Minutes: Channel scallop Steering Group meeting

Meeting Date: 13th October 2021

Location: Teams

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| Attendees | Organisation |
| AB: Andrew Brown | Macduff Shellfish |
| BS: Bryce Stewart | University of York |
| CB: Coco Bagley | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs |
| CG: Caroline Gamblin | Marine Stewardship Council |
| CN: Chloe North | Western Fish Producers’ Organisation |
| CR: Chris Ranford | Cornish Fish Producers’ Organisation |
| FdB: Femke de Boer | Scottish White Fish Producers Association |
| FN: Fiona Nimmo | Poseidon |
| HG: Hubert Gieschen | Marine Management Organisation |
| JGH: Jan Geert Hiddink | Bangor University |
| JH: Juliette Hatchman | South West Fish Producers’ Organisation |
| JP: Jo Pollett | Marine Stewardship Council |
| JPo: Jim Portus | South West Fish Producers’ Organisation |
| KK: Katie Keay | Marine Stewardship Council |
| MS: Matt Spencer | Marine Stewardship Council |
| RC: Robyn Cloake | Labeyrie Fine Foods |
| RW: Rob Whiteley | Natural England |
| **Apologies** |  |
| Andy Lawler | Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science |
| Lauren Parkhouse | Devon and Seven Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority |

Purpose of the meeting

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

Agenda Item 1: Update from the Secretariat

MS and JP provided an update on the actions assigned to the Secretariat at the last Steering Group meeting.

*Clean Catch app:*

The Clean Catch app is being developed by Cefas as a real-time tool to report endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species interactions. JP informed the Steering Group that some Macduff and South West Fish Producers’ Organisation (SWFPO) vessels have agreed to participate in a trial of the app, and there is already one SWFPO vessel using the app. JP was awaiting an access code to share with vessel skippers so that the trial could commence, before rolling out to the wider fleet if the trial is successful. BS suggested it would be useful to have inshore and offshore vessels in the trial and the Steering Group agreed.

Other options for recording ETP interactions include the addition of ETP recording options in e-log books, so that all reporting is done through one platform. JH explained that using e-logbooks for reporting ETP interactions would only be relevant to the larger vessels in the fleet, as smaller vessels do not need to complete e-logbooks.

RW asked what the process was for validating the information going into the Clean Catch app. JH said there was very little observer coverage in the Channel scallop fishery so it might not be feasible to ground truth the Clean Catch trial. FN reminded the Steering Group that there was already some fleet level ETP information available from the Cefas study that Andy Lawler, Cefas, provided.

JPo cautioned the use of the term ETP species, as some of these species are key commercially viable species for industry and acceptable to catch, such as some skates and rays, and wanted to stress that listing a species as ETP might not necessarily mean it cannot be landed. JP explained that the aim for Clean Catch was to prove how few ETP interactions there are in the scallop fishery by having a protocol in place.

*Kingfisher app:*

JP recently spoke to the Kingfisher MPA tool programme developer, Eleanor Michie, who informed her that the project was still on track to launch by the end of October. The tool will enable the user to view management or restrictions to fishing activity by area and gears, with a function of the app being the ability to download reports if needed. JP said she would arrange a pan-Project UK call in November to present to tool once it is complete.

*FisheryProgress.org update:*

FP.org has introduced new social requirements for FIPs on their platform and MS provided a reminder to the Steering Group.

1. Compliance with other social policies

MS asked Steering Group members who were already working on social aspects in their fishery to share the details in case this already meets the FP.org requirements.

1. Sign-off of 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 a grievance mechanism in place. MS asked Steering Group members who represent vessels, to contact him if they have any questions or concerns about signing the code of conduct on behalf of their members and whether they agree to have the Secretariat sign on behalf of the FIP.

1. Review the self-evaluation criteria

There is a November deadline for each FIP to review the self-evaluation criteria and confirm if a full risk assessment will be required.

1. Vessel lists

Accurate vessel lists are required for each FIP by May 2022, and MS requested members of the FIP who represent vessels to share this information with the Secretariat.

Discussion:

JP confirmed that a gap analysis between ILO188 and the FP.org requirements was now available, and the Secretariat would share with the Steering Group. JH asked whether the vessel list is for the FIP or a client group, which MS said currently it was for the FIP and would not automatically form part of a client group.

CN said she did not expect there to be an issue with members of the Steering Group signing up to the code of conduct and expected the requirements to already be covered by ILO188. However, the risk criteria was likely to be met due to the large migrant labour work force present on vessels in the FIP. CN pointed out that the risk assessment and workplan are not required by FP.org until November 2022 and asked how that deadline aligned with the timeline of the FIP. KK said the FIP timeline would be discussed later in the call.

*MPA sub-group*

At the last meeting the Steering Group agreed that an MPA focus sub-group should be formed to discuss appropriate management of ETP species and sensitive habitats in the English Channel. Defra, MMO, Natural England and an Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority (IFCA) representative met earlier in the week for the first sub-group meeting. 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 update the group with more information at the next Steering Group meeting.

Discussion:

BS asked whether Steve Newstead’s report had been shared more widely by the Steering Group as he wanted to flag the limitations of the study, such as some habitat species information. JP offered to invite BS to the next sub-group call, which BS said he would be interested in joining.

Actions from Item 1:

1. Secretariat to:
   1. arrange a pan-Project UK presentation of the Kingfisher MPA tool with Eleanor Michie.
   2. share the ILO-188 and FP.org gap analysis with the Steering Group.
   3. invite BS to the next MPA focus sub-group call.
   4. update the Steering Group on MPA sub-group progress at the next meeting.

Agenda Item 2: Primary and secondary species

Cefas recently produced a catch composition report for the scallop fishery in the English Channel, ICES Areas 7d and e, which showed the primary, secondary and ETP species present in dredge catches. The report was based on landings data and estimates of discards from Cefas’ observer programme.

FN said the content of the report can be considered as ‘some quantitative information’ for an MSC assessment. Each species was converted to biomass through the use of length-weight keys, as required by the MSC Standard. FN highlighted some of the limitations in the report: that less than 1% of trips were covered by the observer programme, non-commercial invertebrates were not included and there were no estimates of unobserved mortality. Despite the low proportion of observer trips, the data is conclusive that the vast majority of catch is king scallops (96%-97%). Dredge gear was seen to have low interactions with ETP species, and the main bycatch species was spider crab, showing up at 1% of the catch biomass. There were no ‘main’ bycatch species, comprising of 5% or more of total catch weight (or 2% if a deemed a less-resilient species).

Discussion:

FN asked whether the Steering Group believed further work was necessary to gather more information. AB said further work was not necessary, as with 28 observer trips he felt that any outlier species would have been identified. JPo said it would be good to know if the sample trips occurred across all four seasons, as the catches can vary according to the time of year. FN suggested speaking to Andy Lawler to clarify when the observer trips took place.

BS asked what the implications were for not including non-commercial invertebrates, as they form the bulk of bycatch in scallop fisheries and should not be forgotten about. FN agreed and asked BS to share any reports or observations on invertebrate bycatch in the scallop fishery. AB said Macduff had camera footage of catches which could be used to support the Cefas data, but believed there was a Memorandum of Understanding with the skippers that the footage could only be used for the Bangor University post-doc research so might be difficult to access.

FN requested information from other UK scallop bycatch studies on non-commercial invertebrates and reminded the Steering Group that originally the group had suggested setting up a total catch survey, which would be expensive and time consuming. FN said that starfish, as the main invertebrate expected in the catch, could be added as a secondary species.

***Actions from Item 2:***

1. Secretariat to ask Andy Lawler about the timings of observer trips to identify whether all seasons were covered in the dataset, and whether Cefas has any anecdotal information on invertebrates present in the catch composition.
2. Steering Group to share any UK scallop bycatch studies on non-commercial invertebrates.

Agenda Item 3: Fishery Management Plan update

The Fishery Management Plan (FMP) is a central document that summarises all aspects of management in the fishery. AB is the lead for the Channel scallop FIP FMP, and he provided an update to the Steering Group.

Overview:

Post-Brexit legislation and the implementation of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) has created significant changes to the Channel scallop fishery, including through complications to access and management. Despite this, AB has managed to make progress in adding content to the FMP.

Section 1.4, social and economic information, requires more recent data than the 2018 data that was already logged into the FMP; the Secretariat offered to speak with Gus Caslake to see if Seafish can provide more information.

Section 2, governance and policy, reflects the current understanding of the Fisheries Act, and AB said he will update the section once new information is available.

Section 3, fisheries management, requires information on how the IFCAs and Defra manage scallop fisheries in the Channel as well as information on the Scallop Industry Consultation Group (SICG) Project Steering Board (PSB).

Section 4, harvest strategy and control rules, is awaiting the outcome of SICG/Defra co-management discussion.

Section 5, ecosystem impacts, contains a lot of information already such as: the Cefas catch composition report, FdB’s ETP management document. The Scale, Intensity, Consequence Analysis (SICA) and the Bangor University habitat study needed to be summarised and added by a Steering Group member.

Section 6, stock assessment and analysis, is well populated from Cefas contributions.

Section 7, compliance and monitoring, has been reviewed by the MMO and can be reviewed again when or if management changes are introduced.

Section 8 and 9 are yet to be drafted, although there is guidance available in Section 8.

Discussion:

JPo cautioned that there will be huge caveats for information required in Section 1.4, which delves into the economics of the Channel scallop fishery, due to the impacts of Covid greatly affecting trade and supply chains. He said that whilst financial information from 2020 might be the most recent data, information from 2019 will be most representative of the industry as it will show pre-Covid impacts.

JH said she would find the terms of reference for the SICG PSB meeting with Cefas to share with AB. CB said she had been in contact with the relevant Defra team for more information on Defra-IFCA roles and responsibilities and will share when she hears more.

CN said she could support summarising and inserting the SICA report.

***Action from Item 3:***

1. Secretariat to speak to Gus Caslake, Seafish, for more information on the social and economic importance of the Channel scallop fishery for the FMP.
2. JH to share information on the SICG PSB meeting with Cefas with AB.
3. CB to share information on Defra-IFCA roles and responsibilities when she has access to it.
4. Secretariat to share the SICA with CN, who will summarise and share with MS and AB to insert into the FMP.

Agenda Item 4: 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.

Discussion:

AB asked if any FIPs have been extended before. JP said there are examples of other (non-Project UK) FIPs extending beyond the five years, so there is precedent. She stressed the importance of Project UK following a fully transparent process with any extension.

JH said Channel scallops do not really enter the UK supply chain. JH was keen to explore how we ensure the FIP remains credible if the Steering Group extends, which AB agreed with. AB believed supply chain would be receptive to an extension but he would like to ask them what their views are and how it might impact their sourcing policies.

JH said that the unknowns in national policy make it difficult to agree an end date of any extension. KK said it was an important point to raise, and that the timeline should be precautionary as FP.org require a specific end date. FN said it was because of this uncertainty that she suggested a two-year extension in the last Steering Group meeting, with the option of merging the FIP in with the Round 2 scallops FIP.

RW asked what the implications were for remaining data gaps in the FIP, such as information on fishing activity for the <12m fleet. FN said the extended action plan would need to identify areas the Steering Group can realistically control or influence. FN said from an MSC perspective, the presence of some quantitative information and an approach to cover some of the data gaps would be needed if the fishery went into full assessment.

JH asked whether the Channel scallop FIP is likely to be merged with the Round 2 FIP, or kept separate albeit with similar timelines and overlapping actions. FN said there could be efficiencies to consider in merging the two fisheries at assessment stage (i.e. post-FIP) but recognised the differing ecosystems and stocks between the two FIPs. Ultimately it would be for the two FIP Steering Groups to decide. AB said from an FMP perspective there is a lot of duplication between the two FIPs, but any proposed merge would depend on the level of regionalisation in fisheries management. AB’s preference was to keep the two FIPs separate at this stage, although closely align on similar actions.

JH appreciated the cost-saving that merging the FIPs might bring at the assessment stage, but this could be discussed further down the line without having to merge the two FIPs now. The Steering Group agreed to keep the FIPs separate for the time being. At the next annual review FN will draft a new action plan to reflect milestones the Steering Group will address, as well as removing all previous actions that are complete.

The Round 2 scallop FIP encompasses English, Northern Irish and Scottish waters. With complications arising between the differing Devolved Administrations’ approaches to management, JH questioned whether a certified scallop fishery within English waters only could exist. FN confirmed that would be possible and it would be up to the client groups to determine the Unit of Certification.

KK said the funding structure for any extension would likely be more bespoke, as not all FIPs might extend, and funding contributions are currently made by round rather than by FIP. The Secretariat would need to discuss any extension to the FIP with the core Round 1 funders, with KK saying a possibility of funding going forward could be FIP specific.

AB asked whether the Channel scallop FIP was unique in requesting an extension, and JP said other FIPs were also discussing it. A lot depends on the progress made to date, what actions are still outstanding and the commitment within the Steering Group to deliver on the outstanding actions.

***Actions from Item 4:***

1. AB and JH to ask their supply chains for their views on extension and how it might affect their sourcing policies.
2. Secretariat to speak with the Round 1 funders in relation to Round 1 FIPs requiring an extension to their timeline and what future funding framework might look like.

Any Other Business

It was JPo’s last Project UK meeting and he thanked the Steering Group for the collaborative and informative process that has been followed throughout the FIP’s duration. JPo wished the Steering Group all the best with any next steps for the FIP.

Meeting Closes

16.30

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| Actions Arising | Responsibility |
| **Update from the Secretariat**   1. Secretariat to:    1. arrange a pan-Project UK presentation of the Kingfisher MPA tool with Eleanor Michie.    2. share the ILO-188 and FP.org gap analysis with the Steering Group.    3. invite BS to the next MPA focus sub-group call.    4. update the Steering Group on MPA sub-group progress at the next meeting. | **Secretariat** |
| **Primary and secondary species**   1. Secretariat to ask Andy Lawler about the timings of observer trips to identify whether all seasons were covered in the dataset, and whether Cefas has any anecdotal information on invertebrates present in the catch composition. 2. Steering Group to share any UK scallop bycatch studies on non-commercial invertebrates. | **Secretariat**  **Steering Group** |
| **Fishery Management Plan update**   1. Secretariat to speak to Gus Caslake, Seafish, for more information on the social and economic importance of the Channel scallop fishery for the FMP. 2. JH to share information on the SICG PSB meeting with Cefas with AB. 3. CB to share information on Defra-IFCA roles and responsibilities when she has access to it. 4. Secretariat to share the SICA with CN, who will summarise and share with MS and AB to insert into the FMP. | **Secretariat**  **Juliette Hatchman**  **Coco Bagley**  **Secretariat** |
| **FIP timeline**   1. AB and JH to ask their supply chains for their views on extension and how it might affect their sourcing policies. 2. Secretariat to speak with the Round 1 funders in relation to Round 1 FIPs requiring an extension to their timeline and what future funding framework might look like. | **Andrew Brown, Juliette Hatchman**  **Secretariat** |