

Summary of FIP meeting with Industry Expert to Discuss Nephrops Habitat and VMEs

24th April 2024

Under Action 4 of the prawn FIP workplan, the FIP is working to collect information on fisheries impacts on habitats, particularly VMEs, in the Nephrops fishery. The FIP is examining how habitat data is collected, and whether the information collected is sufficient to understand the impacts of the prawn fishery on sensitive habitats. From this information the FIP will investigate where the data gaps may lie, and if the FIP could potentially help to plug those gaps. To progress tasks under this action the FIP conducted a meeting with a fishing industry employed scientist with expertise in habitats and VMEs. The following is a summary of items discussed at this meeting.

- Industry expert noted an aim to create a reservoir of biodiversity outside of fishing grounds.
- Discussions on the ability to extend MI UWTV surveys to encompass habitat work, hopefully outside of fishing grounds.
- Areas of VME closures in FU16 are due to be updated since new information was provided to ICES and the relevant management group.
- Working Group held in March to discuss this closure, no information available yet on closure update.
- How sensitive species areas are designated: Presence of sea-pen is recorded and swept area ratio (SAR) combined to result in yellow polygon.
- The reliance on data from UWTV surveys creates a bias which focuses on fishing grounds without consideration of VME areas outside of fishing grounds.
- FU 16 UWTV survey dates between 30th may-10th June.
- Discussion on types of technology available to survey habitats. Potential use of CatchCam (<https://sntech.co.uk/products/catchcam/>) during the scientific fishery to be discussed at next FIP meeting.
- Any technology used should be small due to limited space available on fishing vessels.

- **Action:** Check MI surveys conducted before the closure of area in the south porcupine bank and the surveys after to see if findings are different since closure.
- **Action:** The FIP will assess some options for exploratory investigation into additional habitat assessment methods.
- **Action:** FIP to meet with BIM conservation team to discuss options for incorporating additional habitat assessment with gear trials, if not already incorporated
- **Action:** Set up collaboration meeting between FIP, Marine Institute habitat experts and industry habitat experts to make progress on FIP workplan action 4 tasks.