

Minutes: Monkfish Steering Group meeting

Meeting Date: 10th November 2021

Location: Teams

Attendees	Organisation
AH: Alex Holdgate	Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science
CN: Chloe North	Western Fish Producer Organisation
EB: Edward Baker	Marine Management Organisation
HS: Hayley Swanlund	WWF
JH: Juliette Hatchman	South Western Fish Producers Organisation
JP: Jo Pollett	Marine Stewardship Council
LR: Lisa Readdy	Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science
MS: Matt Spencer	Marine Stewardship Council
NdR: Nathan de Rozarieux	Falfish
TH: Tim Huntington	Poseidon

Purpose of the meeting

This call was an opportunity for the Steering Group to review progress made against each of the actions in the monkfish Fishery Improvement Project (FIP) action plan and discuss the timeline of the FIP in relation to a potential extension.

Agenda Item 1: FisheryProgress.org social policy update

FisheryProgress.org has introduced new social requirements for FIPs on their platform and MS provided a reminder of how it would impact this FIP.

1. Prior social standards

MS requested Steering Group members to provide details of any other social requirements they are adhering to.

2. Sign-off of a code of conduct

The Steering Group will need to review and sign off a code of conduct. This code of conduct covers a range of issues, such as: child labour, slavery onboard vessels, adequate living conditions and that there is grievance mechanism in place amongst other requirements. MS asked Steering Group members who represent vessels to contact him with any questions or concerns about signing this on behalf of their members, or whether they agree to have the Secretariat sign on behalf of the FIP.

3. Review the self-evaluation criteria

Each Steering Group member needs to review the self-evaluation criteria and inform the Secretariat if any of the criteria are met. If any of the risk criteria are met it then triggers the requirement for a risk-assessment and a workplan to mitigate any risks identified.

4. Vessel lists

MS reminded Steering Group members who represent vessels that an accurate vessel lists will be required by May 2022, and requested that they share this information with the Secretariat.

Discussion:

CN said Western Fish Producer Organisation (WFPO) had signed up to the code of conduct. JH said she would review on behalf of South Western Fish Producers Organisation (SWFPO) after double checking the requirements of ILO-188. CN said some vessels in the FIP would trigger the risk-criteria of having more than 25% foreign crews.

CN asked about the cost of having a consultant conduct the risk assessment. JP said the Secretariat is thinking of how best to finance the risk assessment across several FIPs but has not sought any quotes yet.

The Steering Group agreed that the requirement for vessel lists was complex due to the large number of vessels targeting monkfish that were not in Producer Organisations and the fact that they might not want to participate in the FIP. CN suggested putting up notices in ports and markets across the Southwest which could provide more fishermen with information on the FIP and how to get involved. CN also pointed out that the Cornish Fish Producers' Organisation (CFPO) and Interfish would also need to provide vessel information and encouraged the Secretariat to contact them.

JP asked whether IFCA could contact the <12m fleet, but JH said the vessels are usually independent. She also noted that IFCA do not represent vessels, they manage fishing regulations in each of their respective jurisdictions. CN recommended contacting the regional inshore fisheries groups to contact these vessels. JP said there were Project UK banners that could be sent out to Producer Organisation offices and encouraged Steering Group members to request one from the Secretariat if they had a place to put it that would be seen by fishermen.

Actions from Item 1:

1. JH to review SWFPO ILO-188 compliance and respond to the Secretariat whether they meet any of the risk criteria.
2. Secretariat to:
 - a. Contact CFPO and Interfish for vessel information and encourage further input to the FIP.
 - b. Circulate ILO-188 benchmarking report with the Steering Group.

Agenda Item 2: Endangered, threatened and protected species

At the last Steering Group meeting it was established that the FIP needed visual cues, such as an ID guide, to support identification of endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species. CN had reached out prior to the meeting to the Shark Trust to enquire about using their posters on board vessels.

Shark Trust posters:

CN had not received a response from the Shark Trust and said she would try to contact them again. If the Shark Trust is not able to provide these assets for free, then CN said she would see whether any funding is available through WFPO.

Currently the FIP meets the best practice score (>SG80) for performance indicators (PI) 2.3.1 and 2.3.3 (ETP outcome and information) and scores SG60-79 for 2.3.2 (ETP management). CN thought developing the ETP posters would increase the score for PI2.3.2. JH said would be important to have these laminated for use on vessels to prevent damage

CN informed the group that Cefas contacted the Western Fish Producers Organisation to gauge interest in a fisheries-science partnership (FISP) for MMO funding opportunities. CN suggested that a ray and skate survival study would be a good research piece that could be taken forward for funding under the fisheries-science funding opportunity.

Clean Catch app:

CN stressed it was important for any ETP recording process to be simple to adequately engage fishermen. CN is interested in adding an ETP recording section into the e-log books that fishermen already must complete. CN had spoken with an e-log provider who said their e-log had the ability to add ETP species, but there were concerns that the MMO, who manages the e-logbooks, would not be able to upgrade the e-log mechanism to report interactions with ETPs.

JH had concerns that using e-logbooks for recording ETP interactions would mean that some métiers could not participate as smaller vessels do not complete e-logbooks. This would mean segments of the fleet would not be providing any ETP information. TH asked JH what the uptake of the Clean Catch app had been to date, which JH said it had only been trialled in very discrete fisheries, such as a sprat fishery, and that members of this FIP were yet to trial it.

Actions from item 2:

1. CN to:
 - a. Contact The Shark Trust again to see whether they can share their handling and ID posters
 - b. Consider funding opportunities for the ETP identification guides, if needed
 - c. Update the Steering Group on any skate and ray survival studies that are commissioned through FISP.

Agenda Item 3: Habitats

The Channel scallop FIP habitat actions overlap with the monkfish habitat actions as they share a lot of the same fishing area. The Channel scallop Steering Group agreed to form a marine protected area (MPA) focus subgroup to discuss appropriate management of ETP species and sensitive habitats in the English Channel. MS provided an update from the meeting.

MPA coverage in the Channel:

- 11 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), 28 Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ), 8 Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and three other MPAs in the Channel.
- Overall, approximately 20% of the Channel designated as MPA.
- MCZ priority features are 14 animal species and 34 habitats.
- The two main protected habitats are subtidal coarse sediment and subtidal sand. For SACs it is reefs.

Background:

- Representatives from Defra, MMO, Natural England and an Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority (IFCA) joined the subgroup to share their organisations' position on the MPA network. They discussed whether the MPA network in the Channel was sufficient to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) and endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species, and whether they had concerns over dredging outside MPAs.

Findings and next steps:

- No concerns were raised in relation to fishing activity outside of MPAs.
- The subgroup highlighted the need to have a better understanding of fleet composition and the timeline of MPA management measures in the Channel.
- MMO agreed to update on the timeline and prioritisation of MPAs and their management measures.
- The subgroup intends to use the iVMS data that Devon and Severn IFCA has accessed subject Devon and Severn IFCA checking with the MMO that the iVMS data can be shared.

Actions from the meeting were to improve understanding of the fleet composition and timeline of MMO MPA management rollout in English waters. MS offered to provide further updates at the next Steering Group meeting.

Discussion:

EB said that there is not yet a formal timeline for implementing MPA management measures and he offered to speak with the relevant team at MMO for more information. However, EB did confirm the deadline was still to have management measures in all MPAs by 2024.

HS asked for an update on the project SWFPO and WFPO have with Bangor University. CN said the project is still in the early stages and will focus on the impact that displacement from MPAs has on the environment. It will explore what should be considered when designating MPAs, such as shifted habitat impacts and consequences to local fishing communities.

HS asked whether the Steering Group intended to map the FIP's fishing activity against the MPA network in the English Channel. JP confirmed this had already been conducted by Cefas and offered to share the final report with HS.

TH highlighted the recommendations from the Cefas report, which identified a gap in the data available for the activity of the <12m vessels. TH said most of these vessels would be gill-netters, which are of less concern for habitat performance indicators, as they will have a lower impact on the habitat than the beam and otter trawlers. He suggested the Steering Group should focus on understanding the activity of the <12m otter and beam trawlers. There are 19 beam trawlers <12m, so the Steering Group needs to contact the local IFCAs to get more fishing activity information and to determine how they enforce trawling restrictions in MPAs. JH said these <12m vessels were unlikely to be in a Producer Organisation and stressed it might be difficult to reach independent fishermen with updates from the FIP.

TH informed the Steering Group that an MSC assessment would set out explicit Unit of Certifications (UoCs) which, for this FIP, would be split according to the three gear types. TH said the Steering Group could decide to only enter some gears into the assessment process, based on the availability of information for each gear type. CN asked whether Principle 2 scores are impacted by vessels not in the UoC(s) for the FIP, to which TH said cumulative impacts need to be taken into account.

<12m management:

EB suggested the Southwest regional fisheries group would be a good place to make contact with the <12m vessels, with their next meeting scheduled for the 21st December and offered to add a presentation on Project UK to the agenda.

JH said if these <12m vessels do not want to engage with the FIP then the Steering Group might have to make a decision to drop one UoC (otter trawl) from the scope of the assessment. The CFPO represents a large number of <12m vessels, with TH saying approximately 418 vessels, and further engagement from the Secretariat was needed to better understand the composition of their <12m fleet. CN said it would be important to have Devon and Severn IFCA provide an iVMS update at the next meeting as this information would help inform the conversation with the <12m fleet.

TH said habitat Performance Indicators are scored on the full Unit of Assessment (UoA) so includes boats that are not on the client list and other eligible fishers. TH said he would follow up internally at Poseidon to understand whether the impact of otter trawls would negatively impact the scores for beam trawling and netting, even if the otter trawl UoC was dropped.

Actions from Item 3:

1. Secretariat to:
 - a. Keep the Steering Group updated on progress made in the MPA subgroup.
 - b. Share the Cefas habitat report with HS.
 - c. Contact IFCA's to get estimates on <12m otter trawlers in their jurisdictions, and determine how they restrict trawling activity in their MPAs.
 - d. Contact CFPO to get a better understanding of their <12m fleet.
2. EB to put Project UK on the next Southwest regional fisheries meeting agenda.
3. TH to follow up internally at Poseidon to understand whether the impact of otter trawls would negatively impact the scores for beam trawling and netting, even if the otter trawl UoC was dropped.

Agenda Item 4: Fishery Management Plan update

Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) are a requirement of the Fisheries Act, and detail on government requirements for FMPs will be announced in the Joint Fishery Statement (JFS) expected in November 2022. The FIP timeline ends in April 2022, and MS highlighted the importance of adding all the relevant information available to complete the FMP. MS acknowledged that the current legislative uncertainty caused by Brexit means some sections will have to be revisited at a later date.

Section 1 Identification and description of the fishery:

- Biology and habitat information has been reviewed by WWF.
- Economic and social information provided by WFPO.

Section 2 Goals and objectives:

- The uncertainty in fisheries legislation caused by Brexit has slowed the completion of Section 2, which still needs more detail added. MS will speak with Defra about providing text that could be inserted in the absence of a definitive policy until the Joint Fishery Statement (JFS) is published, such as higher-level objectives and text from the Fisheries Act.

Section 3 Fisheries management structure:

- Content provided by industry and management bodies such as MMO, meaning Section 3 is largely complete.

Section 4 Harvest strategy and control rules:

- Information provided by Lisa Readdy and Paul Medley.
- MS asked TH to review the content and confirm how explicit the FMP needs to be with the harvest strategy
- Updated information is needed for section 4.3 – decision-making frameworks – to reflect the UK has left the EU. MS will speak with Steering Group members for their contribution to Section 4.3.

Section 5 Ecosystem management strategies:

- This section is almost complete, but still and needs the Cefas habitat and scale intensity consequence analysis (SICA) summarised and added.
- CN offered to summarise these reports for the FMP.

Section 6 Stock assessment, fishery monitoring and research:

- Complete, although the Steering Group might need to consider incorporating latest ICES advice.

Section 7 Compliance and monitoring

- MMO has provided content and this section now requires industry input. JH offered to review Section 7 from an industry perspective.

Sections 8 and 9 still require input but rely on the formation of a client group to complete the details. Poseidon had provided further guidance in Section 8 to help the Steering Group complete this section. TH said Section 8 can reflect the ICES framework, which would likely not require much time to summarise from a Steering Group member.

Discussion:

CN asked whether Section 8 requires the Steering Group or an external body to evaluate the fishery performance or for the management bodies to provide text on their evaluation processes. TH said it would be good to include the management bodies evaluation processes, and when a client group is formed, to have their views on evaluation included in this section.

Actions from Item 4:

1. Secretariat to:
 - a. Follow up with TH to determine how explicit Section 4 of the FMP needs to be.
 - b. Find a Steering Group member to provide new information to Section 4.3.
2. CN to summarise the Cefas habitat and SICA analysis reports for Section 5 of the FMP.
3. JH to review Section 7 of the FMP and add industry expertise where necessary.

Agenda Item 5: Assessment of stocks

JP and LR updated the Steering Group on the current status of the black-bellied monkfish stock assessment, and the implications of the recent genetics research.

Update:

ICES is reviewing the black-bellied monkfish stock assessment method through the ICES Stock Identification Methods Working Group (WGSIM). If it is added to their Terms of Reference (ToR) at the end of its current cycle, then the current stock assessment will be reviewed by the end of 2022.

AZTI, the scientific and technological organisation that published the paper on the hybridisation between the two monkfish species, had submitted a bid for a follow-up study to investigate hybridisation further.

The ICES working group on tools and development of stock assessment models using stock synthesis (WKTADSA) is holding a workshop at the end of 2021. It aims to facilitate a stock assessment for black-bellied monkfish using alternative assessment models. If there is a benchmark in early 2022 using a stock synthesis model then there should be new advice for the species in 2023.

LR added that WKREF 1 and WKREF 2 are looking at assessments for ICES category 1 and 3 species and LR said they could be reviewing the current assessment methodology for black-bellied monkfish. LR said these workshops were unlikely to change the white-bellied monkfish assessment and explained that the models they were trialling gave very similar distributions in spawning stock biomass (SSB) and recruitment. LR was not aware of any developments on whether new benchmarking for white-bellied monkfish stock assessment had been agreed. There were discussions in ICES around how Category 3 species advice could be calculated to provide better catch advice. The relevant ICES Working Group were looking at more complicated models based on the 2 over 3 harvest control model.

Discussion:

JP asked LR whether Cefas is continuing to look at catch separation through market sampling. LR said market sampling levels were being reviewed, and previously the target was for both species but it might be split into targets for the different species. LR said the previous approach, which sampled both species, meant that species-specific information was lost, such as length distribution. LR said she would speak to with John Elson for more information.

LR said there was a target number of trips that Cefas aims to observe. This provides discard estimates that are then extrapolated to fleet level. LR added that there are target levels for each of the gears, which are met for beam and otter trawls, but there was low coverage for gillnets.

CN welcomed LR's updates and said it was good to know that if the FIP extends there would be time to address both the stock assessment complications and witness the formal rollout of MMO's MPAs management measures. TH said waiting for the black-bellied monkfish to be benchmarked to move from a Category 3 species would add certainty to the assessment and help any certification process and there was greater certainty in its stock health.

Actions from Item 5:

1. LR to ask John Elson for more information on changes to Cefas' market sampling and catch separation approach.

Agenda Item 6: FIP timeline

The FIP is due to finish in April 2022, but Covid and Brexit have caused delays for some actions, leading to discussions in the last Steering Group meeting as to whether an extension would be appropriate. If the FIP timeline were to extend, the Steering Group need to consider whether the process could be scaled back – e.g. reduced number of meetings, and Poseidon support - and what the implications for the supply chain might be. For the FIP to extend its timeline and remain credible, a new action plan would need to be produced with appropriate timelines to show evidence the group is progressing against milestones.

The Secretariat requested Round 1 funders to join Steering Group meetings so that they can better understand the delays each FIP is facing. The Secretariat has also set up a specific funders call on the 23rd of November to discuss FIP extension options.

Based on the timelines for the black bellied stock assessment and MPA management measures, the Steering Group agreed that a two-year extension would be required. JP reminded the Steering Group that the FIP needs to be proactive with other actions to demonstrate continued progress to FisheryProgress.org and other external stakeholders.

Discussion:

In any possible extension, CN suggested the Steering Group could address issues associated with cuttlefish, which is a secondary species to the FIP. Currently it would be assessed using a Risk-Based Framework (RBF) approach but after the five years of the MSC certificate it would need to be assessed using the default tree. CN gave the example of the Steering Group working with Cefas to address data gaps and better understand the biological status for cuttlefish. JH said cuttlefish was an important species for SWFPO and the Cornish Fish Producers Organisation (CFPO) and would welcome efforts improve understanding on the biology of the species. JP said she would follow up with CFPO and Interfish for their views on extending the FIP.

HS said WWF would support an extension to the FIP as long as genuine progress was made towards unconditional passes across the performance indicators, to ensure the FIP remain credible.

CN said an extension would mean the FIP would have to incorporate FisheryProgress.org social policy requirements. She also noted that if there is additional time, the FIP's alternative measures report could be revised to account for new gear changes that have come into force for some sections of the fleets catching monkfish.

JH said that although monkfish was not a priority species for SWFPO they would support an extension as it would be a shame to lose all the hard-earned information and progress to date otherwise.

CN had spoken with some of WFPO's monkfish buyers who stated that their supply has to come from a source that is either third party certified or in a FIP. CN had concerns that if the FIP is not extended then buyers would switch to the monkfish FIP being developed in the North Sea.

JP said that as there were no members objecting to extension she would begin drafting a brief to funders explaining reasons for the extension.

Actions from Item 6:

1. Secretariat to:
 - a. Contact CFPO and Interfish for their views on FIP extension.

- b. Share an extension brief with funders ahead of the funders-FIP extension call on the 23rd November.

Meeting Closes

12.30

Actions Arising	Responsibility
<p><u>FisheryProgress.org social policy update</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. JH to review SWFPO ILO-188 compliance and respond to the Secretariat whether they meet any of the risk criteria. 2. Secretariat to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Contact CFPO and Interfish for vessel information and encourage further input to the FIP. b. Circulate ILO-188 benchmarking report with the Steering Group. 	<p>Juliette Hatchman</p> <p>Secretariat</p>
<p><u>Endangered, threatened and protected species</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CN to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Contact The Shark Trust again to see whether they can share their handling and ID posters b. Consider funding opportunities for the ETP identification guides, if needed c. Update the Steering Group on any skate and ray survival studies that are commissioned through FISP. 	<p>Chloe North</p>
<p><u>Habitats</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Secretariat to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Keep the Steering Group updated on progress made in the MPA subgroup. b. Share the Cefas habitat report with HS. c. Contact IFCAs to get estimates on <12m otter trawlers in their jurisdictions, and determine how they restrict trawling activity in their MPAs. d. Contact CFPO to get a better understanding of their <12m fleet. 2. EB to put Project UK on the next Southwest regional fisheries meeting agenda. 3. TH to follow up internally at Poseidon to understand whether the impact of otter trawls would negatively impact the scores for beam trawling and netting, even if the otter trawl UoC was dropped. 	<p>Secretariat</p> <p>Edward Baker</p> <p>Tim Huntington</p>
<p><u>Fishery Management Plan update</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Secretariat to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Follow up with TH to determine how explicit Section 4 of the FMP needs to be. b. Find a Steering Group member to provide new information to Section 4.3. 2. CN to summarise the Cefas habitat and SICA analysis reports for Section 5 of the FMP. 3. JH to review Section 7 of the FMP and add industry expertise where necessary. 	<p>Secretariat</p> <p>Chloe North</p> <p>Juliette Hatchman</p>
<p><u>Assessment of stocks</u></p>	

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<p>FIP timeline</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Secretariat to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Contact CFPO and Interfish for their views on FIP extension. b. Share an extension brief with funders ahead of the funders-FIP extension call on the 23rd November. 	<p>Secretariat</p>