Minutes: Crab and lobster Steering Group meeting 

Meeting Date: 14th October 2021

Location: Teams

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| Attendees | Organisation |
| BP: Beshlie Pool | South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen |
| CP: Claire Pescod | Macduff Shellfish |
| CS: Chloe Smith | Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority |
| DM: David Markham | The Blue Sea Food Company |
| HG: Hubert Gieschen | Marine Management Organisation |
| JB: John Balls | North Devon Fishermen’s Association |
| JP: Jo Pollett | Marine Stewardship Council |
| KK: Katie Keay | Marine Stewardship Council |
| MJ: Matthew Johnson | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs |
| MS: Matt Spencer | Marine Stewardship Council |
| RC: Robyn Cloake | Labeyrie Fine Foods |
| RM: Ros McIntyre | Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science |
| SB: Sarah Bedingham | Marine Management Organisation |
| TH: Tim Huntington | Poseidon |
| **Apologies** |  |
| Daisy May | Marine Management Organisation |
| Gus Caslake | Seafish |
| Sarah Clark | Devon and Severn 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 crab and lobster Fishery Improvement Project (FIP) action plan, and to discuss the recent Western Waters alternatives workshop held by Defra.

Agenda Item 1: National and FIP Fishery Management Plan updates

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. MJ provided an update from Defra on their FMP strawman and progress on the crab and lobster FMP.

MJ said that Defra had a list of proposed FMPs that will form part of the JFS consultation later this year, with the crab and lobster FMP likely to be one of the first FMPs to be drafted. A first draft UK crab and lobster FMP is expected to be available in early 2023, but this may change based on discussions with Devolved Administrations. MJ added that this will be developed alongside scallop and whelk FMPs.

National priorities and objectives for the fisheries need to be determined and these will be added to the national FMP. MJ acknowledged that the timeline for all proposed objectives might not align with the timeline for the Project UK FIP

Discussion:

TH asked whether the Defra FMP would be incorporate both crab and lobster, and whether there was an explicit harvest strategy required in the Defra FMP. MJ said the FMP would cover edible crab and European lobster, with the ability to incorporate other species of crab and lobster at review points. The FMP will include a harvest strategy, and this will aim to align with the Western Waters effort regime review timeline. If these timelines do not align, the harvest strategy will continue to be developed after the initial publication of the FMP.

CP said the Shellfish Industry Advisory Group (SIAG) and Crab Management Group (CMG) were discussing the harvest strategy and were keen to align closely with the FIP. Defra hosted a Western Waters Alternatives Workshop the day prior to the FIP meeting where Cefas outlined potential future management options.

Project UK FMP update:

The FIP FMP documents progress made by the Steering Group towards all aspects of fisheries management. With the FIP timeline ending in April 2022, MS highlighted the importance of obtaining all the relevant information needed to complete the FMP, whilst recognising the current flux in management likely to mean some sections will have to be revisited at a later date.

Section 1 Identification and description of the fishery:

* Plenty of information in this section provided by IFCAs and MMO.
* Information provided to date should be annexed and consolidated, and will need review from an IFCA representative and MMO. MS said he would contact relevant members after the call.

Section 2 Goals and objectives:

* the flux in national management has hindered the development of section 2, which was sparse on information. MS had spoken with MJ about any useful text that could be inserted in the absence of a definitive policy until the JFS is published, such as higher-level objectives and text form the Fisheries Act, and MJ said he would share what he could with MS.
* The CMG could also support this section, which would contribute to alignment between the FIP and the CMG.
* MS reminded the Steering Group that the FMP needs to reflect what is currently available as a starting point and could be built on once more formal government policy is developed.

Section 3 Fisheries management structure:

* Needs review and further information added on the legal framework for crab and lobster fisheries.MS said industry insight would be useful to document what they are doing to comply with management.

Section 4 Harvest strategy and control rules:

* The harvest strategy is still to be determined, which remains a key action for this Steering Group. As such, large sections of Section 4 remain are still missing information.
* Information from the IFCAs can be annexed once a formal harvest strategy is agreed.
* Section 4.3 (decision making frameworks) would benefit from input from CMG members and MS said he would contact them for input.

Section 5 Ecosystem management strategies:

* This is complete but will require a final review from the Steering Group. There is information included from studies such as: catch composition, endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) report, alternative measures report, and the pre-assessment (habitats and ecosystem scores >SG80).

Section 6 Stock assessment, fishery monitoring and research:

* Section 6 is almost complete, and Cefas stock assessment material has been included. MS requested any additional information from the catching sector on bycatch, ETP species and other surveys (6.3), and other relevant research on crab and lobster fisheries (6.4), such as the recent paper published by Heriot-Watt University on wind turbine cables affecting crab migrations.

Section 7 Compliance and monitoring

* The FMP has MMO input, and still needs some IFCA information. MS offered to contact IFCA representatives for their input.

Sections 8 and 9 still require input, although MS recognised the need for a client group to delve into it in detail. MS said Poseidon had provided further guidance in Section 8 to help a Steering Group member complete this section.

***Actions from Item 1:***

1. Secretariat to:
   1. Contact IFCA and MMO representatives to consolidate the material in section 1.
   2. Contact CMG members for text on Sections 3 and 4.3.
   3. Contact industry members for information on other survey work and research underway to add to Section 6.3. and 6.4.
   4. Contact IFCA representatives for information on Section 7.
2. MJ to share Section 2 text, on policy and governance, with Secretariat.

**Agenda Item 2: Debrief from Defra’s Western Waters workshop**

FIP Steering Group members were invited to attend the Defra-led Western Waters workshop on 13th October, and CP and MJ provided an update for those not able to attend.

Feedback from industry on Western Waters Effort Regime:

* There may be more effective ways to manage a static gear fishery than days at sea.
* The current regulations don’t provide a cap on the potential for increasing pressure, such as through pot numbers.
* Current management is based on previous fishing activity and not on evidence of stock status.
* Current regulatory framework does not provide regulatory cover for all sea areas

Current situation for management:

* Most shellfisheries are classed as ‘data poor’ especially when compared to quota species.
* There is a lack of available, comprehensive evidence-base to inform science-based management.
* Western Waters Effort Regime is the only national management measure in place to regulate fishing activity for some of the species it covers.
* Future domestic management should be developed alongside EU/UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement implementation

Cefas’ Western Waters Alternatives reports:

* Defra commissioned Cefas to review global best practice for shellfisheries management
* The report looked at 11 fisheries, the majority of which were MSC certified.
* All reports are available on the [Defra science website[[1]](#footnote-2).](http://sciencesearch.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Location=None&Module=FilterSearchNewLook&Completed=0)
* Management examples Cefas considered for crab and lobster were:
  + The 3S approach: Size, Sex, Season
    - Size: Maintain and adapt current size limits (minimum landing size, MLS)
    - Sex: Continue ban on landing berried females
    - Season: Introduce the option for seasonal closures. These would require reliable stock indicators and ongoing monitoring the stock.
  + Total Allowable Catch (TAC) limits. Setting these would require improved data collection on both catch and effort
  + The continuation of effort management – possibly through measures such as pot limitations. Continuing days at sea is also an option here if supported

Size limits and limits on harvesting berried and moulting individuals are used globally; and seasonal closures are more common as a management measure than catch limits.

Defra is seeking feedback on the following questions

1. How do you feel about days at sea effort management, would you like to see this retained/ adjusted to some degree?
2. How do you feel about the international examples presented? Do you think these would/ wouldn’t work well to manage crab fisheries in the UK?
3. Is there a stand-out option that you prefer for moving forwards?
4. Do you think there are any considerations that we have been missed?

Responses should be sent to shellfish@defra.gov.uk. MJ said there would be continued engagement with industry on the future of WW, and there will likely be further workshops based on the responses to the questions involving the scallop and demersal sectors also covered by the regime.

*Discussion:*

When asked about management measures, MJ said that input and output controls were discussed during the workshop. The use of total allowable catch (TAC) as a control mechanism was discussed but concerns were raised around how to set appropriate TAC with the limited stock assessments that are available. The continuation of Days at Sea was also discussed, with some stakeholders keen to adhere to that management approach but there was no consensus. Pot limits were also discussed but it was considered that enforcement would be difficult due to the resource demands it would place on the MMO.

BP welcomed Defra’s consideration of management proposals but felt frustrated that it was a review of issues already raised over the past 10-15 years. BP believed there were already a number of useful reports that had been provided to government and industry members she had spoken to felt that this was another exercise that might not deliver the necessary management for the fishery.

BP also suggested drafting a document to clarify how all the different working groups align, for example how the Western Waters group links in with the Future of Inshore Management group. Until this is addressed, BP felt fishermen would continue to feel side-lined by the whole process.

*Alignment with the FIP:*

CP asked TH’s about the timeline for developing a harvest strategy and harvest control rules (HCRs) for the FIP. Currently the harvest strategy scores SG60-79 and HCRs score <SG60, which TH thought was accurate as there is a need to have a more defined harvest strategy as a precursor to setting HCRs. TH said the harvest strategy and HCRs were the main actions remaining in the FIP action plan.

*Harvest strategy for the Southwest:*

Defra’s timeline for reviewing the Western Waters alternatives does not align with the FIP’s timeline. JP asked Steering Group members whether they were committed to drafting a harvest strategy, specific to the Southwest, which could be used as an example by the SIAG/CMG in their national discussion, or whether they would prefer to wait for Defra to agree a national harvest strategy. BP and JB agreed that if this approach was not taken then Defra might develop a strategy that would not work for the Southwest.

TH suggested next steps could include addressing the pros and cons for each of their recommended management options and to then develop a ‘strawman’ harvest strategy that focuses on the Southwest, accommodating both inshore and offshore waters (IFCA and MMO jurisdictions), and then ask industry to comment on it to identify the most desirable options.

JB has concerns with the ease at which foreign vessels can access fishing ground between 6nm-12nm, so any harvest strategy needs to focus on both the UK fleet and foreign fleets. BP said there was no need to make the harvest strategy too contentious, with plenty of ‘easy wins’ to be had. Focussing just on UK vessels, BP explained that it was those able to fish further away from their home ports which lack effective management. She said that segment of the fleet had recognised the lack of effective management and were asking for more measures such as addressing latent capacity.

BP also cautioned that if the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) wasn’t renegotiated it might force large crabbing vessels in the North Sea to return to UK waters, so a harvest strategy will need to be future proof and incorporate scenarios such as this.

*Regional workshops:*

BP said it was important to recognise the frustration in the crab sector and would welcome FIP-led workshops on both the North coast and South coast of the Southwest to discuss appropriate regional management options and to make recommendations that can be taken to Defra.

RM suggested taking HCR suggestions that come out of the Defra workshops and undertaking a scoring exercise to help quantify the most desirable options. This could include effectiveness and popularity, to help rank the options.

*Next steps:*

CP suggested the Steering Group should draft a matrix of the pros and cons of different management options identified in the Cefas report on global best practice, in a style similar to that used in the alternative measures report (of the monkfish FIP). TH said this matrix would be useful and stated the importance of having industry input on the options. Steering Group members and independent experts, such as Tristan Southall, would then have an opportunity to provide further recommendations. Zoning could also be considered in the management matrix, with BP acknowledging it was a useful tool in the Channel but other areas of the country were not able to trial similar spatial-management.

The group agreed with BP’s suggestion to hold a series of workshops in the South West in early 2022 to gather input from fishermen on appropriate management for that region. BP suggested having an independent organisation coordinating and chairing discussions on management options.

***Actions from Item 2:***

1. CP to share suggestions for consultancy support on developing a harvest strategy
2. Secretariat to:
   1. arrange the development of a matrix of the pros and cons of different management options in the Cefas report.
   2. arrange the strawman harvest strategy to include references to the MMO and IFCA management measures already in place.
   3. Speak to BP about organising workshops for industry to provide their suggestions for management, and summarise the outputs to submit to Defra as a request for management in the Southwest.
   4. Start process for hiring a consultant to support the Steering Group to develop a harvest strategy.

**Agenda Item 3: Effort information**

At the last Steering Group meeting HG had an action to gather information on effort across the crab and lobster fleets and determine how this effort data is captured by metier. HG provided links to where information can be found.

HG said the ability to gather effort data was complicated for the <10m fleet segment as vessels are not required to provide landing declarations. This information gap had been resolved since the buyers and sellers scheme requirements were introduced. HG shared the following link for more information: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/fishing-activity-and-landings-data-collection-and-processing.

Crab effort uptake for 2021 was following a similar trajectory to 2020, with uptake to date at 28%, which is very low. HG offered to provide a formal presentation on effort information at the next meeting.

KK asked TH is the information is sufficient for the FIP requirements. TH said it was not yet because all the information was in kilowatt days, whereas the FIP needed information on fishing capacity in the water for crab and lobster, for example number of pots. He asked HG whether there was a way of converting this information. HG said the MMO did not have that type of data.

TH informed the Steering Group that adaptive management requires key indicators (reference points) to identify a change in the stock biomass or harvest rate, and trigger the implementation of a management response. Relying on kilowatt days might not provide a true representation of real-time effort. BP said there is no requirement for submitting pot numbers or types and agreed that kilowatt days bore no resemblance to monitoring actual effort on the water.

BP said it would be difficult to require fishermen to submit their pot numbers and where they are deployed, but might be feasible if they were asked anonymously. JB said Devon and Severn IFCA require crab fishermen to fill out approximate gridded areas of the Devon coasts to indicate where they deployed their gear, which might have useful information.

TH concluded that currently there is insufficient information on the level of fishing effort in the FIP. The group agreed the next meeting should be in early 2022, to discuss progress made on the harvest strategy actions and consider timelines for the FIP in relation to whether an extension would be needed, as this was not addressed in today’s meeting.

***Actions from Item 3:***

1. Secretariat to arrange a Steering Group meeting to discuss progress on the harvest strategy and HCRs, as well as the potential FIP extension timeline, in early 2022.
2. HG to deliver formal presentation on effort data for the next Steering Group meeting in January.
3. All to send any specific questions about the MMO effort data to the Secretariat who will collate it and send to HG ahead of his presentation.

AOB

By the end of November the FisheryProgress.org risk criteria needed to be reviewed and MS asked the catching sector members of the Steering Group to contact the Secretariat to confirm whether their vessels trigger any of the risk criteria. BP said she would conduct a survey to identify if any vessels meet the risk criteria.

RM was writing up an internal blog post on the Project UK FIP and asked Steering Group members to let her know if they had any objection to this.

***Action from AOB:***

1. BP to conduct a survey to identify if any of her organisation’s vessels meet the risk assessment criteria, and inform the Secretariat of the results.

Meeting Closes

12.30

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| Actions Arising | Responsibility |
| **National and FIP Fishery Management Plan updates**   1. Secretariat to:    1. Contact IFCA and MMO representatives to consolidate the material in section 1.    2. Contact CMG members for text on Sections 3 and 4.3.    3. Contact industry members for information on other survey work and research underway to add to Section 6.3. and 6.4.    4. Contact IFCA representatives for information on Section 7. 2. MJ to share Section 2 text, on policy and governance, with Secretariat. | **Secretariat**  **Matthew Johnson** |
| **Debrief from Defra’s Western Waters workshop**   1. CP to share suggestions for consultancy support on developing a harvest strategy 2. Secretariat to:    1. arrange the development of a matrix of the pros and cons of different management options in the Cefas report.    2. arrange the strawman harvest strategy to include references to the MMO and IFCA management measures already in place.    3. Speak to BP about organising workshops for industry to provide their suggestions for management, and summarise the outputs to submit to Defra as a request for management in the Southwest.    4. Start process for hiring a consultant to support the Steering Group to develop a harvest strategy. | **Claire Pescod**  **Secretariat** |
| **Effort information**   1. Secretariat to arrange a Steering Group meeting to discuss progress on the harvest strategy and HCRs, as well as the potential FIP extension timeline, in early 2022. 2. HG to deliver formal presentation on effort data for the next Steering Group meeting in January. 3. All to send any specific questions about the MMO effort data to the Secretariat who will collate it and send to HG ahead of his presentation. | **Secretariat**  **Hubert Gieschen**  **Steering Group** |
| **AOB**  1. BP to conduct a survey to identify if any of her organisation’s vessels meet the risk assessment criteria, and inform the Secretariat of the results | **Beshlie Pool** |

1. http://sciencesearch.defra.gov.uk/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)