

Crab & Lobster Management Group (CMG) Meeting

6th September 2023

Remote meeting via Microsoft Teams

Attendees

Claire Pescod, Macduff shellfish (Chair)	Jack Walker, Mindfully Wired Communications
Adam Holland, Northern Ireland Fishermen's Federation	Joe Redfern, Whitby Lobster Hatchery
Alexander Caveen, University of Hull	Lewis Tattersall, Seafish
Alice Bessell, Brown & Bright	Louise Price, MMO
Alison Freeman, The Fishmongers Company	Mike Roach, NFFO
Andrew Burn, Defra	Natalie Hold, Bangor University
Beshlie Pool, South Devon and Channel	Noel Martin, Daera
Shellfishermen's Association	Patrick Smith, Daera
Carrie McMinn, AFBI	Rebecca Lyal, Marine Stewardship Council
Colin Bannister, SAGB	Rebecca Spain, Seafish
David Jarrad, SAGB	Rebecca Treacy, Seafish
Delyth Dyne, Defra	Rich Corner, Seafood and Eat It
Eleanor Pettitt-Fergusson, Defra	Rosslyn McIntyre, Cefas
Ella Brock, Seafish	Sarah Bedingham, MMO
Emma Plotnek, Fishing into the Future	Tim Smith, Association of IFCAs
Felix Ameye, Seafish	Trevor Bartlett, Devon Crab
Gordon Chittenden, MMO	
Harry Thatcher, Aberystwyth University	
Harry Wick, Northern Ireland Fish Producers' Organisation	

Apologies

Andrew Rooney, Rooney Fish	Louis Cattini, SeaFarms
Aoife Martin, Seafish	Paul Bizec, Industry
Chris Ranford, CFPO	Sara Mynott, Mindfully Wired Communications
Fiona Birch, Mindfully Wired Communications (MWC)	Sarah Clark, D&S IFCA
John Balls, North Devon Fishermen's Association	Sophie Bennett, Seafish
Juliette Hatchman, SWFPO	

Actions from last meeting

1. Action 11.1: FMP consultation launched mid-July and resources are available now. Consultation draws to a close at the end of September. Members advised to contact Seafish if they would like copies of any consultation resources.
2. Action 11.2: Due to a recruitment issue, much of the work under the Crustacean FISP work package 4 (Using durometers to provide an enforceable definition of soft-shelled crab) has been pushed into the next year of the project. It was noted that recruitment will be completed well ahead of the soft-crab season, so this will not cause an issue with project timelines. A number of CMG members had expressed an interest in contributing to this work package; their details will be stored and the research team will make contact in early 2024.

3. Action 11.3: Seafish convened a meeting with an industry stakeholder and CMG member, Colin Bannister, and Cefas to discuss scope and potential of industry derived datasets. Such data assets are incredibly important and have significant potential in supporting science and management, however there is a need to balance resourcing within Cefas in particular to ensure necessary expertise are available to analyse information. Discussions will be progressed following publishing of crab and lobster stock assessments which Cefas is currently working on. Members raised that Bangor University runs a full-time annual placement whereby a student work alongside industry – this resource could be used to undertake any preparatory work on the dataset(s).
4. Action 11.4: Crustacean welfare panels are entering the final phase of work. Members were advised to contact Lewis Tattersall if they would like to join the final round of industry panel meetings.
5. Action 11.5: The snapshot report is now available for the Crustacean Compassion benchmark exercise. This is discussed in greater detail later in this meeting.

Open session for members to raise issues of interest.

6. Holderness Fishing Industry Group (HFIG) will shortly be closing its doors after 10 years of operations due to financial issues. FISP projects which HFIG were directly involved with are currently being re-planned. Members were advised to contact Mike Roach to discuss the FISP projects which HFIG was indirectly involved with. Questions raised around implications for delivery of the Crab and Lobster FMP Evidence and Research Plan (ERP) – specifically development of an abundance index and settlement index, research which was being led by HFIG. It is hoped that these projects will still be fulfilled, and impacts on crab and lobster research of national importance will be minimised.
7. An update was provided on the Round 3 Crustacean FISP project (Bangor Uni, Devon & Severn IFCA, and South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen's Association):
 - a. Work package 2: (Investigating how non-stock factors influence size-frequency of lobster populations) Fisher interviews are underway and have received a good response so far, with questions seeking information from fishers on their observation of factors such as gear creep and significant changes in the fishery, in order to help with interpretation of landings data. Industry members were reminded to contact Natalie Hold if they are interested in participating in at-sea data gathering efforts to investigate drivers (e.g. habitat, depth) and appropriate calibrations of size-frequency data. After response rates have been analysed, the CMG will be used to help plug any geographic gaps.
 - b. Work package 3: (Investigating the benthic impact of brown crab and lobster potting activities) Researchers are awaiting MMO data (delayed due to issues with access / sign off) and field surveys are scheduled for May / June 2024.
8. An update was provided on the Round 1 Shellfish camera FISP project (Bangor Uni). This project is entering the final phases and is due to finish in early 2024. A review of the algorithms underpinning the project has recently been accepted to be published in a peer-reviewed journal. A spell of good weather in early September has provided good conditions for boat work, following a summer of poor weather which has generally impeded at-sea data collection – the software will likely be ready after September for a wider roll-out. The final prototype will be distributed to gather data for final tweaks.

Fisheries Management Plans: Proposed management interventions (Lewis Tattersall, Seafish)

9. Defra's consultation on the proposed FMP for crabs and lobsters is now live. Members were reminded that the consultation closes 1st October and encouraged to provide a response.
10. Engagement events are ongoing around the coast, posters / resources for which are available on request. Both Defra and Seafish-led events will focus on gathering feedback based on FMP consultation questions, and notes on discussions will be fed back into Defra as part of the consultation response. Discussions have focused on key challenges the FMP hopes to address and what initial

management interventions the FMP proposes. Seafish presented an overview of the FMP and opened to comments from members.

11. Thus far the main proposals in the draft FMP have landed well at engagement events, which is testament to the CMG's input throughout the co-development process and stakeholder engagement at the end of 2022. Main proposals within the FMP include:
 - a. Actions to improve the evidence base
 - b. Developing short-term management measures to protect stocks as the evidence base improves
 - i. Harmonisation of lobster and crawfish MLS with existing IFCA measures
 - ii. Prohibiting landing soft-shell brown crab for use as bait
 - iii. Piloting finer scale management of crab and lobster in certain areas
 - c. Embedding targeted long-term management approaches (could include exploring input (pot / effort limits, seasonal closures) and output (catch limits) controls tools)

Comments from members:

12. Questions around why the consultation questions don't specifically address the third intervention (*Piloting finer scale management of crab and lobster in certain areas*) considering this is likely to have a strong regional impact. Defra encouraged industry to input their views on any topics through consultation; however concerns were raised regarding this approach considering the length of the documentation being consulted on and some members felt that more specific questions were required to ensure respondents paid sufficient attention to parts of the plan.
13. Further concerns were raised around volume of material being consulted on (six FMPs, REM, discard policy, bluefin tuna, and U10m licence uncapping). Defra highlighted that they recognise this issue, and that these consultations have been prioritised due to their importance and relevance to policy commitments.
14. Questions around whether consultation responses will be shared with the CMG in order to allow them to feed into post-consultation FMP updates. Defra is currently working out how this process will work given the time pressures involved and the overarching commitment to publish the crab and lobster FMP by the end of 2023. The CMG will be informed on what their involvement will look like once more information is available.
15. Defra is currently working on the necessary structures for implementing management across all FMPs. Members highlighted that shellfish frontrunner FMPs must remain a priority for implementation for the same reasons as they were put forward for early development (e.g. need for management action, economic value, importance to coastal communities). Defra restated that there is an overarching commitment to deliver on all FMPs, and how action is prioritised between plans is yet to be determined. Ongoing dialogue with industry via groups like the CMG will continue to be an important aspect of decision making.

Update on Welfare Codes of Practice (Mike Roach, NFFO)

16. The crustacean welfare project is almost completed, with Phase 2 expected to be completed by the end of 2023. Following the addition of decapods to the Animal Sentience Act in 2022, a Steering Committee was established to guide industry response and develop voluntary Codes of Practice (CoPs) across the supply chain. The project is led by the CMG, Seafish, and the SAGB. Phase 1 (information gathering) is complete, and the project is currently in Phase 2 – developing the first tranche of CoPs covering lobsters, crabs, and Nephrops (caught for live market only). Input has been gathered from a number of Welfare Panels spanning the supply chain (industry/ transport/ restaurant trade) as well as the eNGO sector (e.g. Crustacean Compassion).

17. Defra have been an observer throughout the process to ensure the voluntary CoPs are sufficiently robust. It is recognised that the uptake of CoPs must be as wide as possible to maximise their effectiveness and the group acknowledge that most industry stakeholders are already following best practice since welfare, quality, and market value go hand in hand.
18. Industry-led CoPs are not looking to address every welfare-related issue that has raised; the aim is to translate this into a practical resource which is useful for industry. In cases where it would not be feasible to implement measures proposed being proposed by some NGOs, industry CoPs have taken a more pragmatic approach in the hope that these codes are more useable and practical.
19. Next steps include presentation of draft CoPs to industry Welfare Panels during the next round of meetings (beginning of October) before sign off by the Steering Committee, with a view to publishing before the end of the year. It is anticipated that Nephrops could be the focus of the next phase of the project but this is predicated on securing funding. This will allow for application of lessons learned from phase 1, feeding into the iterative process.
20. Members raised that in Northern Ireland a project has recently started to investigate humane dispatch of Nephrops, specifically looking at stunning machines and automatic tailing. Industry are encouraged to get involved with the project if it would be relevant for their vessels. There are some concerns that best practice codes become as restrictive as legislation if a product cannot be sold if it does not comply with CoPs. This subject will be integrated into the next step of the crustacean welfare project.

Crustacean Compassion benchmark audit update (Claire Pescod, Macduff Shellfish, Chair)

21. Members were updated on the 2023 Crustacean Compassion industry benchmark audit. Crustacean Compassion has audited 30 companies across the crustacean supply chain. These companies have received their scores and been notified that they have until mid-September to comment on or challenge their scores before they are published. Methods used to conduct the 2023 audit differ from the 2022 audit: this year, the audit only looked at online information on welfare policies etc., whereas in 2022 each company was invited to speak to Crustacean Compassion to explain their operations and protocols.
22. The 2023 benchmark audit will be published in January 2024. Whilst the [2022 industry benchmark](#) report did not publish the scores of individual companies, the 2023 benchmark will rank each company audited against each other.
23. It was noted that Crustacean Compassion have a new "[Close the loophole](#)" campaign, petitioning the government to include all decapod crustaceans included in the Animal Welfare Act – with a particular focus on the tailing live Nephrops. Whilst Nephrops are not within the scope of the CMG, this is something that is of wider interest to both CMG and SIAG members and the groups will maintain a watching brief on this type of campaign.

Crab and Lobster FIP management plan (Rebecca Lyal, Marine Stewardship Council)

24. The Crab and Lobster FIP has just finished its sixth and final year in Project UK (PUK). Since the FIP worked against version 2 of the MSC standard in the first 5 years, PUK commissioned a gap analysis against the new version 3. This found no score changes against P1 and P3, with additional evidence requirements for some performance indicators. Under P2 it was highlighted that more work is required to understand the impacts of potting activities on ETP species and benthic habitats.
25. The PUK team are still working with Steering Group members to maintain momentum evaluate industry enthusiasm to put the fishery through full MSC assessment. It was highlighted that assessment against MSC standard scores are grouped into principles, therefore scores do not have to all be green but must reach an average score of 80 in order to achieve certification. If an average score of 80 is not achieved, certification may be awarded with specific time bound conditions.
26. Questions raised as to whether there is an appetite for forming a client group and pushing for full MSC certification. PUK feels that there is sufficient appetite, and coordinated a "Southwest Hub" this summer

to support formation of a client group for some of the southwest FIPs that have recently completed their timeline. It is recognised that this motion has to come from industry.

27. The Southwest Crab and Lobster FIP FMP will continue to be a live document considering draft status of the national FMP. Status of the national FMP will impact timelines if the FIP moves into full assessment – if the national FMP delivers management directly after publication, the FIP will be ready for full assessment in 2024. If not, this will be more like 2025/26.

Northern Ireland prohibition of landing of soft brown crab (Patrick Smith, DAERA)

28. Northern Ireland has recently prohibited landing, possessing, selling, and buying of soft-shelled crab (defined as “an edible crab which has recently cast its shell”) under [Edible Crabs \(Conservation\) \(Amendment\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2023](#) which came into effect on 10 February 2023 following unanimous support throughout public consultation. This was in response to the fact that the ban on landing, selling, or possessing soft shelled crab (except for bait) under the [Shellfish Act 1967](#) is not relevant for Northern Ireland.
29. Questions raised around how the ban is being enforced. Fishers in Northern Ireland risk a monetary penalty of up to £5,000 for any infringements. Fisheries managers in Northern Ireland also initially discussed the enforcement issue with IFCA with similar byelaws, who advised that these byelaws are largely self-regulating in that most fishers do not often land soft-crab and there is an element of peer-pressure in that this practice is viewed as immoral by many fishers. IFCA representatives raised that video footage from bodycams or smart phones can also be useful in identifying and evidencing obvious infringements.
30. Discussions around the subjectivity of the definition of soft-shelled crab as an animal which has “recently cast its shell”. It was noted that the new legislation passed legal review and has not faced any legal challenge. Members highlighted the ongoing FISP project coordinated by D&S IFCA, SD&C Shellfishermen Ltd, and Bangor University which is looking at using durometers to provide an enforceable definition of soft-shelled crab and linking crab softness to meat yield for human consumption. Agri Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) has previously utilised EMF funding to measure shell softness using durometers in relation to meat yield – with findings indicating that this method of enforcement could be highly costly.

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31. It was highlighted that NEIFCA are currently running a [consultation on their shellfish permit byelaw](#). This includes addition of a number of shellfish species (including Nephrops and scallops), pot limits, permit capping, and a new payment structure. Members were encouraged to respond if relevant.
32. Fishmonger’s Company have recently opened a new [Fisheries Exchange Programme](#) for applications. This will be an opportunity to advance global sharing of knowledge around the management of fisheries and the ocean. Members were encouraged to share information and encourage applications.
33. Members shared that the MMO are likely to come out with a consultation in autumn regarding stage 4 Maring Conservation Zones (MCZs). Cetacean bycatch will be main concern for crab and lobster sector. The CMG will keep an eye out for this consultation and encourage responses as appropriate.

Actions

Number	Description	Responsible
12.1	Reconvene industry-derived data group following publication of Cefas crab and lobster stock assessments. Include Natalie Hold and explore potential of Bangor University placement student to support data analysis.	Seafish
12.2	Distribute a link to FMP consultation questions.	Seafish

12.3	Discuss with Defra how the CMG will feed into FMP updates post-consultation and distribute a note explaining this process.	Seafish
12.4	Circulate resources of interest to CMG members, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crustacean Compassion Benchmark report (when published)• FIP Gap analysis (MSC)• Bangor University paper on autonomous sampling (camera) project for shellfish (when published)	Seafish to coordinate