Minutes: crab and lobster principle 1 and 3 

Meeting Date:19 January 2021

Location: Teams

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| Attendee | Organisation |
| BP: Beshlie Pool | South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen |
| CP: Claire Pescod | Macduff Shellfish |
| CE: Carley Elson | Marine Management Organisation |
| DM: David Markham | Blue Sea Food Company |
| EB: Ewen Bell | Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science |
| GCa: Gus Caslake | Seafish |
| GCl: George Clark | Marine Stewardship Council |
| HG: Hubert Gieschen | Marine Management Organisation |
| HH: Helen Hunter | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs |
| JB: John Balls | North Devon Fishermen's Association |
| JP: Jo Pollett | Marine Stewardship Council |
| KK: Katie Keay | Marine Stewardship Council |
| MJ: Matt Johnson | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs |
| MS: Matt Spencer | Marine Stewardship Council |
| MY: Martyn Youell | Waterdance |
| NdR: Nathan de Rozarieux | Falfish |
| RC: Robyn Cloake | Labeyrie |
| RM: Rosslyn McIntyre | Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science |
| SC: Sarah Clark | Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority |
| TH: Tim Huntington | Poseidon |
| **Observing:** |  |
| CB: Colin Bannister | Observer |

Purpose of the meeting

This call was an opportunity for the Steering Group to review progress made against each of the actions under Principle 1 and 3 in the Project UK crab and lobster Fishery Improvement Project (FIP) action plan and get an update on the status of the Fishery Management Plan (FMP).

Agenda Item 1: MSC certification process

The FIP is coming up to the end of Year 4 in its five-year timeline, and the Steering Group needs to consider whether to form a client group to take responsibility for entering into the MSC programme. The MSC can provide information about the process but cannot provide advice on how to meet the certification requirements. JP presented the MSC certification process to the Steering Group to help inform their discussion.

Presentation from MSC

The client group is responsible for providing all relevant research and reports to the Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) assessment team, including a mandatory client document checklist, which is a guide to the documentation needed to provide an assessor. The CAB uses this information to undertake an initial assessment of the fishery against the MSC Standard and produce the announcement comment draft report (ACDR). The ACDR is a report that gives the client an indication of how the fishery is doing, scoring the fishery against each performance indicator in the MSC Standard, and guides next steps. This report is confidential and, based on the results, the client group can decide whether they wish to proceed further with the full assessment.

If the client group wishes to continue the assessment process, the ACDR is published by the CAB and becomes publicly available for public stakeholder consultation. At this stage it is important to identify key stakeholders, who may wish to comment or submit evidence to the assessment team. There is a 60-day consultation period between the ACDR becoming publicly available and the site visit from the CAB, which is where additional information about the fishery is gathered by the CAB.

After the site visit the CAB produces the client and peer review draft report, an internal document which allows 60 days for the client group to flag any additional information that might support their application and to draft an action plan for any conditions identified by the CAB. At this stage, the client and peer review draft report is peer reviewed by a panel of three independent experts to check the information gathered to date, the process of the CAB and that the scores for each performance indicator is accurate.

Feedback received through the client and peer review process in incorporated into the assessment and the CAB publishes the public comment draft report (PCDR). The PCDR is open for further stakeholder consultation for 30 days and for peer review follow-up. At this stage, the assessment may also be reviewed by the MSC Technical Oversight team, to independently review the certification process and raise any irregularities or concerns with Assurance Services International (ASI), an independent organisation that acts as a ‘watchdog’ to ensure due process and relevant rigour has been implemented to the assessment process.

After addressing the consultation and peer review feedback, the CAB delivers the Final Draft Report (FDR). This report is open to a notice of objection for 15 working days upon which the report is deemed final and is published as the Public Certification Report (PCR) if the fishery meets the MSC Standard.

In the UK, client groups have been formed through Producer Organisations, local governments, or specific fishery focussed associations. Many successful client groups have a member or consultant who’s is specifically responsible for the MSC certification process, including documentation, audits, CAB liaison and costs.

When deciding upon a specific CAB to support the client group through the certification process, key things to consider are:

* what expertise the CAB has e.g. experience of working in the South West or particular expertise on crab and lobster fisheries.
* the timeline for the CAB and their capacity.
* Cost, which can range from £10,000 - £100,000 and is dependent on: complexity and size of fishery; availability of information, level of stakeholder involvement.

Prior to entering MSC assessment, the client group will need to decide on the Unit of Assessment (UoA). The UoA defines what is being assessed during the certification process and includes: – the target stock(s); – the fishing method or gear; – the fleets, vessels, individual fishing operators and other eligible fishers pursuing that stock. TH suggested there could be three UoAs: Western Channel (VIIe) crab and lobster, Bristol Channel (VIIf) crab and lobster, and part of Celtic Sea North lobster only.

Group discussion

CP commented that understanding this process early on is important. She added that Macduff has received requests recently for MSC labelled crab which highlights the market desire to have certified product in the UK. CP reminded the group that this FIP was included in Project UK because of the requests from retailers for MSC certified crab and lobster. JP informed the group that the MSC commercial team is able to provide support to fisheries in matching up their product with MSC markets, both domestically and internationally. GCl reiterated the growing demand for certified UK crab both domestically and abroad in countries such as Denmark and France.

CP raised the topic of funding for the certification process and whether there was an opportunity to ask retailers whether they could provide additional funding to support the transition of the FIP to certification. CP suggested that members of Project UK who are not funders but might wish to financially support the certification process could be approached. CP said it was important to have this discussion now rather than wait until the end of the FIP. Currently the shellfish industry is under a lot of financial pressure from the impacts of Brexit and Covid, but in 12 months things may be more positive for the sector. CP mentioned the Scottish Fisheries Sustainable Accreditation Group (SFSAG) model, of an umbrella organisation representing different groups helping pool together resources for certification. NdR suggested a similar model is needed for English waters and features in the Seafish 2040 strategy. NdR saw it as key to driving forward sustainability initiatives without creating a plethora of smaller groups with their own agendas and meetings, and could share the costs and benefits of achieving certification across the South West. MY highlighted the importance of the continuity of a FIP and having something meaningful at the end of the FIP’s timeline. MY agreed with NdR on the need to equally distribute the costs and benefits on MSC certification to help promote South West fisheries and agreed that the SFSAG model would be something he would like to see replicated for the South West.

KK read out a supporting letter from Helena Delgado-Nordmann, Responsible Sourcing Manager at Tesco, which highlighted Tesco’s public commitment to achieve 100% sustainable seafood by 2030, its support of the Project UK FIPs, and a keen interest to see these fisheries move into MSC full assessment. She noted that pressure and awareness from NGOs and customers has never been greater and that we need to continue to work together to deliver healthy, sustainable, and affordable diets for a growing population.

RC added that as a processor, Labeyrie is aligned with UK retailers in the desire to see more UK certified seafood and noted that increased sustainability – through MSC certification – is built into their organisation’s policy. RC highlighted that Labeyrie’s sister organisations in France and Belgium are also driving to increase the number of MSC products they sell with one of Labeyrie core principles and to support FIPs whenever an opportunity arises. Labeyrie’s competitors in mainland Europe are also asking for more MSC products and it is becoming an increasingly important part of sourcing and procurement policies.

Actions from Item 1:

1. Secretariat to facilitate conversation with Steering Group to start client group process but will not participate in discussions other than to provide information about the process.

Agenda Item 2: Stock status

Presentation from Cefas

The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) publishes regional stock assessments for crab and lobster every two to three years and provide a short report per region. It is difficult to age crustaceans and so Cefas relies on length-based assessments which can provide an indication of exploitation rates and stock sizes. Inputs to the assessment come from length samples taken from crabs and lobsters when they are landed in ports, or from fish merchants. Landings data contributes to the assessment and is obtained through logbooks, buyer and seller records and monthly shellfish return forms. RM noted that within the assessment certain parameters are fixed and these include growth rate (per region), mortality and maximum size.

The South West is the second largest crab fishery in England. Landings from the Western Channel and Celtic sea region have dropped since a 2014 high – although have remained stable in recent years. RM pointed out that Cefas know the number of days fished but not the number of pots being used in the fishery, which does not give the full picture of ongoing effort in the crab fishery.

Results from the Western Channel stock assessment indicated that landings for female crabs were high, whilst for males they were low. Overall mortality was just above the target reference point, but stock biomass (SSB) was declining – although SSB was close to the target reference point. RM concluded that overall the stock was fairly healthy.

For the Celtic Sea region, stock mortality is close to the target reference point; SSB has remained fairly stable for the last 10 years and is close to the target reference point. Like the Western Channel fishery, the Celtic Sea landings are dominated by female crabs with the assessment for both regions being based solely on information for female crabs, as male landings are so low.

RM concluded that the assessment results are indicative rather than absolute but show useful trends over time. RM believed that pot numbers are increasing, and the fishery is moving further offshore, but that cannot be accounted for in the model. The results from the assessment are useful but should be used with caution.

The South West lobster assessment indicated that effort had increased in the past few years with landings remaining relatively stable. The exploitation of lobsters in the South West has remained fairly constant, with SSB also remaining stable. Overall RM thinks there are not any issues with the stock.

Group discussion

TH asked whether there were large landings of crab in the Bristol Channel, which is currently outside the UoA of the FIP so not much research has gone into determining landings from that area. RM believed there was some landings from the Bristol Channel but as it is shared waters with Wales it complicates knowing exact landings data as Welsh landings are not collated by Cefas. NdR believed there was a significant amount being landed, with crab vessels based out of Padstow and Newquay. JB added that ICES area 7f goes to the Welsh coast and that crab would be landed around the coast to Minehead. In JB’s area – North Devon - they catch some crab but not in large volumes, and in the winter months the fishery isn’t viable. SC mentioned that crab was landed all the way up to Somerset, with this information already in the Fishery Management Plan (FMP).

Agenda Item 3: Defra FMP update

MJ informed the group that Defra’s Fishery Management Plan (FMP) strategy is being led by the Defra sustainability team alongside representatives from the Devolved Administrations. A key part of the FMPs relates to ongoing work with the Joint Fishery Statements and ensuring they reflect what is required in the Fisheries Act.

Defra is willing to support the drafting of text for some sections in the FIP’s FMP, such as long-term objectives, but other sections such as fisheries specific objectives will take longer as they need to be determined in collaboration with industry. Progress on Defra’s own FMP strategy has been delayed by the impacts of Covid but they remain keen to support the FMPs being drafting in Project UK FIPs and to ensure there is strong communication between crab FMPs across the UK. MJ noted that the FMP drafted by this Steering Group should align with other FMPs due to the overlap in members with the Shellfish Industry Advisory Group (SIAG) and Crab Management Group (CMG).

Actions from Item 3:

1. Defra to provide the secretariat with wording for section 2 (governance) of the Project UK crab and lobster FMP.

Agenda Item 4: Action 1 and 2 harvest Strategy and harvest control rules

The objective for Actions 1 and 2 is to have an adaptive management system, which monitors the reference indicators proactively to ensure the stock does not decline. This needs to be formalised to produce the harvest strategy for the fishery. TH advised that the Steering Group needs to develop fishery-specific objectives to ensure the fishery is adaptive to changing circumstances, and as a basis for what HCRs are to be used. There is some overlap of members between Project UK and other industry-led groups which intend to address the requirements for UK-wide shellfish management.

Other industry-led groups:

The Shellfish Industry Advisory Group (SIAG) was established in 2019 and now has three subgroups: whelk, lobster and crab. CP chairs the Crab Management Group (CMG). There are currently 60 members of the CMG, and they are still finalising their objectives in the following areas:

1. Improving the range of tools to manage crab fisheries, their appropriateness and understanding the consequences that implementing the tool may have on the fishery.
2. Greater research to improve the data and better understand what data gaps may exist.
3. Exploring opportunities for managing effort, including limits to fishing in the short term; and developing a management toolbox for fishing representatives and management authorities to guide the right management at the right scale.

MY noted the value of both the CMG and Project UK groups. The recent developments to the Trade and Continuity Agreement (TCA) sets out caps on vessels that fish in EU waters; something that will need reflecting in the FIP’s FMP. CP said the CMG had written to Defra for clarification around the TCA, something HH said was complex but Defra had had good discussion around the TCA with the Whelk Management Group.

CP said that timeline for the CMG objectives has been complicated by changes to the Western Waters alternatives workstream and invited JP to join the next CMG meeting to find out more detail on the group. CP encouraged the FIP not to wait on progress developing a harvest strategy from the CMG but to keep close links between groups to avoid duplicating effort.

Fishery specific objectives

CB said it is important that fishery objectives can be achieved with practical solutions. For the South West (of England) the fishery is close to the target reference points and so drastic reductions in effort might not be needed, and that the focus could be put into capping the effort. As a result, CB believed that the FIP’s harvest strategy should focus on the harvest rate rather than the biomass of the stock. CB cautioned the accuracy of the stability of the stock given the changes in length data and sparse data on pot use.

JB cautioned that the models produced by Cefas are based on landings data, and supported CB’s comment that there may be gaps in the understanding of the stock status. He believed that capping effort would be difficult to do but recognised it’s something that should be done. HH flagged to the group that Cefas was working on way to improve stock models, and the data used within them, and suggested having Defra or Cefas providing an update on this at the next meeting.

Discussion arose between RM, SC and JB around the use of capture release methods for monitoring stock, with RM cautioning that the same individual could be recaptured multiple times. SC mentioned that studies have shown that lobsters are more sedentary than crabs, and so mark, release recapture methods would be misleading to monitor their stocks.

Drafting a harvest strategy

The HCRs need to stipulate what the fishery will do as limit reference points are reached, but these can be decided upon once an overarching specific harvest strategy has been agreed.

KK asked whether anyone in the Steering Group had the capacity to draft the harvest strategy and offered to facilitate a meeting to support if several people were needed rather than an individual lead. TH reminded the group of the importance of having fishery managers: IFCAs, MMO and Defra in this workshop. SC flagged the importance of industry members joining as the managers may consider a harvest strategy that may not be feasible to fishermen. BP, SC, RM all agreed to join a harvest strategy meeting and contribute to the document, and CB and CP offered to review the harvest strategy once it is drafted. All agreed the Harvest Strategy needs group thought and to be agreeable for fishermen.

Actions from Item 4:

1. MY to draft up TCA impact on crab management and provide Secretariat a summary for the FMP
2. HH or RM to update group on progress made to assessment methodology for crab and lobster stocks at the next meeting.
3. Secretariat to arrange a harvest strategy meeting for BP, RM, SC, JB, CP and TH.

**Agenda Item 5: Project UK FMP**

MS updated the Steering Group on the progress of the FIP’s Fishery Management Plan (FMP). As the FIP enters its final year it is important that the FMP contains all the work to date and relevant information needed by an assessor, should a client group wish to progress the fishery into certification.

***Section 1: Identification and Description of the Fishery***

This section is well populated with information from the IFCAs and MMO but will need reviewing, as much of the data used in the text and graphs comes from 2018. MS will follow up with those who had already contributed for updates and noted that this section will need consolidating.

***Section 2: Goals and Objectives***

MJ confirmed Defra will lead input to this section.

***Section 3: Fisheries Management Structure***

There was a lot of information in this section from the IFCAs and MMO and it will require review to reflect the changes to management of crab and lobster fisheries as a result of Brexit. Sub-section 3.3. (consultation and co-management arrangements) is lacking information and MS will follow up with MMO to update this section.

***Section 4: Harvest Strategy and Control Rules***

This section has some information from the MMO and IFCAs but TH noted that more is needed. As noted in Item 4, several members will develop the harvest strategy and this section will be updated.

***Section 5: Ecosystem Management Strategies***

A lot of work had gone into this section and MS highlighted that it was now a case of summarising that work and inputting it into the FMP. GCa offered to insert a summary of his alternative measures report. There is currently no detail in the sub-sections on habitat and ecosystem, as the preassessment did not flag those performance indicators needing improvement. However, TH noted that a Steering Group member will need to go through the preassessment and summarise the findings for ecosystem and habitat and insert them into the FMP. There were no volunteers for this and MS said he would follow up to ascertain who could do this.

***Section 6: Stock Assessment, Fishery Monitoring and Research***

This section had been addressed through input from the IFCAs and Cefas.

***Section 7: Compliance and Monitoring***

MMO input had been extremely useful in this section, with all the sub-sections well populated except for 7.3: planning. MS said he would follow up with MMO to get more information on this sub-section.

***Section 8: Fishery Performance Evaluation***

This section relates to monitoring the performance of the FIP, using the benchmarking and tracking (BMT) tool. If the FIP were to progress to certification section 8 would outline the conditions in the fishery. TH agreed to add to this section after the annual review in April.

***Section 9: Resources required to implement the Plan***

This section would be completed if/when a client group is formed. They would outline the human and financial resources required to deliver and upkeep the FMP.

Actions from Item 5:

1. GCa to summarise the alternative measures report and insert it into the FMP.
2. MS to:
   1. follow up with MMO and IFCAs around providing updated information to section 1 and finding a Steering group member to consolidate the information already in the FMP.
   2. follow up with MMO to get more information on sub-section 3.3 and 7.3 for the FMP.
3. Steering Group members to consider summarising the habitats and ecosystem section of the preassessment to inset into FMP when contacted by the Secretariat.

Any Other Business

Due to the number of Project UK meetings, the draft minutes may be circulated to the group beyond the two-week deadline but the Secretariat would endeavour to have them available as soon as possible.

Meeting Closes

12.00hr

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| Actions Arising | Responsibility |
| **Agenda Item 1: MSC certification process**   * Secretariat to facilitate conversation with Steering Group to start client group process but will not participate in discussions other than to provide information about the process. | **Secretariat** |
| **Agenda Item 3: Defra FMP update**   * Defra to provide the Secretariat with wording for section 2 (governance) of the Project UK crab and lobster FMP. | **MJ** |
| **Agenda Item 4: Harvest Strategy and Harvest Control Rules**   * MY to draft up TCA impact on crab management and provide Secretariat a summary for the FMP * HH or RM to update group on progress made to assessment methodology for crab and lobster stocks at the next meeting. * Secretariat to arrange a harvest strategy meeting for BP, RM, SC, JB, CP and TH. | **MY**  **HH and RM**  **Secretariat** |
| **Agenda Item 5: Project UK FMP run through**   * GCa to summarise the alternative measures report and insert it into the FMP. * MS to:   1. follow up with MMO and IFCAs around providing updated information to section 1 and finding a Steering group member to consolidate the information already in the FMP.   2. follow up with MMO to get more information on sub-section 3.3 and 7.3 for the FMP. * Steering Group members to consider summarising the habitats and ecosystem section of the preassessment to inset into FMP when contacted by the Secretariat. | **GCa**  **MS**  **Steering Group** |