

Finfish Industry Advisory Group (FIAG) Meeting Minutes

18th October 2022 13:00-15:00

Remote meeting via Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

Sophie Throup, Morrisons (Chair)

Alison Freeman, Fishmongers Hall
Barrie Deas, National Federation Fishermen's Organisations (NFFO)
Chloe North, Western PO
Chloe Rogers, UK Association of Fish Producer Organisations (FPOs)
Chris Ranford, Cornish FPO
Courtney Inch, MMO
Dale Rodmell, Eastern England FPO
David Curtis, Bass Anglers' Sportfishing Society
Duncan MacInnes, Western Isles Fishermen's Association
Elaine Whyte, Communities Inshore Fisheries Alliance
Eleanor Holford, MMO (RFGs)
Elizabeth Bourke, NFFO
Emma Plotnek, Fishing Into the Future
Emma Ulyatt, Defra
Esther Gilson, Cardium Shellfish Ltd
Fiona Birch, Mindfully Wired
Freya Mitchison, Defra
Gwladys Lambert, Cefas
Hannah Rudd, Angling Trust
Isobel Johnston, MMO
Jerry Percy, NUTFA
Jim Evans, Welsh Fishermen's Association

John Balls, North Devon Fishermen's Association
Katie McNally, Defra
Lewis Tattersall, Seafish
Magnus Johnson, University of Hull
Maria Hermida, Hooktone
Mike Park/Mark Robertson, Mallaig and North West Fisherman's Association Ltd
Neil Witney, Fisher
Oscar Wilkie, Seafish
Phil McBryde, Defra
Rebecca Thomas, University of Southampton
Richard Caslake, Seafish
Richard Hards, North Sea FPO
Richard Hoskin, MMO
Richard Stride, Fisher
Sara Mynott, Mindfully Wired
Sarah Ready, Two Brothers Brixham
Sheila Keith, Shetland Fishermen's Association
Simon Cadman, Cornwall IFCA
Simon Macdonald, West Coast Inshore Fisheries Group
Tim Dapling, Sussex IFCA

Apologies:

Beshlie Pool, South Devon & Channel Shellfishermen's Association
Douglas Beveridge, Thistle Seafoods

Jim Ellis, Cefas
Mark Page, Fisher
Rob Blythe-Skyrme, Fisher

Welcome and apologies (Sophie Throup, Morrisons (Chair))

1. The minutes and actions from the last meeting were presented and approved by members. Seafish are to ensure FIAG meeting minutes are, and continue to be, published on the group landing page on the Seafish website.
2. Members had the opportunity to raise issues, the following points were discussed:
 - a. Questions were raised about the latest ICES advice for spurdog in the Northeast Atlantic, and in particular how future fishing opportunities could be allocated; in addition to featuring on the agenda for the meeting there are ongoing discussions about the formation of a spurdog-focused sub-group of the FIAG.

Consultation on managing fly seine vessel pressure on demersal non-quota species (Phil McBryde, Defra)

3. Defra recognise that there are concerns about the level of fishing effort by fly seining vessels in the English Channel. The issue is that the capacity/efficiency of some vessels operating in UK waters is far greater than has traditionally been the case using fly-seining gear. There is also recognition that there is a challenge around the lack of data available on the impact of these fishing activities on fish stocks.

4. To explore these concerns, Defra is currently undertaking a consultation, consisting of 10 questions, which is to run from 25th August 2022 until 23:59 on 16th November 2022. The consultation, which incorporates English waters only. The consultation seeks to understand how Defra can protect non-quota species (NQS) from greater fishing efficiency, but also how they can address the specifics of that activity; species are vulnerable, data poor and valuable.
5. The number of 'higher capacity' vessels has roughly doubled in recent years and their landings of non-quota species have also roughly doubled.
6. The consultation explores measures that could be used to help manage the extra effort. This is not an exhaustive list but has been narrowed down through discussions with regulators and operators around the coast. The purpose of the consultation is to establish whether some proposed options are not feasible, due to cost implications, impossibility of regulation, or impracticality.

Comments from the group:

7. Fly-seining data in UK waters is patchy and does not include EU catch data.
8. New vessels with improved efficiency have 1,300-1,500 horsepower. How useful is studying horsepower to understand impacts? Studying the horsepower of beam trawlers has proven to be useful in the past, however most measures on the consultation do not look at horsepower.

Finfish Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) updates from delivery leads

Bass in English and Welsh waters (Phil McBryde, Defra)

9. Policy Lab are in the process of undertaking 3 in-person workshops, followed by 3 online workshops. They are looking at objectives to address challenges – such as issues around discards, licencing and restrictions – and how stakeholders may want to respond. Workshops are a scenario testing exercise and involve discussions between around 10 stakeholders.
10. Policy Lab will provide a report to Defra by the end of the year on their progress. Responsibility for the development of the Bass FMP for English waters will revert to Defra in January 2023.

Comments from the group:

11. Members mentioned that a lot of topics were raised in the collective intelligence debate and the impossibility of covering everything in detail in the 2.5-hour workshops. Queries were raised around how topics and potential solutions were selected for workshops and whether there was a possibility that preference was given to items for which there was more consensus. This was not the case and many chosen topics had lots of disagreement. Policy Lab discussed with IFCA's how topics could be selected.
12. Members raised that there hadn't been much conversation around the objectives of the FMP to date and wanted to know how decisions were being made on what is incorporated into the draft FMP.

Channel Non-Quota Demersal Species (Isobel Johnston, MMO)

13. The FMP is progressing well with the first working group having been held on 28th September. Minutes will be published shortly and supported by videos.
14. The group is looking to establish how partnership working will work, how species prioritisation will be decided and other feedback around data and evidence that will support framework development. Establishing the overall goals and objectives of the FMP and how guiding principles may be developed is taking place.

15. 14 demersal Non-Quota Species (NQS) are included in the scope: gurnard (red, tub, and grey), cuttlefish, squid, octopus, john dory, lesser spotted dogfish, red mullet, smoothhound, bib, turbot, lemon sole, and brill.
16. The possibility of setting up an evidence sub-group to assess evidence and feedback to the main group is being explored.
17. The next working group will be October 31st, with face-to-face engagement likely to commence in early 2023.

Comments from the group:

18. Members expressed concerns that the composition of the working group isn't representative. In particular, there was concern that there may be an imbalance between the number of commercial fishing stakeholders on the group compared to the number of angling representatives.

Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish (Emma Ulyatt, Defra)

19. The timeline for this FMP is different to the others and will pause during November-December for EU negotiations take place. Work will begin again in January 2023.
20. The FMP does not involve a working group; as part of exploring different ways to develop draft FMPs, this Plan utilises meetings and building networks but does not have a formal working group. Following initial engagement for the FMP, the team undertook desk-based research.
21. Concerns were raised around dab discards, with up to 89% of dab discarded. Any changes in policy here would likely have significant knock-on effects to other flatfish fisheries. Cefas advised that the stock is currently considered to be healthy.
22. Concerns were raised around halibut and the fact that it's a slow growing and late maturing NQS. Members suggested that implementing a minimum landing size for halibut would not be possible but the FMP could look into filling evidence gaps so there's more knowledge and data surrounding the species, which could then inform management.
23. Sole is a very important species for the group and a priority for many of its fisher members. There has been impetus to investigate the decline of Sole species in NUTS (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) ICES areas 4B, 4C and 7D. A survey is currently being undertaken in 4C to better understand the stock.

No comments from the group.

The role the FIAG can play in FMP development and delivery (Lewis Tattersall, Seafish)

24. At the first meeting of the FIAG members were asked what they would like the group to prioritise. FMPs were identified as a priority.
25. These FMPs are a major change to how fisheries are managed in the UK. All 3 groups are either focussed on NQS or have a NQS element.
26. At the second meeting of the FIAG it was agreed that an FMP sub-group would be formed to facilitate effective stakeholder engagement in FMP development and delivery. It was agreed that a single overarching FMP sub-group was most appropriate as many members are engaged in multiple FMPs simultaneously; this will reduce the risk of duplication of effort.
27. Following Seafish meeting with the FMP delivery leads it is proposed that the FIAG FMP sub-group focuses on:
 - Facilitating effective industry engagement.
 - Serving as a place to test ideas.
 - Serving as a place to gather feedback from industry stakeholders on draft content.

- Communicating about upcoming events and distributing outputs of events.
28. It is proposed that the following actions are out of scope for the FIAG FMP sub-group:
- FMP content creation
 - FMP 'ownership'

Spotlight on Spurdog

Update on the latest ICES advice on Spurdog in the NE Atlantic (Gwladys Lambert, Cefas)

29. Spurdog landings peaked in the 1960s, with some fisheries specifically targeting larger fish, often aggregations of mature females. Management of the fishery was first suggested in the late 1960s and early 1970s; a 1989 study recommended a precautionary TAC, however no action was taken at this time. A 2002 ICES study showed that the species may be as low as 5% of its virgin biomass. A 2010 assessment indicated that the stock was about 19% of virgin biomass.
30. Spurdog has a long-standing assessment and time series of data. Advice from 2020 was based on landings and discard levels, recruitment, harvest rate, and total biomass. Recruitment and total biomass showed a small increase since 2005.
31. For the 2021 benchmark, more data became available and the species assessment is now Category 1 – the most data rich stock assessment possible. This means it is in the best position for advice.
32. A maximum sustainable yield (MSY) approach has been applied for 2023 and 2024, with an allowance of up to 17,353 tonnes in 2023 and 17,855 tonnes in 2024 available in sub-areas 1-10, 12 and 14 (the Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters). Stock may not be landed for the remainder of 2022 (except for on-going bycatch avoidance programs). It was noted that this is ICES advice only: any discussions around acceptance of the advice and subsequent allocation of fishing opportunities are TBD. This is a complex process and one that has not been navigated before.

Comments from the group:

33. Members asked whether the new advice would be interpreted to allow for a targeted spurdog fishery in UK waters or if it would be a bycatch allowance. Cefas advised that they are unable to recommend how fish are caught as this is a policy matter; it's down to negotiators to decide how the quota is split between the nations bordering the Northeast Atlantic and then down to individual policy teams to decide how the allowance is allocated. As a cross-border issue this will be in the remit of the Specialised Committee for Fisheries.
34. Members commented that this fishery has the chance to rejuvenate some ports where spurdog was historically a key fishery, such as Lowestoft and Grimsby.
35. Members wanted to know which FMP spurdog would fall into. There was concern that it would be part of a regional FMP in the longer-term but that more immediate action is required to safeguard stocks.
36. The group discussed whether the concept of a TAC was the best approach for managing spurdogs. Large female spurdog are considered disproportionately important to recruitment and often aggregate separate to males. There were also questions raised about whether MSY methodology was appropriate for spurdog, which has an older size of maturity and lower fecundity than many other commercially exploited species. Cefas reassured that the MSY methodology utilises the best available evidence on spurdog recruitment.

Fishing Into The Future (FITF) focus on latest advice and industry-led research for Spurdog (Emma Plotnek, FITF)

- 37. FITF is a fisher-led charity that has been having conversations around spurdog, specifically promoting discussions around industry-led work, including bycatch mitigation programmes, and sharing knowledge and expertise amongst different stakeholders.
- 38. FITF will miss the window for FISP funding this year, but if there's still interest in 2023 they are hopeful that funding will be available for industry-led data collection.

Comments from the group:

- 39. Members wanted to know whether the ICES advice feeds into the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) status of the species.
- 40. It was raised that spurdog assessments are being looked into by a partnership involving the Shark Trust.

Any other business and next steps (Lewis Tattersall, Seafish)

- 41. On the FMP proposed next steps: there will be a sub-group of this group to discuss each of the finfish FMPs. Seafish will send out a memo outlining the role that the FIAG can play and inviting members to join the sub-group.
- 42. There is an acknowledgement that spurdog is a difficult species. Seafish and Defra will form a dedicated spurdog sub-group in the new year, to meet before the next meeting of the FIAG. The intention is that this group will keep stakeholders up to date on goings on and next steps.

Actions

Number	Description	Responsible
3.1	Seafish to ensure previous meetings minutes are published on group landing page on Seafish website. Ensure minutes from this meeting are published in the same place.	Seafish
3.2	Members are encouraged to feed into the Defra consultation on managing fly seine vessel pressure on demersal NQS before it closes on 16 th November 2022.	Members
3.3	There will be a sub-group of this group to discuss all the finfish FMPs and the next steps for each. Seafish will send out a memo that members wanted this to happen and outlining the role that the FIAG can play.	Seafish
3.4	Seafish will create a new spurdog group to keep stakeholders up to date on goings on and next steps regarding this species.	Seafish