

## Minutes: Monkfish Steering Group

Meeting Date: 12 September 2022

Location: Online

Attendees	Organisation
AT: Adam Townley	New England Seafood International
CN: Chloe North	Western Fish Producers Organisation
HS: Hayley Swanland	WWF-UK
JH: Juliette Hatchman	South Western Fish Producers Organisation
JP: Jo Pollett	Marine Stewardship Council
LB: Lisa Bennett	Marine Stewardship Council
LR: Lisa Readdy	Cefas
LW: Linda Wood	Marks and Spencer
NdR: Nathan de Rozarieux	Falfish
TH: Tim Huntingdon	Poseidon
<b>Apologies</b>	
Chris Ranford	Cornish Fish Producers Organisation
Gus Caslake	Seafish

### Purpose of the meeting

This meeting was to discuss actions related to Principle 2, and to receive an update from Cefas on stock status and harvest control rules. The group also discussed progress with the ID guides for Endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species, and the actions needed to make progress against habitats performance indicators.

### Agenda Item 1: Secondary species

During the last annual review TH updated the action plan to cover the extension of the FIP, and added new actions for secondary species as a results of harmonising scores with the recent Round 3 South West pre-assessment. The pre assessment was more precautionary in anticipation of the expected raising of the bar that will come with the release of the new MSC Standard in October 2022. TH explained that the new actions for secondary species involve reviewing current management measures, and adding these into the fishery management plan (FMP).

JP reminded the Steering Group that they had previously discussed undertaking a heatmap exercise with skippers to provide information on where they are finding hotspots of secondary species. The secondary species identified in the updated action plan are gurnard, pouting and cuttlefish and CN said gurnard and cuttlefish are being included in the Channel demersal non-quota species (NQS) FMP that Marine Management Organisation (MMO) is leading on. TH agreed that if they are included in the FMP then that should cover the management requirements for those two species.

### *Discussion*

JP, JH, CP discussed that the Western Sea and Channel monkfish FIP covers ICES area 7b – k and 8 a, b, and d. It would be up to a client group to decide which of those areas would need to be included in an MSC assessment, depending on where monkfish were being caught and landed. NdR said those areas align with the stock assessment, but the majority of landings of monkfish are taken in 7 h, j, k, f, and a bit in e.

JH listed the species currently being considered for the Channel demersal NQS FMP, which covers a lot of the Channel mixed fishery species including gurnard and cuttlefish, but not pouting. However, JH said the management plans are an iterative process so it may be possible to request that pouting be included. The FMP is just for the English Channel, and covers ICES areas 7d and 7e.

JH and CN discussed the draft Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS), and that some FMPs have been designated as front runners while other fisheries are not being prioritised yet. JH said the JFS is a draft document, and more FMPs may be added to it, but the order in which they are prioritised is based on environmental, social and economic factors, as well as local and regional circumstances.

TH said if there was an FMP for a significant proportion of the FIP area, like the Channel, then the management measures set out in the FMP could be useful to demonstrate that similar management may be applicable to the whole fishery because certain aspects, such as gear type, would be identical.

### *Considerations for a mixed fishery*

NdR said pouting is not an economic driver for any fishery so willingness to implement management measures will be limited. There is less information available and less focus on data collection for the less economically valuable species. For secondary species in this mixed fishery, that means management will always be led by the perception of what the most valuable species are, in this case plaice, sole and monkfish.

TH agreed that for species like gurnard and pouting, the Steering Group should support the development of the FMP for the non-quota demersal species. He has reviewed the pre-assessments for the South West Round 3 fisheries, and commented that the scoring was precautionary likely due to concerns with compliance with the Landing Obligation. CN said that the Landing Obligation only covers quota species, and none of the secondary species in this fishery have a quota attached. TH agreed the Landing Obligation is therefore not necessarily relevant in this fishery and using management plans at stock level should be sufficient to raise the score.

NdR talked about Project 50%, where the South West fisheries made large improvements in selectivity prior to becoming involved with Project UK. A lot of improvement work was done particularly with regards to pouting, and the results are captured in reports by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture (Cefas); JH has access to these reports and will share them with the group. CN has an updated Cefas report from 2017 which demonstrated that the nets widely in use in 2017 were the same mesh size as those trialled in Project 50%. NdR agreed that the mesh size has only increased over time and suggested that there should be observer data to support this. TH said that would be useful for the Steering Group to demonstrate that.

CN asked if someone could verify net mesh sizes in Cornwall and Devon by speaking with the relevant net makers. NdR suggested that David Warwick at Seafish may be able to assist. He also said the work on the ecological risk assessment might be useful as species like pouting will likely come out as low risk.

Aoife Martin at Seafish would be worth contacting to get hold of the risk assessment. JH suggested contacting the MMO to see if they have any data on net mesh sizes based on compliance checks.

### ***Actions from Item 1:***

1. CN to:
  - contact David Warwick to enquire what information Seafish currently have on mesh size through their fleet surveys, and if he could take on a small work package of collecting net mesh sizes from netmakers in Devon and Cornwall
  - share the 2017 update on Project 50% with the Secretariat
2. JH to share the Project 50% documents with the Secretariat
3. Secretariat to:
  - contact the MMO and enquire if they collect any data on net mesh sizes when doing compliance checks.
  - ask MMO if pouting can be included in the Channel demersal NQS FMP, and if they would consider widening the region covered by the FMP to include the Bristol Channel
  - contact Seafish to ask for a copy of their recent South West risk assessment

### **Agenda Item 2: Stock status, assessment of stock and harvest control rules**

LR updated on behalf of Cefas. There was a benchmark this year for monkfish and hake, which included the stocks covered by the FIP. Both monkfish species in the South West now have full analytical stock assessments using a stock synthesis model which is an integrated stock assessment that takes uncertainties into account. They all have ICES reference points, and advice is now available using those reference points.

- White bellied monkfish

Updated data this year showed spawning stock biomass is above  $B_{lim}$ , and fishing mortality (F) is below F maximum sustainable yield (MSY) which is consistent with sustainable fishing pressure. Recruitment is above average for the time series and because of that, the advice for 2023 is for an increase in catch.

- Black bellied monkfish

Spawning stock biomass is above  $B_{lim}$ , and above MSY  $B_{trigger}$ , and fishing mortality (F) is below FMSY; therefore the 2023 advice is for an increase in catch. In 2020, there was a large recruitment at the height of the time series which is good news for future catch prospects.

LR said the only complication is in relation to hybridisation between white bellied and black bellied species, and researchers are looking for additional samples to move that project forward. TH asked if the landings would be reported separately or combined. LR said it is still combined at the moment, and it will be up to industry to decide if they split the catch, but she acknowledged the difficulties that industry would have in being able to identify the individuals if the catch was split. LR said Cefas continue to look at the catch at ports, and split it there into the two different species, however hybridisation of the species does add additional uncertainty.

Cefas also do onboard sampling which helps with identifying the two different species of anglerfish. TH agreed that although there are some uncertainties, there is enough port sampling to be able to run two different stock assessments separately, and the uncertainty is understood, so he believes this shouldn't be an issue for Principle 1.

### *Discussion*

CN commented that the remaining challenge of management of the fishery is the joint total allowable catch (TAC). The TAC that is set needs to be precautionary enough to protect both species, and use trigger points for each species which point to different management options if one species is decreasing. CN asked if that is discussed at the ICES working group. LR said it does get looked at in the mixed fisheries assessment, and the advice will be released in October, which will show if both species are included in the Category 1 stock assessments. The mixed fishery advice would consider the overall catch from each species, taking into account their MSY F-ranges.

CN said Defra is likely to base their negotiating position on the mixed fishery advice, so the F-ranges will be taken into account there. Monkfish is a joint stock, which means that implementing harvest control rules (HCRs) will be of limited effectiveness unless the European Union (EU) also implements those rules. CN said this needs to be discussed through the multi-year strategies for shared non-quota stocks as it is important that the United Kingdom (UK) and EU have the same HCRs. CN said it is important from the Steering Group's perspective that the joint TAC for monkfish is discussed as part of the Defra FMP process.

TH said the next stage is to include black bellied monkfish into the mixed fishery advice for the South West, and to understand what this would mean in terms of management and effective HCRs. CN said the mixed fishery advice sets a fishing pressure and balances different MSYs, so for some species there might be a slight overfishing, and others slight underfishing for example. If both monkfish species are included in that the mixed fishery advice, the TAC would be determined by adding the two together to get the overall TAC.

LR said moving forward there is potential for including the uncertainty of how variable each species are that contribute to that TAC, which could be added in to the advice. CN said ICES provide separate advice for each species, and then it gets combined at a Defra or EU level, so it would be helpful if ICES provided joint TAC advice that accounts for the uncertainty. LR said that could be a way forward in the mixed fishery advice offered to find out if that is either happening now or is planned for the future. CN said it could be a way of ensuring we are being precautionary about TAC setting.

### ***Actions from Item 2:***

1. LR to explore whether ICES are considering providing joint TAC advice for monkfish that accounts for the uncertainty of the variability between species, or if this option could be considered in future.

### **Agenda Item 3: Endangered, Threatened and Protected species**

CN said she had an action to develop ID guides for beam trawlers and demersal trawlers and has spoken to shark trust about that. The producer organisations (POs) are funding the printing of the guides, which

will include the POs logos. They will be ready in Autumn 2022, and CN said the POs would need to ensure the guides are being stuck up in galleys, and that skippers are using it as a training tool for handling certain species and for the regulations around the different species of rays. The guide is relevant for all demersal trawlers fishing in Area 7.

The gill netters interact with different ETP species to the demersal fishery, but are already MSC certified for hake, and use the Clean Catch app to report ETP interactions. JH said she has some fishermen involved in trialling the Clean Catch app. The software for the app is being updated, and the final testing is currently underway.

TH said the performance indicator for ETP management scores 60 - 79 for gill nets, and >80 for mobile gear. He considered why the gill netters scored <80 if they are covered under the MSC certification for the hake fishery, and said he would review the scores based on the information in the hake certification. CN asked if the hake fishery covers trammel nets and NdR said the South West vessels are not fishing for hake with trammel nets, but the boats are carrying both types of gear.

#### *Discussion*

If the hake fishery is not using trammel nets, then they will need to be included in any ETP recording protocols developed. Trammel nets might have less of a bycatch issue as they are flatter on the seabed. CN noted that the MSC certified hake fishery will need to address any ETP conditions during their period of certification. If the hake vessels are trialling the Clean Catch app, it will also cover the monkfish caught by those vessels using the same gear type.

NdR agreed that any processes in place in the hake fishery regarding seabirds and cetacean bycatch can be replicated for the monkfish fishery. TH said the hake fishery does not include trammel nets and CN asked if it would still be useful evidence that the hake vessels are trialling the Clean Catch app when fishing with other gear. JP said if the gillnet fishery is certified and demonstrates it complies with these performance indicators, we could enquire if they use the same techniques (i.e. the Clean Catch app) when they are using the trammel nets. TH said this should be sufficient evidence to support this performance indicator.

#### ***Actions from Item 3:***

1. Secretariat to
  - request an update from Stuart Hetherington at Clean Catch on the progress of the Clean Catch app development
  - enquire with fishermen in the certified hake fishery whether they continue to use the Clean Catch app when fishing with trammel nets
2. TH to review the scores for gill net and trammel net based on the information in the MSC Cornish hake certification

**Agenda Item 4: Habitats**

The action plan states that the Steering Group needs to complete a summary report of the footprint, scale and intensity of commonly encountered habitats and VMEs. The Steering Group discussed asking Fiona Nimmo, a Principle 2 expert who also works at Poseidon, to look at the SICA report again, only accounting for gravel or coarse sediment habitats to see whether this alters the result. TH added that the SICA could be re-run using the assumption that all Marine Protected Areas would be closed to trawling to see if that affects the outcome. TH will see whether Fiona Nimmo can do this work, with a timeline of completing it early next year.

*Discussion*

JP informed the Steering Group that the Secretariat is meeting Natural England on 12<sup>th</sup> October to discuss Good Environmental Status, and also about the areas of concern for any VMEs outside of MPAs. JP updated the group on the iVMS roll out which has been delayed and is now expected for completion in May 2023. The Steering Group will be able to access the anonymised iVMS data via a Freedom of Information request to the MMO.

As an update on the MPA process: in 2021, the MMO consulted on management measures for four MPAs, one in the English Channel, and these measures were implemented in April 2022. In June 2022, the MMO consulted on management measures for the next tranche of MPAs, including a further two in the English Channel. Management measures are also expected to be rolled out in those MPAs in due course, and full management measures are expected for all currently designated MPAs by the end of 2024.

CN updated that Cefas are running a project to link spatial data (VMS data) and landings data to create heat maps of where species are being caught and landed. CN is going to set up a joint meeting with Cefas to discuss the project and offered to invite JP and JH.

**Actions from Item 4:**

1. CN to invite Secretariat and JH to the meeting with Cefas to discuss the heat mapping project.
2. TH to speak to Fiona Nimmo about updating the SICA with a focus on gravel areas, and with an assumption that all MPAs are closed to trawling.

**Agenda Item 5: Compliance and enforcement**

JP asked how Steering Group members are demonstrating compliance with the Landing Obligation. The MSC certified hake fishery has a condition on compliance and enforcement stating '*evidence should be provided that the Monitor, Control, Surveillance (MCS) system has demonstrated an ability to enforce relevant management measures, strategies and rules, key of which is the Landing Obligation*'. The hake fishery has this condition because it was harmonised with other certified fisheries in the UK, and the monkfish FIP would also harmonise with this condition if it became certified.

JP asked if any of the vessels in this FIP have cameras onboard which could help demonstrate compliance and enforcement.

### Discussion

CN said six WFPO vessels have cameras onboard, but the footage is strictly for data collection for Cefas. The cameras are not an MCS tool, and so are probably not useful in demonstrating compliance for the Landing Obligation. CN said the Landing Obligation is an issue across multiple fisheries, and there may be decisions to address is at a national level. JP agreed that this FIP has enough time remaining to ensure the Steering Group can determine the best way forward, as this is the only performance indicator in Principle 3 where the FIP scores below 80,

TH recommended including a paragraph in the FMP on trying to improve the data on discards to allow them to be accounted for in any stock assessment. CN agreed they could try and improve the catch data recording of discards. CN suggested the group should document in the FMP anything that Defra is doing to address the Landing Obligation, and the Producer Organisations can encourage accurate discard recording.

### Actions from Item 5:

1. CN to pass on reminder to PO's to encourage accurate discard recording

### Any Other Business

CN asked about the next steps for the FIP and the action plan. JH asked if it was worth having a separate briefing with a Defra representative in order to discuss the FIPs ongoing actions, and also with the MMO lead and chair of the working group for the Channel demersal NQS FMP, Jessica Duffil-Telsnig.

JP said the Secretariat recently met with some Defra officials to update them on the FIPs and the progress that has been made on Project UK. The Secretariat will follow up with John Davies (FMP lead) and update him on the progress of the FIPs. In relation to the scallop FIP, JH commented on how useful the scallop FIP FMP has been when working on the national scallop FMP.

TH said there is a lot of positive movement in this FIP: Principle 1 has made progress, the rollout of iVMS, and the Cefas heatmap project are all good steps.

### Actions from Other Business:

1. JH to share contact details of Jessica Duffil-Telsnig with Secretariat

### Meeting Closes

1535

Actions Arising	Responsibility
Chloe North to: (a) contact David Warwick to enquire what information Seafish currently have on mesh size through their fleet surveys, and	CN

	<p>if he could take on a small work package of collecting net mesh sizes from netmakers in Devon and Cornwall</p> <p>(b) share the 2017 update on Project 50% with the Secretariat</p> <p>(c) invite Secretariat and JH to the meeting with Cefas to discuss the heat mapping project</p> <p>(d) pass on reminder to PO's to encourage accurate discard recording</p>	
	<p>Juliette Hatchman to share the Project 50% documents with the Secretariat</p>	JH
	<p>Secretariat to:</p> <p>(e) contact the MMO and enquire if they collect any data on net mesh sizes when doing compliance checks</p> <p>(f) ask MMO if pouting can be included in the Channel demersal NQS FMP, and if they would consider widening the region covered by the FMP to include the Bristol Channel</p> <p>(g) contact Seafish to ask for a copy of their recent South West risk assessment</p> <p>(h) request an update from Stuart Hetherington at Clean Catch on the progress of the Clean Catch app development</p> <p>(i) enquire with fishermen in the certified hake fishery whether they continue to use the Clean Catch app when fishing with trammel nets</p>	Secretariat
	<p>Lisa Readdy to explore whether ICES are considering providing joint TAC advice for monkfish that accounts for the uncertainty of the variability between species, or if this option could be considered in future.</p>	LR
	<p>Tim Huntingdon to:</p> <p>(a) review the scores for gill net and trammel net based on the information in the Cornish hake certification</p> <p>(b) speak to Fiona Nimmo about updating the SICA with a focus on gravel areas, and with an assumption that all MPAs are closed to trawling.</p>	TH