

Crab & Lobster Management Group (CMG) Meeting

6th February 2023

Remote meeting via Microsoft Teams

Attendees

Alex Caveen, University of Hull	Harry Wick, Northern Ireland Producer's Organisation
Aoife Martin, Seafish	Jim Evans, Welsh Fishermen's Association
Andrew Brown, Macduff Shellfish	Jo Pollett, Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)
Andrew Burn, Defra	John Balls, North Devon Fishermen's Association
Andrew Rooney, Rooney Fish	Lewis Tattersall, Seafish
Andy Wheeler, Andy Wheeler Fisheries Consultancy Limited	Louis Cattini, Seafarms
Annabel Stockwin, Defra	Louise Price, MMO
Beshlie Pool, South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen	Magnus Johnson, University of Hull
Caitlin Turner, Seafish	Michael Roach, Holderness Fishing Industry Group (HFIG)
Chris Ranford, Cornish Fish Producers Organisation	Mike Cohen, NFFO
Carrie McMinn, Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)	Natalie Hold, Bangor University
Claire Pescod, Macduff Shellfish, Chair	Noel Martin, Daera
Colin Bannister, Shellfish Association of Great Britain (SAGB)	Oscar Wilkie, Seafish
Damian Chapman, Devon Crab	Roslyn McIntyre, Cefas
David Jarrad, SAGB	Sarah Bedingham, MMO
David Markham, Seachill	Sarah Clark, Devon and Severn IFCA
Emily Theobald, Marine Management Organisation (MMO)	Rebecca Thomas, Falfish
Fiona Birch, Mindfully Wired Communications (MWC)	Udara Nagodavithana, Seafish

Apologies

Carl Davies, Gwen Paul M BS115	Rachel Irish, MMO
Delyth Dyne, Defra	Rebecca Treacy, Seafish
Jim Portus, Scallop Industry Consultation Group (SICG)	Sara Mynott, MWC
Juliette Hatchman, Southwest Fish Producers' Organisation (SWFPO)	Simon Dixon, Defra
	Leanne Stockdale, MMO
	Katrina Ryan, MWC

General comments from members:

1. Member requested an update on Defra's response on non-quota stock management via the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. Member responded to that for the next CMG meeting, Defra will give a fuller update on this.
2. The consultations on the creation of MPAs and candidate HPAs in English waters including the North East of England Lindisfarne HPA is still ongoing, those with an interest are encouraged to participate. Please follow the link attached for any further information: [MPA Call for Evidence](#)
3. Scotland is starting the consultation process on Highly Protected Marine Areas (HMPAs). HPAs will include areas that are permanently closed and where no extractive activities (including fishing) can occur. An action was taken to add HPAs to the agenda of the next CMG.

Crab and Lobster Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) Update (Lewis Tattersall):

4. September saw the start of the stakeholder engagement events facilitated by Seafish to raise awareness about the development of the crab and lobster FMP for English waters, gather feedback on the draft shared and species-specific FMP objectives, and discuss different management options.
5. A total of 530 stakeholders attended the events spanning the three front runner shellfish FMPs, 220 of these attended the crab and lobster events. The events engaged stakeholders from all across the crab and lobster supply chain, including fishermen, processors, researchers, regulators and environmental non-governmental organisations etc.
6. Some of the key themes emerging from stakeholder engagement activities carried out to date are summarised below:
 - i. There was a strong appetite for collaborative management, improved data collection, and better industry input to marine spatial planning processes (reducing spatial squeeze and conflict).
 - ii. There were mixed views on the relative importance of addressing latent capacity (perceived scale of the issue) and carbon foot-printing (perceived ability for the fishing industry to drive change vs. the importance of communicating positive environmental credentials of low impact fishing activities).
 - iii. There were mixed / negative views on the ambitiousness of the FMP programme (“we have been here before”) and a lack of clarity on how FMPs will interact with other legislation, e.g. IFCA byelaws.
 - iv. There were positive views on promoting shellfish and facilitating trade, but these objectives were considered a lower priority than building the shellfish evidence base and improving fisheries management.

Discussions:

7. A question was posed regarding the general lack of events in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Members acknowledged that the online events captured the cross-border issues arising in the crab and lobster fisheries and that as the Crab and Lobster FMP applies to English waters only, events were focussed on targeting English ports and harbours.
8. A query was raised concerning the potential circulation of the draft FMP to the CMG. The group discussed likely timelines for sharing information, including final drafts of the FMP and evidence statements. The FMP, and associated annexes, is undergoing Defra’s gateway review process and will be shared at public consultation later in 2023.
9. Members discussed legislative hierarchy and interactions between the FMP and other legislation (e.g. IFCA byelaws), it is expected that national-level FMP management measures will serve as a minimum requirement, whereby IFCA byelaws could be more stringent but not less stringent. It is not the intention that FMPs repeal IFCA byelaws. The Association of IFCAs is currently undertaking work to compile a report of all IFCA byelaws and management measures, this will be shared with the CMG when available.
10. Shared shellfish objective 5 (understanding the impact of non-fishing activities on shellfish stocks) was added following stakeholder engagement activities and had not been previously seen by many members of the CMG. Members discussed the use of the term ‘non-fishing impact’, and whether this encompasses ‘non-shellfish fishing impacts’ such as dredging as well as non-fishing impacts such as spatial squeeze as a result of offshore wind development; it was noted that the impacts of fishing activities on non-target shellfish species is already covered under the species-specific objectives of each plan. Members expressed that there is value in keeping the term broad and the species-specific sub-groups can make the intended focus of this term narrower as each fishery requires.
11. Objective 1 on the species-species objectives mentions a pilot data collection programme; a question was raised on whether the pilot programme would be a national scheme or only specific to one area. The intention is to explore opportunities to implement a national scheme to improve data collection and the shellfish evidence base.

12. Clarity was sought on Defra's gateway review process and whether this includes the involvement of the other DAs (concerning cross-border enforcement). Defra confirmed that the gateway review will include reviews by other fisheries bodies, overseen by a panel of specialists within Defra. The purpose of the review process is to ensure that the draft FMP meets the minimum requirements of the Fisheries Act 2020 and that there are no "showstoppers" or problems that could prevent the FMP from going through public consultation.
13. Concerns were raised regarding the complexity of wording and detail in the draft FMP and whether this will be accessible for all readers. It was noted that shellfish fisheries, and the issues facing them, are particularly complex in nature and care must be taken to ensure that all stakeholders are able to meaningfully input to public consultation. Mindfully Wired Communications has been contracted as a key means to communicate and engage in the FMP process prior to, and during, public consultation. There is an option to use infographics, videos, and more accessible formats to communicate on FMP content in the future. A consultation document will also be compiled by Defra to make the information in the draft FMP concise and accessible.

Crab and Lobster FMP early interventions (Aoife Martin, Seafish)

14. Seafish presented on the proposed early interventions for crab and lobster fisheries in English waters. The intention is that these early management interventions are proposed and consulted on alongside the FMP itself and represent the first step in improving management of these fisheries. The suggested interventions have been selected based on the availability of existing data and information to support the intervention, and appraisal of likely appropriateness and effectiveness in the crab and lobster fishery context through both FMP stakeholder engagement work and other workshops / research on crab and lobster management. The four suggested early interventions were:
 - i. harmonising MLS for lobster (90mm) and crawfish (110mm) nationally,
 - ii. piloting crab finer scale management approaches in selected CFU,
 - iii. prohibiting landing of soft-shell crab for bait and;
 - iv. implementing measures to improve information base on recreational shellfish fishing.

Discussion:

15. It was suggested that the proposal to prohibit landing of soft-shell crab for bait should explicitly cite the need to address the 'loophole' in section 17 part 2 in the Sea Fisheries (Shellfish) Act 1967 which allows for soft brown crab to be used as bait. Members expressed concerns over the timeline for prohibiting the landing of soft crab for bait, which was seen by some attendees as a pressing issue needing immediate attention.
16. Members expressed concerns that changes to MLS could render current technical conservation measures and gear adaptations, such as escape gaps, obsolete or inappropriate. These modifications have been made based on requirements of a 87mm MLS, so whilst fishers may support the increase in MLS there would be costs associated with modifying gears further to reflect new MLS. These changes would likely require support for fishers in the form of funding or grants.
17. Members agreed that harmonisation of the MLS for lobsters would be significantly more straightforward than with brown crabs since due to both the more complex MLS landscape for crabs and the significant migratory and temperature related differences in stock biology. Regionally specific growth factors need to be kept in mind if changes to brown crab MLS were to be explored.

FISP project addressing the gaps in crustacean evidence for English and Welsh FMPs (Natalie Hold, Bangor University)

18. A collaborative group including CMG members have been successful in securing FISP funding to support some of the research aligned with the FMP evidence and research plan.

19. The project will comprise of four work packages that will run from January 2023 to December 2024, these packages are as follows:
- i. Increasing understanding of the landings structure of English and Welsh brown crab fisheries. This project will collate and assess existing datasets (held by MMO / Cefas / Welsh Government / IFCA) to determine the relative contribution of different metiers/sectors of the fleet.
The project came about from discussions with the Welsh government. MMO are partners in this project to look at VMS and landings data etc.to understand where the landings are coming from and how it varies regionally.
 - ii. Increasing understanding of the size-structure of lobster populations. This project will assess whether size-frequency analysis of landings reflects fisher knowledge, investigate how non-stock factors (habitat, depth etc.) influence size-frequency using fisher surveys and onboard camera systems, and simulate how stock assessment outputs and size-based indicators are influenced by non-stock factors.
 - iii. Assessing potential benthic impact on crab and lobster pots on habitats of conservation importance. This project will map Welsh fishing effort using VMS / Catch app / logbook data, assess *acute* impacts and fishing footprint using dive surveys, multi-beam surveys, ultra-short baseline (USBL) positioning system beacons, and accelerometers, and assess *chronic* impacts on benthic fauna and habitats at “reefy” sites using underwater camera transects. The extent, condition and biodiversity of seabed habitats and biological communities relative to potting effort will be assessed, while also monitoring fishing gear at all stages of deployment. This would in turn quantify the physical and biological impact of individual pots.
 - iv. Define and develop an enforceable method to determine what is a soft-shelled crab. This project will analyse the effect of shell-hardness on meat yield and economic value in collaboration with local fishers and processors in the D&S IFCA region. The range of durometer readings corresponding to a soft-shelled crab will be determined through a fisher workshop, to inform whether visual determination is reliable for enforcing regulations.
20. For any further information or to get involved in the research (fishers and processors) please contact Natalie Hold at n.hold@bangor.ac.uk.

Discussion:

21. Durometer readings have been used in the past from a processing perspective to identify soft shelled crab however enforcement on this would be complex.
22. Eastern IFCA have carried out research on assessing impact of gear on chalk beds in the North Norfolk coast. This may be used to inform the third work package of the FISP project.

Stonecrab fishery investigation (Magnus Johnson, University of Hull)

23. A FISP proposal has been created to look at the likely feasibility of an emerging fishery for stone crab in the northeast of England.
24. Stone crabs are currently being landed into Whitby, Hartlepool, Blyth, Seahouses where they fetch high prices.
25. FISP projects must bring together collaborative groups consisting of both scientific researchers and industry stakeholders; the proposed project currently has representation from size fishers and two fishermen’s organisations as partners.
26. The project aims to predict the overall distribution of stone crabs in the study area and to have a pre-emptive fisheries management plan developed collaboratively by fishers and scientists in the event that the fishery is deemed economically viable.

Discussion:

27. Members noted that the map of distribution of stone crab that was presented suggests an overlap between stone crab distribution and prime trawling grounds. There were concerns raised about

potential gear conflict in the area as a result of increased fishing activity. Member states that the stone crabs seem to be on the fringes of the Nephrops grounds, so the risk of gear conflict is considered low. The project team is in the process of onboarding Nephrops trawlers into the project so they can also participate in the research; it is hoped this will ensure good communication between sectors and reduce the risk of spatial conflict.

Update on FISP projects (Michael Roach, HFIG)

28. No update is currently available on the 'Lobster settlement index' project, however the research team recently caught their first early benthic phase juvenile lobster in settlement cages deployed off the Holderness coast. To date there has been limited success in the project due to issues in catching sufficient numbers of juvenile lobsters.
29. In the camera project: [Using novel technology to investigate population abundance estimates and catch dynamics of static gear crustacean fisheries](#). The output images from the creel mounted camera system are in the process of being analyzed. The project has achieved successful deployment in the Holderness and Isle of Man fisheries. Overall, the team has realized over 450 hours of equipment deployment time and recorded over 12,000 images from two fisheries. The project is moving into the image analysis phase for year one and planning is ongoing for sampling season in year 2.
30. HFIG has received FISP Part A funding to develop a research proposal on understanding drivers of gear loss and ghost fishing. The Part B proposal is for a project is to:
 - i. Assess the financial impact to fishers of gear loss;
 - ii. Determine drivers of gear losses;
 - iii. Use simulated 'ghost gears' to understand bait attractiveness and persistence, shelter effects provided by lost gears, and impacts of 'self baiting' in pots and traps;
 - iv. Estimate overall scale of gear losses and estimate how many pots are lost annually and the associated economic impact.

Developing codes of practice across key stages of the seafood supply chain to ensure optimal welfare standards for decapod crustacea (Oscar Wilkie, Seafish)

31. Seafish, alongside the SAGB and CMG, have identified the need to develop Codes of Practice covering crustacea welfare for the UK shellfish supply chain. The purpose of these codes is to (1) detail best practice for the handling and despatch of crustacea and (2) to enable businesses to easily meet the requirements set out in the codes so as to minimise unnecessary stress to animals and to satisfy public concerns.
32. The project is a two-phase project; the first phase was a feasibility study completed in March 2022. The gathered evidence from phase one of the project will help establish the form the guidance will take, how it will be implemented, and how adherence can be monitored. Phase 2 of the project is the development and implementation of Codes of Practice for the crustacea supply chain.
33. Cumulus Consultants, who are working with Seafish, the CMG and SAGB to develop the Codes, will be speaking at the SAGB/CMG event on the 28th of February from 10:00AM - 11:30AM. 'The Snapshot', Crustacean Compassion's business benchmark report, will also be presented at the event.

Actions

Number	Description	Responsible
10.1	Defra to provide members with additional information on multiyear strategies and the management of NQS through the TCA at future CMG meetings	Defra
10.2	MPA and HMPA consultation information will be shared and a meeting of the CMG convened if there is sufficient interest in discussing the consultation	Seafish
10.3	Regular updates on research projects and FISP projects through Seafish	Seafish and research project partners

10.4	Relevant members to discuss soft shell crab FISP project and the use of meat yield sensors	Seafish/CMG
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