:**

* **MY and GC to enquire about internships to contribute research to Project UK**
* **Steering group to keep a watching brief on SIAG and ascertain what their direction for management looks like.**

**Action 5: Endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species**

GC confirmed that the South West was very different to Scotland in regard to whale interactions. The Channel is not part of a migration route, nor are there the number of islands to travel through as there are in Scotland. This is why there are not any records of whale interactions in the South West, and Cefas corroborated this by stating that there were not many whales in the area.

TH confirmed that this action will be complete once the report BP’s report on ETP interactions and mitigation is summarised in the FMP. The report had been positively received and was discussed at the previous Steering Group meeting.

**Action: BP to send a summary of the ETP report, along with GC’s whale information, to the secretariat who will add it to the FMP**

**Action 6: Fishery specific objectives**

The group had noted that bait species could be a problem for certification of this fishery. If bait is more than 5% of the target catch then has to be included as a secondary species, and any assessment would need to assess its provenance. BP said that this would be a huge ask, but TH thought it would only really apply to four or five species as the rest will be listed as ‘minor’. Crab and lobster would need to be looked at separately under P1. GC explained that in the crab fishery the bait is about 25% of the catch. As this is above the 5% threshold any assessment would need to see that the bait itself is sustainable. If the bait used is a managed species, then it would be addressed as a primary species, and if it is not managed it would be considered a secondary species, possibly requiring a Risk Based Framework analysis (RBF) and Productivity Susceptibility Analysis (PSA). Nathan de Rozarieux previously wrote a report, separate from the FIP, that is useful and will need adding to the FMP. GC questioned whether bait analysis would include frames, as these may not come from species with TAC. TH suggested as a starting point to use the work BP has already done, and Nathan de Rozarieux’s bait report.

MY stated that they predominantly use gurnard, rays and pouting for bait, and offered to get a sample of what his fishermen were using to extrapolate from there. TH suggested that perhaps the IFCAs could provide a sample of bait being used by one or two boats representative of the area.

Data seems to be available but there are resource constraints in being able to analyse it. KK asked the group if anyone had any capacity for internships that could help support this analysis, which MY and GC agreed to look into. GC said it would be interesting work if we could get some bait to catch weight ranges and a breakdown of species used. DM asked TH to formulate an email for him so he knew exactly what the steering group requires and can follow up internally with the MMO. DM said that boats did give away bycatch species in an informal agreement and he would follow up with Hubert Gieschen on who the lead in the MMO is on this work.

Similar fisheries (Shetland and Jersey) were both assessed on MSC standard v1.3 so they have not had to deal with the issue of bait yet. This FIP will be following v2.0 which is more rigorous around the P2 requirements. TH said the group will need to be careful around this work and that fish frames that are used for bait will also need looking at.

**Actions:**

* **Secretariat to seek MMO and Defra input to the FMP**
* **Secretariat to work with Steering Group to summarize reports for Actions 4 and 5 to add to FMP**
* **CS and IFCAs to find out bait used by a representative portion of their fleets**
* **MY to provide secretariat with a breakdown of bait volume and type (over several vessels and locations if possible)**
* **TH to draft email to MMO explaining exactly what data the FIP is looking for and DM to follow up internally over P2 species use as bait in issues such as frames**

**AOB**

KK discussed the Project UK Terms of Reference (ToR) that had been finalised last November with input from across the Project UK FIPs and shared by email. Some concerns around voting arose from a member in the Stage 2 FIP, who felt that decisions should be made by consensus only, and should never get to the stage of needing a vote. KK said that the secretariat was now asking each of the Stage 1 Steering Groups how they would prefer to proceed. There are two options: to keep the agreement resulting from the consultation which includes voting as a last resort where consensus cannot be made, or align with the Stage 2 request to remove the clause on voting (section 1.4 of the draft ToR) to remain consistent throughout Project UK FIPs.

BP stated that she felt voting was sensible and it made sense to have a way out of an impasse. MY said he had no strong views either way. The overriding feeling from the group was to continue with things as they had been agreed in November.

KK presented the final Project UK logo to the group and explained there will be guidance for logo use coming soon. If anyone would like to contribute to the guidance, or wants to use the logo in the meantime, then please discuss this with the secretariat beforehand.

KK announced that the MSC was launching a campaign called ‘What it takes’­ to showcase Cornish hake and Shetlands mussel, and the hard work fishermen put in to delivering quality seafood. One of the showcase events will be held in Plymouth and KK offered invitations and information to those present who were interested in attending.

JB mentioned that he was growing concerned about marine space – particularly with wind farms and mobile gear. The increase in wind farms in the Bristol Channel was putting pressure on fishermen and fishing grounds due to displacement, and JB suggested this is something that the MSC should take into account. TH said that all wind farms were required to have an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). KK said she would share this concern with the marketing team for the What it Takes campaign.

BP asked why the FMP didn’t include the Channel Islands, as they used English licencing, and she thought the Welsh would need to input more into the work. The two big Channel Islands (>15m) vessels are managed by the MMO and should be involved in this FIP. They are landing into Brixham and Salcombe, with vessels licences controlled through Plymouth. Currently they are restricted by the Western Waters Regime. GC thought the group would need to speak with French and Irish counterparts and cautioned that the French effort in the Channel is probably in excess of the UK’s.

**Actions:**

* **Secretariat and BP to engage with the two Channel vessels**
* **Secretariat to seek MMO and Defra input for FMP**

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| **Action** | **Responsibility**  |
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* MY to send SIAG minutes to secretariat
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| ***Action 3 & 4: Primary & Secondary Management and Secondary Information*** * MY and GC to enquire about internships to contribute research to Project UK
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| ***Action 5: ETP*** * BP to send a summary of the ETP report, along with GC’s whale information, to the secretariat who will add it to the FMP
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