

Minutes: Channel scallops Principle 1 and 2

Meeting Date: 22 June 2021

Location: Teams

Attendees	Organisation
AB: Andrew Brown	Macduff Shellfish
AL: Andy Lawler	Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science
CB: Coco Bagley	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
CN: Chloe North	Western Fish Producer Organisation
FdB: Femke de Boer	Scottish White Fish Producers Association
FN: Fiona Nimmo	Poseidon
HG: Hubert Gieschen	Marine Management Organisation
JH: Juliette Hatchman	South Western Fish Producer Organisation
JHi: Jan Hiddink	Bangor University
JP: Jo Pollett	Marine Stewardship Council
JPo Jim Portus	South Western Fish Producer Organisation
KK: Katie Keay	Marine Stewardship Council
LP: Lauren Parkhouse	Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities
MJ: Manon Joguet	Marine Stewardship Council
MS: Matt Spencer	Marine Stewardship Council
NdR: Nathan de Rozarieux	Falfish
RW: Rob Whiteley	Natural England

Purpose of the meeting

This call was an opportunity for the Steering Group to review progress made against each of the actions under Principles 1 and 2 in the Channel scallop Fishery Improvement Project (FIP) action plan and discuss the timeline of the FIP.

Agenda Item 1: Stock status

Stock assessment

Improved understanding of the status of scallop stocks in the English Channel will provide the basis for effective fisheries management. AL presented Cefas' most recent stock assessment data.

- Cefas identified four stocks in the English Channel
 - 27.e.I Cornwall Inshore
 - 27.e.L Lyme Bay
 - 27.e.O Western Channel Offshore
 - 27.d.N English Eastern Channel
- Eastern English Channel (EEC) surveys showed this area is subject to fishing predominantly by UK and French vessels, with landings greatest during quarter 1 and 4. AL said it was possible

that that quarter 3 had lower landings due to fishing restrictions in the Channel during that period.

- Stock assessments are based on dredge surveys, with the EEC relatively well sampled but data gaps on the French side of the Channel, due to permission issues in 2020. The data shows a high density of scallops in centre of the EEC scallop bed.
- For the EEC fMSY is 35% of the virgin stocks, and Cefas data shows the harvest rate was at 21.5% in 2020, in line with fMSY. Total harvestable biomass appears to be steadily increasing over the four years of Cefas surveys.
- The 2021 Western Channel and Celtic Sea (WCCS) survey was complete, with permission from French counterparts to survey French jurisdictional waters, but the data was still to be released. The WCCS inshore area is typically a spring/summer fishery and exploited almost exclusively by UK vessels. The WCCS offshore fishery however is shared access with French vessels. AL pointed out that Lyme Bay seemed to have less seasonality of landings than other areas.
- The 2020 WCCS surveys showed good dredge tow coverage (except in French waters) with the area around Guernsey having strong scallop densities.
- The WCCS offshore area harvestable biomass has nearly doubled from 2019 to 2020, however, Cornwall (27.e.l) scallop biomass has dropped.
- Overall, all scallop stocks in the Unit of Assessment (UoA) of the FIP are at or around MSY, with Lyme Bay (27.e.L) slightly above and offshore (27.e.O) under exploited.

Discussion

AB asked about the line representing Lyme Bay on the MSY graph, which appeared to be missing. AL said was in line with the other areas and slightly hidden below one of the other stock lines. AB asked whether an MSY harvest rate could be set for the entire Channel if the MSY for each stock is similar. FN explained that the MSC Standard requires management at a stock level, rather at a regional level.

Reference points

Current scallop stock assessments rely on landings information 12 months after the survey has gone ahead (as well as international landings) which makes reactive management complicated. Cefas do not have any biological basis to agree a reference point for B_{lim} (the level below which recruitment is likely to be impaired) yet. In the absence of a biological basis for reference point, observable reference points such as the use a B_{loss} (the lowest historical recorded stock size) can be trialled as reference point for biomass instead. Discussions are underway for developing recruitment indices, and AL mentioned the difficulty of obtaining relevant reference points is also being experienced in the *Nephrops* Farne Deeps fishery and is being considered by ICES working groups.

Discussion:

AB asked if Cefas had a timing for formalising a B_{loss} reference point, which AL said he was still unsure of, explaining that to begin estimating B_{loss} you need as many years as there are cohorts in the fishery catches, so in the case of this FIP, about seven years. AL said ideally you would use decades of time series data to get an accurate B_{loss} and would also have good information on stock-recruitment relationships, as that is a useful tool for fishery managers.

FN said the reference point discussion is likely to go on past the timeline of the FIP but it was useful to know that high level discussions are underway. The presence of harvestable biomass in the vast

majority of the UoA could imply that the lowest biomass level (Bloss) may have already occurred previously in the fishery. Further cohort information is required to determine a Bloss that is representative of the stock. AL said he would keep the FIP informed of any progress made to develop reference points and said the increase in harvestable biomass was probably due to improved access to reliable international landings data, as well as high amount of scallops in survey tows.

Actions from Item 1:

1. AL to keep the Steering Group informed of any progress made on developing a Bloss for Channel scallops

Agenda Item 2: Harvest strategy & harvest control rules

Action 2 and 3 in the FIP's action plan relate to formulating a harvest strategy that is responsive to the state of the stock and achieves overall management objectives through the use of well-defined harvest control rules (HCRs). The Scallop Industry Consultation Group (SICG) had discussed the need for a suitable harvest strategy and HCRs with Defra recently and JPo and AB updated the Steering Group on progress.

JPo said that the SICG met with Defra on 16th June and that Defra have responded positively to some of the management options the SICG had presented to them. In July Defra intend to put out a call for evidence on three key issues: management proposals for the <15m fleet, how to address the issue of latent capacity in the shellfish sector in England and proposals to replace the Western Waters regime. JPo explained that the recent Cefas paper on Western Waters alternatives had contributed to discussions.

AB added that the EU and the UK have agreed to monitor tonnage uptakes but not enforce tonnage ceilings in 2021. However, Brexit has created two different management regimes in the Channel; with UK vessels fishing against effort in the UK EEZ and by tonnage in EU waters. AB suggested the contrasting management systems in the Channel might make tracking the stock status for scallops increasingly difficult. JP said that the MSC Standard requires a fishery to be managed to a stock level and asked JPo and AB to consider that requirement in the SICG-Defra discussions on harvest strategy options.

Agenda Item 3: Information and monitoring

Action 4 in the FIP action plan requires the fishery to provide sufficient relevant information related to stock structure and stock productivity to support the harvest strategy. The Steering Group previously identified a knowledge gap related to the interaction between dredged and undredged areas in the Channel. In 2013, Cefas undertook preliminary research into scallop connectivity in the Channel, and AL presented findings from Nicolle et al, 2013.

The report showed the level of connectivity between the fishing grounds in the Channel, but it did not show interaction between undredged and dredged areas. Cefas hope to investigate this subject in the Channel in 2021. Originally the research was planned for 2020, but they were only able to complete the study in the North Sea. Hydrographic models for the Channel already exist, as a similar exercise had been conducted on crab dispersal, and AL said Cefas hoped to begin this research soon.

Discussion

FN highlighted this PI already met SG80 but this exercise would be very useful to further support this action. FN did not consider the delay caused by focussing on North Sea stocks as a concern.

Agenda Item 4: Primary and secondary species

Catch composition

The Steering Group previously commissioned Cefas to undertake a review of scallop catch composition based on observer data. The MSC requirement for primary and secondary species data is that it is in biomass, but the data used by Cefas was in numbers of organisms and not in biomass. Cefas previously agreed to convert the number of organisms into biomass, through the use of length-weight keys, and AL presented the progress.

- Data came from the Cefas observer programme, for ICES areas 7d and e, using scallop dredges in 2018/19.
- The focus was on all commercial species, with length distributions recorded for each species.
- Each species presented on the list had to have at least 30 incidents, those with less than 30 incidents of capture were not taken forward in the study.
- Main findings showed that King scallops were approximately 93% of the catch with Queen scallops and spider crab both accounting for between 1-2%.
- In 2018 starry ray and undulate ray were recorded in the catch, and both are considered to be ETP species.
- A final report was being drafted and AL hoped to have it available for the Steering Group in a few months' time.

Discussion

FN thanked AL for his work and stated that this gave the FIP adequate quantitative data, as required by the MSC standard. AL said the tables he presented would be in the report and that they showed combined catch results for 7d and e. FN said that as Principle 2 considered the Channel as one ecosystem it was fine to have the aggregated data,

Alternative measures report

A review of alternative measures for minimising unwanted catch was circulated to the group ahead of today's meetings. AB asked whether smaller ring-sizes for scallop dredges might be better as it would retain smaller scallops which could be discarded on deck, rather than being caught under the belly bag of the dredge, where damage was likely to occur. JPo said that there is a very high survival rate for scallops brought on deck and asked MJ whether there were any IFRAMER studies that could be shared to support this idea. MJ believed there were, and she would speak with IFRAMER and French fleet representatives for any useful documentation.

Actions from Item 4:

1. AL to share bycatch biomass report when it is available.
2. MJ to contact IFRAMER and French industry representatives for scallop survival studies with different bag ring sizes.

Agenda Item 5: Endangered Threatened and Protected species

All three Performance Indicators (PIs) for Endangered Threatened and Protected (ETP) species currently score SG60-79, and there is an outstanding action to agree on and document the current ETP management measures and recording mechanisms in the fishery management plan (FMP).

The MSC Standard requires a fishery to prove there is a protocol in place to record any ETP interaction, and AB asked whether the Clean Catch App, developed by Cefas, could be used. CN thought the Clean Catch app would be useful to progress the ETP action, and would provide an independent, centralised reporting mechanism. CN mentioned that fisheries in Australia trialled similar technology through their e-logbooks. JP informed the Steering Group that she had an upcoming meeting with the Clean Catch designers and could feed back more detail after the call.

FN updated the Steering Group on the ETP interaction log designed for the Round 2 FIP, which is currently being trialled on a scallop vessel in Scotland. Since this log was designed the Clean Catch App has been released so it will be interesting to see the feedback from both options before committing to one.

FdB agreed to draft the ETP section of the FMP, given her previous lead on the initial ETP skate management strategy.

Actions from Item 5:

1. FdB to lead on adding ETP management text to the FMP, with Secretariat support.

Agenda Item 6: Habitats

The MMO have set out a timeline for introducing management measures in all English MPAs by the end of 2024. CN informed the Steering Group that Western Fish Producer Organisation (WFPO) and South Western Fish Producer Organisation (SWFPO) are considering a trial in the East of Start Point MCZ, to understand more about the differences between fished and unfished habitats. The East of Start Point call for evidence is expected in mid-2022 so the trial will need to start as soon as possible to meet this deadline. CN warned if this area was completely closed off to dredge gear it would have a large, negative impact on the coastal community through loss of access to the fishery.

FN reminded CN that the habitats post-doc research could be submitted in the call for evidence and the Secretariat agreed to share the report with CN.

An action from the previous Channel scallop Steering Group meeting was for FN to map all protected areas and any areas with restrictions to fishing activity, in the UoA of the FIP. FN had finished a first draft of the work and presented it to the group.

Overview:

- 11 special areas of conservation (SACs)
- 28 MCZs
- Eight special protection areas (SPA)
- Approximately 20% of the surface area of the Channel is designated for protection
- IFCA areas with management measures were displayed covering a large proportion of the inshore area.

Next steps:

- Focus group to discuss whether the ETP management process is sufficient.
- Define the timeline for MPA management implantation outside of the 6nm.
- Trial of Clean Catch App.

Discussion:

JP reminded the Steering Group of the Seafish Kingfisher project which has already conducted an MPA mapping exercise for the *Nephrops* FIP and agreed that the Secretariat would get in touch with the project lead to ask for scallop specific mapping as well.

JPo said some Devon and Severn IFCA management areas might be missing from the map produced and that it would be good to have French protected areas added as well. FN confirmed that the IFCA mapping information came from the IFCA website.

RW said it was important that the FIP has recognised the importance of protected areas and reminded the Steering Group that MPAs are not necessarily set in stone. Each area is reviewed periodically and new information can change the status of the area. RW offered Natural England's support with providing text and procedures around MPAs, which KK thanked him for.

FN suggested a focus group should be set up to consider the current level of habitat and ETP protect in the Channel, and whether this is considered sufficient. FN suggested membership should include MMO, Defra, IFCAs, JNCC and Natural England. HG agreed the MMO should be involved in this group and would check who would be the appropriate MMO representative. CB believed there was a Defra MPA team and would follow up internally to check whether she can sit on the FIP focus group. AB recommended contacting Leanne Stockdale (MMO). LP offered to join to input inshore information.

KK agreed that the Secretariat would facilitate the formation of a MPA focus group.

Actions from Item 6:

1. Secretariat to:
 - a. share habitats post-doc report with CN to be used in Defra's call for evidence for management measures in MPAs.
 - b. to facilitate formation of MPA sub-group for the FIP by contacting LP, CB, RW, HG and Leanne Stockdale before next Steering Group meeting.
 - c. contact the Seafish Kingfisher project lead to ask for scallop specific mapping as well.
2. FN to update her mapping review to include French regulation and protected areas.
3. HG to check within MMO for most appropriate person to join the MPA focus group.
4. CB to check within Defra for most appropriate person to join the MPA focus group.
5. RW to provide text on the MPA procedure for English waters to the Secretariat.

Agenda Item 7: Ecosystem

Cefas previously undertook a Scale, Intensity, and Consequence Analysis (SICA) for the Channel scallop fishery, which identified functional group composition as the most relevant ecosystem sub-component to be affected by the scallop fishery. The score for the ecosystem action is expected to increase based on the outputs from Action 6 (ETP) and Action 7 (habitats). The Steering Group has also been discussing ways to monitor and evaluate the fishery, through the use of technologies such as geofencing.

RW explained that there is technology available to inform vessels when they are approaching protected areas, such as MPA maps and increased ping rates. RW asked for industry perspective on the 'real-world' application of technologies and what limiting factors would be in using them. CN asked to speak with RW after the meeting to hear more about geo-fencing technologies that could be implemented, as WFPO have a project planned with Devon and Severn IFCA to put cameras on vessels so that they can prove the number of dredges either side to enable them to operate in inshore areas and were interested in whether geofencing might contribute to the success of this project.

RW explained that the better the monitoring systems that are in place around MPAs, the smaller any buffer zones would need to be. JPo said low-ping rates were introduced with VMS to make it less costly to industry, but over time ping rates have increased whilst prices had stayed the same, which was positive. JPo recognised the need for geofences but had concerns around the term 'buffer-zones' as he believed these were already built into the protect area when it was designated. JPo concluded that the more fishing areas are that are designated as protected areas, the greater concentration of fishing effort there will be in non-protected areas. He supported geofencing but suggested that any new technology needs to be inexpensive if industry are expected to use it.

Action from item 7:

1. RW to provide an update on the roll out of iVMS in English waters.

Agenda Item 8: FIP timeline extension

The recent annual review of the FIP has provided clarity on the status of actions still to be addressed by the FIP. The implementation of a robust harvest strategy and appropriate harvest control rules, as well as in introduction of management measures in MPAs are unlikely to be complete within the 5-year timeline of the FIP. Steering Group members have previously suggested that a timeline extension might be needed and asked for a rolling agenda item to discuss this at each meeting. Key considerations for the Steering Group include credibility on FisheryProgress.org, supply chain sourcing policies, and funding.

CN and NdR agreed that there should be an extension of the FIP timeline, given the impacts of Covid and Brexit. CN didn't think extending the timeline would be too much of an issue for sourcing policies as long as the FIP can clearly state why its extending and continues to show progress against the action plan. JPo believed there should be recognition of the impacts Covid and Brexit had on the fishing sector in the UK. JPo believed it better to extend the timeline, and delay completion, rather than finish on the allotted 5-year plan with gaps still needing to be addressed.

There was general agreement that further discussion was need around whether an extension would be necessary for the Steering Group to complete the actions in the Action Plan. FN estimated that implementing a robust harvest strategy and monitoring its success could require up to two additional years. The Steering Group requested that the Secretariat to follow speak with the core funders of Project UK to gauge the possibility of continued funding and whether some of the outstanding actions could be taken on by the Round 2.

Actions from item 8:

1. Secretariat to find out the implications of an extension on FisheryProgress.org.
2. Secretariat to approach funders to gauge their interest in continued funding.

Any Other Business

The draft minutes will be available in a few weeks time.

Meeting Closes

16.00hr

Actions Arising	Responsibility
<u>Stock status</u> 1. AL to keep the Steering Group informed of any progress made on developing a Bloss for Channel scallops.	AL
<u>Primary and secondary species</u> 1. AL to share bycatch biomass report when it is available. 2. MJ to contact IFRAMER and French industry representatives for scallop survival studies with different bag ring sizes.	AL MJ
<u>Endangered Threatened and Protected species</u> 1. FdB to lead on adding ETP management text to the FMP, with Secretariat support.	FdB
<u>Habitats</u> 1. Secretariat to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> share habitats post-doc report with CN to be used in Defra's call for evidence for management measures in MPAs. to facilitate formation of MPA sub-group for the FIP by contacting LP, CB, RW, HG and Leanne Stockdale before next Steering Group meeting. contact the Seafish Kingfisher project lead to ask for scallop specific mapping as well. 2. FN to update her mapping review to include French regulation and protected areas. 3. HG to check within MMO for most appropriate person to join the MPA focus group. 4. CB to check within Defra for most appropriate person to join the MPA focus group. 5. RW to provide text on the MPA procedure for English waters to the Secretariat.	Secretariat FN HG CB RW
<u>Ecosystem</u> 1. RW to provide an update on the roll out of iVMS in English waters	RW
<u>FIP timeline extension</u> 1. Secretariat to find out the implications of an extension on FisheryProgress.org. 2. Secretariat to approach funders to gauge their interest in continued funding.	Secretariat Secretariat