

Minutes: Environmental sub-group

Meeting Date: 31/08/2022

Location: Online

Attendees	Organisation
AB: Andrew Brown	Macduff Shellfish
AC: Annika Clements	Ulster Wildlife
BL: Bill Lart	Seafish
CC: Charlotte Coombes	Marine Conservation Society
CD: Calum Duncan	ScotLINK
DD: David Donnan	NatureScot
EW: Elaine Whyte	Communities Inshore Fisheries Alliance (CIFA)
FN: Fiona Nimmo	Poseidon
GB: Giles Bartlett	Whitby Seafood
HS: Hayley Swanland	WWF
JP: Jo Pollett	Marine Stewardship Council
LB: Lisa Bennett	Marine Stewardship Council
MK: Mike Kaiser	Herriot-Watt University
RW: Robert Whitely	Natural England

Purpose of the meeting

This environmental sub-group meeting was to discuss updates to the alternative measures reports, to discuss the SICA reports, and to agree on the next steps for the Wheelhouse Guide.

Agenda Item 1: ETP species recording protocol

JP updated on the ongoing communication with Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) to trial the Clean Catch app. Skippers need a code to access the app, and there have been delays in accessing this code. JP asked the Steering Group whether they wanted to continue trying to access Clean Catch, and if anyone is working with Cefas already, or whether to try a different approach.

Discussion

FN advised the group should keep trying to use Clean Catch and access the necessary code as skippers have already agreed to trial the app. She suggested the Chair of the *Nephrops* Steering Group (Dan Whittle) and/or relevant members of the FIPs could contact the Cefas Clean Catch team to try to get the necessary codes. RW asked for a summary of the issue, as he is speaking with Stuart Hetherington (Cefas) for other reasons so could also request the app codes. FN noted that the Scottish Fisheries Sustainable Accreditation Group (SFSAG) Northern Demersal Stocks has a recommendation under the same Performance Indicator to develop self-sampling protocols for ETP, and it may be useful to look at

how they are working on that. The group agreed the Secretariat should contact Jennifer Mouat from SFSAG to discuss.

Actions from Item 1:

1. Secretariat to
 - (a) Contact DW and ask if he can assist with gaining access codes to the Clean Catch app
 - (b) Send RW a summary of the Clean Catch app discussion and requirements
 - (c) Contact SFSAG to discuss their recommendation in relation to ETP reporting
2. RW to ask Stuart Hetherington (Cefas) for the code(s) needed for Clean Catch app

Agenda Item 2: Wheelhouse Guide update

LB updated on the current status of the Wheelhouse Guide. There are a number of images that are still required, either as real photos, or as illustrations similar to the Shark Trust ID Guide. LB discussed the size of the current prototype, and the idea of requesting the use of the Shark Trust template which shows only one species per slide. Using the template would have a cost which would need to be budgeted for, but this approach would reduce duplication of effort.

Discussion

DD agreed we should reduce duplication and using the Shark Trust template could be a viable option. A 'sense' check is still required of the lists to see which species would actually be brought up on deck, and identifiable on the deck of a dredger. AC agreed, and said she has access to images through the Wildlife Trust, as well as NatureScot having images on Flickr. The sub-group agreed it is important to ensure that imagery is used of what the species will look like on the deck to aid in accurate identification. In this case, using illustrations (as in Shark Trust ID Guide) might not be the best option for the guide. CD asked if species like tall sea pens, or *Pachycerianthus*, should be included in the list. FN discussed that the lists were compiled and reviewed by many different stakeholder bodies, and has been 'sense' checked in terms of which fishing gear would catch which species. Sub-group members suggested that the various observer programs could possibly be a source of imagery for species on deck.

Actions from Item 2:

1. Secretariat to
 - (a) put the list of ETP species on a shared file for the sub-group to comment on appropriateness of the species to be included in a wheelhouse guide, and to note whether they have potential images which could be used
 - (b) contact Shark Trust for a quote to use their template

Agenda Item 3: Review of Alternative Measures Report

BL provided a review of his recent updates to the alternative measures report for the *Nephrops* and scallops fisheries. Overall, he said the review of alternative measures report for scallops is nearly ready, and could go online soon (FisheryProgress.org).

Nephrops trawl alternative measures

Not much had been added to this report, but BL intends to include the latest information on coverless trawls in the Northern Ireland fishery, which he will request from Ben Collier. BL would be interested to know how many of the alternative trawl fishing measures have actually been implemented by fishermen after the trial period.

Nephrops alternative measures

A lot of data has been published on whale entanglements since the FIP pre-assessment was published in 2019. This topic is getting a lot of attention and FN said it would be good to know which mitigation measures are currently being implemented by the creel fleet. BL referenced the Scottish Entanglement Alliance Report (published by NatureScot), which has a section on mitigation measures, and said he needs assistance from creel fishermen to discuss the different measures and feasibility of implementing them.

Discussion

DD said the first phase of the report published by NatureScot was about collecting information; there was a good response from fishermen and they have good data from the West of Scotland, however the risk of whale entanglement applies throughout the UK. The work has moved on to the second phase looking at the feasibility of taking forward mitigation methods – this is a work in progress rather than something that provides definitive advice. NatureScot would like to broaden the involvement of creel fishermen in this work across the UK.

FN said the information in the NatureScot report aligned with the initial findings from the pre-assessment, and links in with the need for an ETP reporting protocol. It would be good to have some self-sampling and self-reporting of ETP species from members of the creel Unit of Assessment (UoA), and then work towards whether management is needed. BL and EW discussed the involvement of the creel fishermen so far and future involvement. FN and EW discussed the creel fishermen engaging with self-reporting of entanglement through the Clean Catch app, which may be a way to raise awareness and move forward, and EW offered assistance where she can.

Scallop fishery alternative measures

This has been updated to include recent trials on skid dredges and N-viro dredges. The design of the N-viro dredge is such that it takes the weight off the teeth of the dredge, which steadies the dredge to make the fishing process smoother. The skid dredge is one that Herriot-Watt University have been working with Bangor University on, which has small skids under the belly of the dredge, to reduce impact on the seabed.

BL discussed the results using a table to compare the various dredge designs and components, against 11 different criteria which are broadly grouped under three categories: (a) alteration of seabed habitat, (b) effects on catch and (c) commercial viability (slides available). The table has been updated to include the results of the N-viro and the skid dredge. The N-viro dredged shows some improvements in

performance for stones/debris (criteria a), selectivity and stress on scallops (criteria b) and fuel efficiency (criteria c). The skid dredge showed improvements in performance against damage to benthic organisms (criteria a) and durability (criteria c).

The table is a useful way to look at different combinations of measures which may be more effective when trialled together, and could be used to inform future dredge trials by combining methods where improved performance has been recorded.

Discussion

The recent dredge trial with the skids involved examining the catch of other benthic organisms and FN asked if data had been collected from other trials like this. BL said researchers at Heriot-Watt University are the first people who have tried to compare different gear modifications and what comes up in the dredge.

RW discussed the report on the skid dredge trial by Herriot-Watt University, and recalled a presentation by Marija Sciberras where there appeared to be a lot of data on bycatch of ETP species. This data was not included in the final report, so RW asked whether he could see a copy of the original presentation.

Other approaches

BL discussed the self-propelled ROV scallop collector which scoops up scallops remotely. This has shown success when there are high densities of scallops, but is ineffective in strong currents. Scallop potting with lights may show potential in a mixed fishery, but BL is unsure if this method has commercial potential. ETP species and vulnerable habitats become closely linked when discussing dredge impacts, and Mairi Fenton, a PhD candidate at Heriot-Watt University, is looking into management approaches taken by other certified dredge fisheries. BL discussed whether improved technology could help skippers avoid vulnerable habitats altogether. He would like to prepare a discussion document for the Steering Group exploring this topic. AC commented that it will depend on the fishery and the investment they have in technology, but reviewing the available options is a positive step.

Discussion

FN commented that the information about ROV and the scallop pots was interesting, although would not be relevant within the FIP as those gear types are not included and the alternative measures need to be specific to the gear type under assessment.

CD reiterated his endorsement for spatial management being a more confident way of helping meet the requirements of environmental sustainability in this and other fisheries, particularly with mobile gear. CD discussed reversing the burden of proof, where specific areas for fishing are allocated on established areas appropriate for fishing. FN explained that the work that has been done by BL was specifically on alternative measures to minimise mortality of unwanted species and focussed on gear and gear trials that are under assessment, not necessarily wider management. FN acknowledged that they are waiting on post-doctoral research to inform the wider processes. AB said it is important to continue to focus on gear improvements as well as spatial management for the future of scallop fisheries.

ETP section of the alternative measures reports

BL commented that the ETP section of the alternative measures report needs further detail and he was considering including information on the technology and cameras that modern vessels have, and how using that technology improves fishing practices. BL asked for more input from others on this section.

Discussion

FN said there was room to expand on the ETP section with relation to creel, and suggested she and BL work together to do that. EW offered to support on this where possible. FN suggested that BL add any recommendations or suggestions he has regarding the technology aspect and then share it with Ben Collier and Mike Kaiser for input.

CC and FN discussed how the FIP tracks improvements on the water with relation to gear improvements; FN explained the relevant parts of the MSC Standard and how score improvements are made.

Actions from Item 3:

1. FN to
 - outline how creel fishermen can engage in self-reporting of entanglement and send to EW
 - work with BL on expanding the ETP section in relation to creel fishing
2. EW to
 - pass on information received from FN on how creel fishermen can engage in self reporting of ETP species to see whether any creel fishermen would like to participate in this
 - review the creel alternative measures report and provide feedback to the Steering Group
3. BL to
 - ask Mairi Fenton about her research into management approaches taken by other certified dredge fisheries
 - contact Ben Collier about the latest results on the coverless trawl research
 - send the creel alternative measures report to EW for review
4. Secretariat to ask Mairi Fenton if she has a copy of the LISG presentation given to the Steering Group in February and share this with Rob Whiteley.

Agenda Item 4: SICA report and habitat suitability

FN summarised that a scale intensity consequence analysis (SICA) was undertaken in 2021 for both scallops and *Nephrops*.

The results of both of those reports mean the FIP's meet SG 60-79 for performance indicator 2.5.1 (ecosystem). The SICA looked at species composition, functional group composition, distribution of the community and trophic size and structure, and concluded that the elements most affected by fishing activity were distribution of the community and species composition. The recommendations from the

report were that ecosystem management should be aligned with the habitat management measures being reviewed and developed within the Action Plan.

Discussion

CD discussed the results of the SICA reports and his concerns about shifting baselines. Some of the sensitive features of the ecosystem will have a diminished spatial extent on grounds that have been previously fished or swept. CD discussed concerns about looking for impact on an already impacted area, and that the footprint on many of the VMEs is already diminished because of the legacy of bottom contact gear. He discussed the historical extent of the VMEs and needing to have protection for priority features outside of the MPA network and asked whether the MSC process considered this.

FN said it was agreed within the SICA that the ecosystem scope would be defined as an larger area than just the functional units; it included the West of Scotland, Irish Sea and greater North Sea, and includes benthic mud (burrowed mud) that is fished, and that has these sensitive species identified.

FN and CD discussed the percentage impact area mentioned in the SICA report, and which areas and habitats were and were not considered. FN stated it would be more relevant to look at this issue under the habitats component, where the historical extent of a species is listed within the MSC methodology, and where work from the PhD on scallop dredge habitat impacts and the Post-doctoral research for *Nephrops* to be finalised.

RW commented that he will review his comments on the SICA report again, and would likely provide some additional feedback.

MK discussed that many of the issues with habitat recoverability can be dealt with by gear technology and effort controls, and management measure that reduce the footprint of the fishery will improve the conservation status of the seabed. AB commented there is work ongoing on the nation scallop Fishery Management Plan, which will include stakeholder and public consultation, and will pose the question of scallop total allowable catches (TACs), as well as other management measures.

Actions from Item 4:

1. Secretariat to send CD the MSC guidance wording on ETP and habitat outcomes, and the wording around 'historical extent'.

Any Other Business

N/A

Meeting Closes

1605

	Actions Arising	Responsibility
1	Secretariat to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contact DW and ask if he can assist with gaining access codes to the Clean Catch app 2. Send RW a summary of the Clean Catch app discussion and requirements 3. Contact SFSAG to discuss their recommendation in relation to ETP reporting 4. Put the list of ETP species on a shared file for the sub-group to comment on appropriateness of the species to be included in a wheelhouse guide, and to note whether they have potential images which could be used 5. Contact Shark Trust for a quote to use their template 6. RW to ask Stuart Hetherington (Cefas) for the code(s) needed for Clean Catch app 7. Ask Mairi Fenton if she has a copy of the LISG presentation given to the Steering Group in February and share this with Rob Whiteley 8. Send CD the MSC guidance wording on ETP and habitat outcomes, and the wording around 'historical extent' 	Secretariat
2	Fiona Nimmo to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Outline how creel fishermen can engage in self-reporting of entanglement and send to EW 2. Work with BL on expanding the ETP section in relation to creel fishing 	FN
3	Elaine White to <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pass on information received from FN on how creel fishermen can engage in self-reporting of ETP species to see whether any creel fishermen would like to participate in this 2. Review the creel alternative measures report and provide feedback to the Steering Group 	EW
4	Bill Lart to : <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask Mairi Fenton about her research into management approaches taken by other certified dredge fisheries 	BL

	<ol style="list-style-type: none">2. Contact Ben Collier about the latest results on the coverless trawl research3. Send the creel alternative measures report to EW for review	
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