

## Whelk Management Group Meeting #2

21<sup>st</sup> July 2020

Virtual meeting via Zoom

### Attendees

Aoife Martin , Seafish	Jim Evans, Welsh Fishermen's Association
Andrew Brown, Macduff Shellfish	Joanna Messini, DEFRA
Andy Lawler, CEFAS	Julian Bray, Welsh Gov.
Anne Freeman, DEFRA	Les Lawrence, Shellfish Assoc. of Great Britain
Bill Brock, Brighton & Newhaven Fish Sales	Lewis Tattersall, Seafish
Charlie Abbott, Lynn Shellfish	Mark Tilling, Welsh Gov.
Charlie Brock, Brighton & Newhaven Fish Sales	Mark Williams, Williams Marine Ltd.
Gary Hodgson, Venture Seafoods	Martyn Youell, Waterdance
Helen Hunter, DEFRA	Michel Kaiser, Heriot-Watt University
Iain Spear, Coombe Fisheries	Natalie Hold, Bangor University
	Phil McBryde, Defra

### 1: Progress update

Seafish presented a progress update on actions from the first meeting of the Whelk Management Group (WMG). This information is summarised in annex 1.

Short sessions were held to present the outputs of the following actions:

Action	Description	Responsible
5	Review and map current management tools	Joanna Messini, Defra
9	Overview of data requirements	Andy Lawler, Cefas and Natalie Hold, Bangor University
8	prepare a short report summarising economic data for whelk-dependant vessels	Marta Moran-Quintana, Seafish
12	preliminary research around "fleet flux"	Marta Moran-Quintana, Seafish
13	improve understanding around setting a total allowable catch (TAC) in the absence of a full stock assessment	Lewis Tattersall, Seafish
20	preliminary assessment of where whelk catches are taken and what international interests there are in the fishery	Lewis Tattersall, Seafish

#### 1.1 Legislation

There was discussion around the overview of shellfish legislation (action 5) and the need for more work on the appropriateness and effectiveness of existing management tools. This activity should look to:

- Define the criteria for the terms "appropriate" and "effective" with regards to reviewing existing fisheries management tools;
- Determine if existing management tools are delivering on their objective to ensure whelk stocks are fished sustainably, and;
- Analyse the intended and unintended consequences of management measures.

## 1.2 Data requirements

The Group discussed options to address data deficiencies in UK whelk fisheries in both the long- and short-term. Given the low starting point for whelk fisheries with regards to the data available, the WMG should plan both short- and long-term objectives. Short-term efforts should focus on assessing stock status and targeting biological sampling; long-term objectives should focus on data collection to facilitate robust modelling.

Bangor University are already exploring short- and long-term options to address this issue in Wales.

The priority data requirement for whelk fisheries is around spatial distribution of stocks. Stock definition is poorly understood and this lack of basic biological data restricts modelling efforts.

Industry input into scallop stock assessment work has been vital; a similar evidence gathering exercise for whelks would be beneficial. It was proposed that Cefas will contact whelk catchers, via processors, to collect anecdotal evidence about spatial distribution of whelks. This evidence would then be used to inform a “rough and ready” mapping exercise which in turn would be used to target biological sampling. This exercise would focus on the following points:

- Where do fishers currently catch whelks;
- Where have fishers caught whelks in the past;
- Where, from expert opinion, are likely whelk grounds, and;
- Any information on anomalous stock traits, for example stocks of particularly large or small individuals.

It was suggested that this mapping exercise could be carried out by asking fishers to identify whelk grounds on gridded maps at a resolution of 5x5 nautical miles.

There was a high level of interest in providing anecdotal evidence from industry members of the Group.

## 1.3 Economic data

The Group discussed drivers that may have played a role in the significant changes observed in the Seafish economic data time-series from 2009 to 2019.

Seafish economic data for whelk-dependant vessels shows a peak in the number of active vessels, fishing effort (days at sea), whelk landings, and fishing income in 2016. Industry members of the Group noted the implementation of IFCA bylaws in 2016, and the eagerness of some fishers to build up a track record in the whelk fishery, may have played a role in increasing interest in the fishery.

An action was taken to undertake an improved economic analysis of the whelk-dependant fleet using trip level activity data where possible, and for Seafish to liaise with Defra to explore the influence legislation may have had on economic performance of the fleet.

## 2. Governance and membership

### 2.1 Governance

Governance of the WMG and how species-specific management groups should interact with the Shellfish Industry Advisory Group (SIAG) was discussed. It was agreed that the SIAG should have an umbrella role across species management groups and that specific groups should provide feedback on their work to the SIAG regularly to make sure the groups are

aligned and to share information. National-level shellfish items should be picked up by the SIAG.

Whilst the SIAG does not currently have terms of reference defined, there are a set of guiding principles and a proposed governance structure which would apply to both the SIAG and species management groups. The proposal was shared with the SIAG for discussion at the meeting on 22 July 2020 and will be circulated to members of the WMG for comment prior to approval.

Members stated that the model adopted by the SIAG and WMG thus far was appropriate but noted that there should be continued discussion between groups around impacts on other sectors as vessels move between target species.

Members stated that it is paramount that these groups build credibility with both industry and government to ensure they help develop policy and provide an opportunity for industry to engage with fishery managers.

## **2.2 Membership of the WMG**

The WMG agreed that the membership list should be reviewed to better understand representativeness and identify any gaps in membership. Members stressed that effort should be made to ensure as many stakeholders as possible are aware of the WMG and are able to engage.

WMG members are asked to suggest additional prospective members, particularly active whelk fishermen and representatives from around the UK coast.

The Group discussed opening membership of the WMG to IFCA representatives. Views were mixed though it was agreed that:

- the WMG should communicate with the IFCA Whelk Working Group (WWG) and that observer status could potentially be given to a representative from the WWG in the future.
- IFCA representatives could be invited to join WMG meetings on an ad-hoc basis to present information on specific issues as required

## **2.3 Communications strategy**

To raise awareness about the WMG – as well as the SIAG, Crab and Lobster Management Groups – it was proposed that a joint press release for all four groups could be issued. Seafish will lead on this action and communications activity will be linked to the Future of Inshore Fisheries project.

# **3. Next steps**

## **3.1 Work priorities**

WMG members appreciate the need to plan and prioritise actions around agreed objectives. Robust data provision was noted as the foundation to all future work of the WMG and as such should be the Group's immediate priority. This includes the "rough and ready" data and anecdotal evidence gathering exercise detailed in section 1.2.

There is a need to take into account environmental, stock, and socio-economic issues in any work plan. The WMG should also consider if inshore and offshore (inside and outside of 6nm) require the same management measures.

Members stated that the whelk fishery is currently relatively unrestricted and that some form of short-term control is required. The WMG should take timescale into account and should have both short- and long-term objectives, with work priorities planned accordingly.

The WMG noted that The UK Scallop Fishery 2018 report, by Poseidon Aquatic Resource Management, provided the Group with a framework for moving forward. The WMG should consider whether a similar assessment and report would be beneficial for UK whelk fisheries.

Immediate priorities for the WMG are:

- Define short-, medium- and long-term objectives of the Group;
- Improve understanding of stock composition and status;
- Consider precautionary, short-term management interventions to safeguard the stock until science catches up;
- Explore differences between inshore and offshore whelk fisheries, and;
- Explore mortality of whelks due to other fisheries, and the impact of whelk fisheries on other stocks (including the use of brown crab as whelk bait).

### **3.2 Other considerations**

Members expressed concern about the use of brown crab (*Cancer pagurus*) as whelk bait. Given concern about crab stocks it is important that the WMG takes this aspect of whelk fishing into account. Scientists in Wales are already looking at bycatch and bait fishing in the Welsh whelk fishery. Some IFCA's already prohibit using brown crab as bait within 6nm.

There was discussion around the use of crab processing waste to make whelk baits. Members said this had been tried in the past but had not proved successful.

#### 4. Actions from the Whelk Management Group meeting

Action	Detail	Responsibility
Action 1: Assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of existing management tools	<p>Establish criteria to define “effective” and “appropriate” to be reviewed by the WMG before proceeding to the second stage of the action</p> <p>Expand the Defra shellfish legislation summary document to include an assessment of management tools including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Effectiveness</li> <li>- Unintended consequences (positive and negative)</li> <li>- Are rules delivering fishery management objectives?</li> </ul>	<p>Joanna Messini, Defra Michel Kaiser, Heriot-Watt University Seafish to assist as required</p>
Action 2: Collection of anecdotal information from industry	<p>Anecdotal evidence from fishermen and processors should be collected to better understand spatial distribution and local variations in whelk biology. This information will be used to target a biological sampling programme.</p> <p>This could be delivered through a “rough and ready” mapping exercise with industry representatives.</p> <p>(Seafish to assist in providing Cefas with industry contacts).</p>	<p>Andy Lawler, Cefas Natalie Hold, Bangor University Michel Kaiser, Heriot-Watt University (Lewis Tattersall, Seafish)</p>
Action 3: Draft a short term action plan for the WMG	<p>Based on discussions from meeting #2, Seafish will draft a plan of next steps for the WMG.</p> <p>This action will include a review of the Poseidon report produced for the SICG to determine if something similar would be appropriate for the WMG.</p>	Seafish
Action 4: Clarity around post-Brexit engagement with the North western Waters Regional Advisory Council (NWWRAC)		Helen Hunter, Defra
Action 5: WMG communications strategy	Explore opportunities for a joint press release to publicise the SIAG, WMG and Crab Management Group and encourage membership.	Seafish
Action 6: Improved economic analyses	Seafish economic analysis to be updated using detailed trip level data and, if possible, provide more information on differences between vessels operating inside/outside of 6nm.	Marta Moran-Quintana, Seafish Joanna Messini, Defra

	Seafish to collaborate with Defra on legislation to explore the influence the introduction of legislation (e.g. pot limits) through IFCA bylaws may have had on economic performance of the fleet.	
Action 7: Circulation of WMG resources	The following resources to be sent to WMG members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Defra shellfish legislation summary document</li> <li>- Basse-Normandie Granville Bay fishery review</li> <li>- Whelk handling guide draft for review</li> <li>- SIAG governance paper</li> <li>- STECF data tables</li> <li>- Seafish economic analysis of the whelk-dependant fleet and presentation slides</li> <li>- Actions update slides</li> <li>- Link to the Poseidon scallop report for the SICG</li> </ul>	Lewis Tattersall, Seafish
Action 8: Improve mechanism for storing and sharing WMG resources		Lewis Tattersall, Seafish
Action 9: Set the date of the next WMG meeting	Circulate a Doodle Poll for the end of September/early October to set a date and time for WMG #3.	Lewis Tattersall, Seafish
Action 10: Proactively target active fishermen for membership of the WMG	All members to be asked to propose potential members, particularly active fishermen.	Lewis Tattersall, Seafish
Action 11: Agendas and summary minutes to be uploaded to WMG landing page on Seafish website		Lewis Tattersall, Seafish
Action 12: Update the devolved administrations on the work of the WMG	Ongoing action	Aoife Martin, Seafish Anne Freeman, Defra