Minutes: North Sea Regional Management meeting

Meeting Date: 14th December 2022

Location: Online

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| Attendees | Organisation |
| Anne Birnie | North East of Scotland Fishermen’s Organisation |
| Claire Pescod | Macduff Shellfish |
| Dale Rodmell | Eastern England Fish Producers Organisation |
| Dan Whittle | Whitby’s Seafoods |
| Fiona Nimmo | Posieden |
| Giles Bartlett | Whitby’s Seafoods |
| Jo Pollett | Marine Stewardship Council |
| Kevin McDonnell | Orkney and West of Scotland Fish Producers Organisation |
| Lisa Bennett | Marine Stewardship Council |
| Mark Sutton | Northumberland Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority |
| Mike Park | Scottish White Fish Producers Association |
| Ralph Bublitz | North Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority |

**Purpose of the meeting**

This meeting was an opportunity to discuss potential future technical measures which could be considered for the Nephrops fishery should the point of recruitment impairment be reached. This meeting was specific to the functional units in the North Sea.

Agenda Item 1: Functional Unit 5-10 and Functional Unit 34 action plan score analysis

FN summarised the Functional Unit (FU) scores for the North Sea fishery. The scores for Harvest Strategy (PI 1.1.1) across all FUs are currently scoring SG<60, because the requirement in the MSC Standard is the harvest strategy must be responsive to the state of each stock (functional unit) and therefore means management - but not necessarily TAC - at FU level. Harvest control rules and tools (HCRs; PI 1.2.2) currently scores SG60-79 because, although there are generally understood HCRs available, the requirement is for well-defined HCR that must ensure the exploitation rate is reduced as the point of recruitment impairment is approached.

The *Nephrops* Steering Group previously agreed that the use of TAC by functional unit was not an appropriate option to ensure that management was responsive to the state of the stocks. Effort restriction was also considered, but was also considered unworkable by industry. Therefore, the route being taken for developing HCRs for the fishery is through technical measures which can be implemented if the reference points, once defined, are reached.

Agenda Item 2: Harvest Strategy

FN said that the Western Waters Multi-Annual Plan (MAP) requires that conservation reference points for Nephrops shall be requested from ICES for MSY Btrigger and Blim. It also requires that safeguards are in place if the FU stock falls below certain levels, and it mentions the option of suspending the FU fishery if the stock falls below Blim,.

*Objectives for regional management group:*

* Discuss which technical measures are most appropriate for the region
* Develop set of options to be adopted if reference points are reached
* Define limit and target reference points
* Define HCR relative to reference points

Agenda Item 3: Harvest control rules

DW discussed the application to ICES for reference points as described in the North Sea MAP and said he, FN, GB and Cefas had a meeting with Defra to discuss the situation. At the time, Defra said they did not have the resources to take on this work. Ewen Bell (Cefas) recommended to DW that an application should be made to ICES, but it would take considerable time. UK government would also need agreement from the other devolved administrations in order to progress with this. At the recent Irish Sea Regional Management Meeting, the group agreed to support an application to ICES for Blim and Btrigger and DW asked if anybody from this group objected to making this request to ICES.

*Discussion*

MP asked how likely it is that the devolved administrations would agree to submit this request together. FN said it is difficult to say, but there may be challenges to get agreement from the devolved administrations on how to approach FMPs. MP explained that there were some concerns within Scottish government that the direction of this group is towards functional unit management through quota allocation, and that is why there may be issues getting government approval at this time. CP said it is disappointing that there is still the perception that this group is working towards functional unit TAC as we have spent considerable time explaining that functional unit TAC is not the purpose of this group.

DW reiterated that an application to ICES would take considerable time and cost, and is not specifically about TAC by functional unit, but is a common-sense step in ensuring we are working towards a sustainable fishery. JP said she, DW and FN have a meeting in January with Marine Scotland, and can ensure they reiterate that this group is not looking for functional unit TAC, and that the reason for these groups is to talk about technical measures.

Actions from Item 3:

Secretariat to:

* At the upcoming meeting with Marine Scotland, reiterate that the Regional Management Groups are working towards management using technical measures, and not total allowable catch by functional unit.

Agenda Item 4: Technical Measures

GB gave an overview of technical measures in place in the different functional units and the gear currently in use. Farn Deeps is the main area in the North Sea which has trawling restrictions in place.

**Agenda Item 5: Technical Measures HCR Tool Box**

FN gave an overview of the technical measures toolbox that Paul Medley had previously created, including options within the umbrellas of gear design, effort restrictions and minimum landing sizes of target species. She reminded the group that Paul Medley’s work concluded that TAC by functional unit and effort control within functional unit were not options that were considered feasible by industry. As an example, technical measures options that were put forward for Farn Deeps (functional unit 6) were discussed, with the expected reduction in harvest if applied. FN asked for input on the toolbox of technical measures and whether any of these could work, or would definitely not work, or what additional ideas could be considered.

*Discussion*

DR asked for more clarification on what the purpose of this session was, and said some of his members believe there is already self-regulation in the fishery in the form of a ‘move on’ approach i.e. if abundance is falling in one area, they will move to a different location due to the economic implications.

FN said this group is about looking for industry knowledge of what might be acceptable as a management measure should management be required. This stage is not about commitment, but getting initial ideas that could be modelled.

MP said it is difficult to prescribe measures to recover a stock given that many things could change between now and the time any measures would be implemented. That said, there is a toolbox of measures that could be considered, similar to the toolbox shown in this meeting, at such time as management measures were needed. DW asked whether, instead of prescribing which technical measures would be put in place, that the process for defining measures that would be taken is more clearly defined. For example, this would mean the ICES advice is released in October, which prompts specific parties to get together and go through the ‘toolbox’ of technical measures, in order to achieve the specific outcome that is required. FN said something like this has been previously considered for Farn Deeps but it was deemed unacceptable, however it is worth proposing again to get feedback from a Principle 1 expert.

MP supports an agreement where if a stock falls below a certain point, they put in a number of measures to achieve the desired goal that is quantified at the time (i.e. how much of a reduction is needed). Being overly specific now will cause concern among the fishermen, as it may not be the right plan at the time the measures are put in place.

FN said it would be useful to understand what the varying factors are that would influence what measure industry might choose at a particular time.

Actions from Item 5:

1. Secretariat to organise a call with MP and FN to discuss what the varying factors are that would influence what measure industry might choose at a particular time
2. FN to take the proposal described by DW to Paul Medley for consideration i.e. where the process is clearly defined for agreeing technical measures, but the measures themselves are not agreed.

**Any Other Business**

DW raised the chairmanship of this group and said he also chairs the *Nephrops* Steering Group, and therefore it may be preferable for someone else to chair this regional management group. DW asked if anybody would like to do this, and JP said the group could take some time to consider it, and the Secretariat would raise this again in advance of the next meeting.

Actions from AOB:

Secretariat to raise the discussion of appointing a new chair with the group prior to the next meeting

**Meeting Closes**

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