

Note of meeting held at Friends House, London. Wednesday 6 November 2019.

For the Discard Action Group minutes and meeting presentations see:

<https://www.seafish.org/article/the-discard-action-group>

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

Mike Park welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Attendees

Adam Townley	New England Seafood
Amrita Rose	Defra
Andrew Newlands	Defra
Anne Birnie	NESFO
Aaron Hatcher	University of Portsmouth
Arina Motova	Seafish
Barrie Deas	NFFO
Ben Collier	Northern Ireland Gear Trials
Claire Pescod	McDuff Shellfish
Clarus Chu	World Wildlife Fund
Daniel Owen	Fenners Chambers
Duncan Vaughan	Natural England
Erik Lindebo	European Commission
Eunice Borero	OceanMind
Gus Caslake	Seafish
Harry Owen	MRAG
Helena Delgado Nordmann	Tesco
Jenni Grossmann	ClientEarth
Jennifer Mouatt	The Aegir Consultancy
Jo Pollett	Marine Stewardship Council
Jonny Hughes	Pew Trusts
Karen Green	Seafish
Kenny Coull	SWFPA
Kevin McDonnell	WSFPO Ltd
Su Kim-Stroud	SafetyNet Technologies Ltd
Laura Eeles	Pew Trusts
Louise McCafferty	Joseph Robertson Ltd
Malcolm Morrison	Scottish Fishermen's Federation
Maria Moset	European Commission
Martin Jaffa	Callander McDowell
Michael Kendrick	Seachill
Mick Bacon	Seafish
Mike Montgomerie	Seafish
Mike Park	SWFPA (Chair)
Paul Macdonald	Scottish Fishermen's Organisation
Peter Alexander	SafetyNet Technologies Ltd
Robyn Cloake	Lyons Seafoods
Sam Stone	Marine Conservation Society
Stuart McLanaghan	Seafish

Apologies

Aoife Martin	Seafish
Dan Watson	SafetyNet Technologies Ltd
Kimberley Cullen	Seafood 2040
Maria Hermida	Hooktone Group
Nathan de Rozarieux	Falfish
Sarah Hussey	Sea Farms
Sean McSeveney	Plymouth City Council
Tamara Talevska	North Sea Advisory Council
Theresa Redding	Natural England
Warren Devine	Marine Scotland

2. Welcome and introductions/Minutes of the previous meeting on 2 April 2019. Mike Park, SWFPA, DAG Chair.

The final minutes from 2 April are on the Seafish website. Attendees were asked to take note of the meeting and purdah guidelines. In the following minutes Seafish will provide a link to the various presentations given at the meeting but not summarise the whole presentation. In the main we do not attribute the comments made at the meeting.

Reference was made to the purdah guidelines (during the pre-election period). As a Non-Departmental Public Body Seafish has to maintain political impartiality and avoid any party political controversy. As such we cannot comment on matters of policy or politics or do anything that may influence the views of the public or impact how they might vote. Seafish recognises the value of this group in initiating and facilitating discussion and providing factual information. Where necessary a factual explanation of current government policy, statements and decisions will be provided but during this meeting we will be particularly careful not to become involved in a partisan way in election issues. Speakers and attendees are asked to note that matters raised about future government policy or on matters of public controversy will be handled with discretion.

New regulations and advances in selectivity

3. New Tech Con Reg - what is new? What has changed? Maria Moset, DG MARE, EU Commission.

https://seafish.org/media/DAG_Nov2019_TechConREg_EU.pdf

Maria explained the main provisions of the new Technical Measures Framework (EU Regulation 2019/1241). The key elements of this new framework are the simplification of existing measures; regionalisation, following the mandate of the Common Fisheries Policy; quantified targets; and a result-based approach with a review and reporting framework to check on progress and implementation. The first report is to be produced by the end of 2020.

Discussion

- There was discussion around measures to mitigate the bycatch of cetaceans as part of an NGO call re the conservation of whales and dolphins. It would appear that this regulation has been repealed.
- There was also discussion around clauses concerning the use of scallop dredges; exemptions for non-bivalve molluscs (and calls for a name change to molluscs); bycatch provision; and unintended consequences, all linked to compliance with the Landing Obligation (LO) and the various exemptions.
- There was mention of significant discards of cuttlefish (mollusc) as an accidental catch and the difficulty in avoiding this.

- **Question.** There was mention of minimum mesh size. Is this just in the cod end or is it extended to the whole site? **Answer.** More details are contained in the Annexes. This covers specific details relating to exemptions and derogations. All of this is subject to regionalisation which does allow some flexibility.
- **Q.** Is there scope to look at a maximum landing size rather than a minimum landing size? **A.** This could be an option.

ACTION: Share link to report when available.

4. Ten new selective gears approved for use in the UK all aimed at reducing discards. Mike Montgomerie, Seafish.

https://seafish.org/media/DAG_Nov2019_SelectiveGears_Seafish.pdf

During 2019 the Marine Management Organisation, Marine Scotland and DAERA introduced newly approved selective gears (10) designed to give industry more options to help them meet the demands of the LO, this is in addition to the revised Tech Con Reg which will also give fishermen more options to improve selectivity. These were detailed. A lot of the UK fishing industry is already using these gears but certain sectors do need help and support. The New Tech Con Reg is worded to make everything a lot simpler but there is still a fear amongst fishers about what is safe and legal to use. They are often faced with a very long description of each gear. Seafish has worked on diagrams of each of the ten gears accompanied by clear text to explain each gear. All of this will shortly be on the Seafish website. Whilst some fishers are keen to try new gears many do not want to advertise what they are doing.

Discussion

- Whilst different gears are referred to many struggle to actually identify them. There are also differences across the United Kingdom. In Northern Ireland it is perhaps more apparent what can and can't be used. Everyone needs to benefit from this and all relevant parties (fisheries officers in particular) need to be aware of this. There are instances where fisheries officers have been briefing fishers on the new gears. In October fishers and fisheries offices from the Republic of Ireland attended a training course at the Flume Tank
- The Amity Net Grid (referred to as a Dual Codend in the Irish Sea) has been approved for use but it is not clear who is actually using it.
- **Q.** What is the process to move a gear from a successful scientific trial to commercial use?
A. It has to be approved by the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF). Once it has been approved it can then be implemented at regional level. In Northern Ireland this is quite a quick process. It takes longer in Scotland and England. But to even be able to run the trials in the first place you need a derogation from the current rules. With the Tech Con Reg now in place hopefully there will be more flexibility now. Fishers have not necessarily wanted to try new gear because anything that reduces their catch has an economic impact.

In summing up there was thanks to Mike Montgomerie, who will shortly retire from Seafish, for imparting his expertise and for the clarity he has brought to this very technical subject area.

ACTION: Share link to Seafish website.

5. Project UK FIP update. Jo Pollett, Marine Stewardship Council.

https://seafish.org/media/DAG_Nov2019_PUKFI_MSC.pdf

Jo updated the group on progress with Project UK Fisheries Improvement in particular the progress with crab and lobster, Channel scallops, south west monkfish, North Sea plaice and lemon sole, and what will be happening with Nephrops and scallops going forward. This also covered FisheryProgress.org

Discussion

- It is good to see this work progressing. **Q.** How long will the Channel scallop observer work last? **A.** Probably about a year and then a Terms of Reference will be produced.
- In terms of other stocks hopefully North Sea cod will move into a FIP.

2019 - one year into full implementation of the landing obligation

6. Industry perspective. Barrie Deas, NFFO.

https://seafish.org/media/DAG_Nov2019_LOin2019_NFFO.pdf

From 1 January 2019 the LO has applied to all quota species in the demersal fisheries following a four-year lead-in period. Important high survival and de minimis exemptions have been included specifically the TAC status has been removed from Dab and the decision was made to exclude seabass from the LO. In the 10 months since the LO was introduced no serious chokes have emerged whilst high survival and de minimis exemptions have been critical in mitigating chokes – esp. skates and rays and plaice. The measures to avoid unwanted catch and improve selectivity were presented in terms of whether the LO has driven change, as well as the waypoints such as the House of Lords report. In terms of enforcement two schools of thought were presented – the need to work collaboratively to address the issues with Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) having a role to play but not as a top-down control versus the use of CCTV as a panacea (but there are legal, ethical and practical issues associated with using CCTV). Looking ahead the Landing Obligation Forum brings together administrators, fisheries scientists and the industry to take co-ownership of the problems but there are serious issues to address in 2020 with major choke risks; the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) requirement by 2020 (but not the only legal obligation); mixed fishery issues; in fisheries where uplifts and illicit discarding, will lead to an increase in fishing mortality – lower TACS; the future of Exemptions; and the Brexit/Fisheries Bill.

7. Defra update. Andrew Newlands, Defra.

https://seafish.org/media/DAG_Nov2019_LOImplementation_Defra.pdf

The current Defra policy approach is for increased engagement with the industry through the creation of a Landing Obligation Forum with the catching sector, targeted consultations with fishermen in specific regions and meetings with the retailers, processors and eNGOs to deliver bycatch reduction plans (for zero TAC advice stocks), a reserve quota policy (due to consult for 2020) and International quota swaps (IQS). In terms of control and enforcement Defra as adopted an educational-based approach. Much of 2018 and the early months of 2019 focused on ensuring fishers had the right information to be able to comply with the new requirements. Such information was provided through practical guidance outlining the requirements of the EU discard plans; face to face meetings, including the 'Landing Obligation Forum' and the 'Net to Plate' workshop, and through social media. This is now moving towards a more enforcement-centred approach. This enforcement-centred approach includes recording the last-hauled catch on vessels to assess the catch profile (rather than only what has been retained on board); increasing the number of inspections of landings and at sea; rolling out the under 10m catch reporting system, introducing inshore vessel monitoring systems (IVMS), and increasing our scientific evidence base of the state of our stocks. Defra are also currently exploring the potential use of REM, alongside other monitoring and enforcement tools, as a cost-effective and efficient way of monitoring fishing activity and ensuring compliance. Some trials on REM have already been undertaken and have reduced discarding rates significantly eg in a number of fisheries throughout the UK since 2011 and in the English North Sea as part of a Fully Documented Fisheries (FDF) scheme, managed by the MMO.

Discussion

- **Q.** Quota uplifts and illegal discarding all threaten the sustainability of our fish stocks. Quota uplifts were given to cover for the fish that was previously discarded however if we do have both uplifts and illicit discarding we are compounding the problem. The risk of non-compliance will increase if a choke situation is coming close.
- What is being done to address this? **A.** The MMO has been given more funding which will allow more inspections at sea and more staff on the shore. We need to find actual evidence of discarding and recognise there are issues but equally we realise we do not need to criminalise the industry but give the industry time to re-align and transition from the old system to the new. We don't think that REM is the panacea but we do need to keep accurate records and the industry needs to keep faith with science.
- Economic considerations are crucial. It is difficult to be green when you are in the red.

Latest initiatives

8. Co-designing the principles for defining low impact fishing. Harry Owen, MRAG.

https://seafish.org/media/DAG_Nov2019_LowImpact_MRAG.pdf

The New Economics Foundation, Cefas, MRAG and Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) intend to hold a series of workshops in North Shields, Brixham and Eastbourne early in the New Year to start looking at co-designing the principles for defining low impact fishing: This is to develop a framework of principles for low impact fishing, and to agree the processes for applying them. The scope of this work extends only to England for operational reasons, but it is recognised the outputs may be of interest at a UK-wide scale and beyond. This will cover bycatch and discards, ghost fishing, pollutants and GHG emissions.

ACTION: Provide details on workshops when available.

9. Real-time reporting of cod and whiting catches in the West of Scotland. Paul Macdonald, Scottish Fishermen's Organisation.

https://seafish.org/media/DAG_Nov2019_RTR_SFO.pdf

Real-time reporting (RTR) is the term used here for the rapid, semi-automated collation, processing and dissemination of catch data to benefit spatial selectivity. This information is then used by skippers for tactical decision making at sea. RTR harnesses the modern information and communications technology that is an integral part of modern fishing. Faced with zero TAC advice for cod and whiting in the West of Scotland RTR pilot is a collaboration between: the Scottish Fishermen's Organisation, Fisheries Innovation Scotland, the University of Aberdeen and Chordata LLC (Alaska). This is a one year pilot project to trial applicability in Scottish fisheries which started on 16 September 2019 with five vessels and will be rolled out fully in January 2020. As soon as practicable after cod and whiting catch amounts are determined for a haul, skippers use the reporting software to enter gear deployment and retrieval time and catch in kg. The reporting component will transmit data to a database server. This database server will store all catch reports as well as vessel position reports from the dedicated position units. In addition to haul reports, aggregated cod/whiting catch data can be used to generate maps of high-bycatch tows and cod catch rates by a range of spatial divisions.

Discussion

- **Q.** Avoidance is the way forward but this requires fishers to share information. Has there been any resistance? **A.** It will take time and there has been some suspicion but this only requires sharing information about cod and whiting and it is anonymous.
- **Q.** Who will be monitoring this? **A.** This is a pilot to test the best way to share information and we want to create choice and stimulate a reaction at vessel level.

- **Q.** Where information like this has already been produced could this be plotted to show where successful avoidance is already happening? **A.** We have already seen successful mapping of cod and the pressure is now on to avoid a choke situation and this can only help.

ACTION: Provide update on pilot project when available.

End of life fishing gear and recycling

10. End-of-life fishing gear and recycling. Stuart McLanaghan, Seafish.

https://seafish.org/media/DAG_Nov2019_EndOfLifeGear_Seafish.pdf

This is impacted by Directive (EU) 2019/904 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment. This was adopted on 5 June 2019 but at the moment it is not entirely clear what will be covered, what UK Government takes forward and who will take the lead. This only considers gears containing plastic; it has extended the Producer Responsibility scheme to include collection, transport, treatment and awareness raising; it covers fishers/artisanal producers not 'producers'; there are harmonised standards for circular gear design; and national collection targets with a view to an EU-wide target. The terms End-of-life fishing gear (EOLFG) and Abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) are used. It is estimated that 27% of all marine litter comes from fishing gear. A Seafish survey of ports and net manufacturers has shown that very few ports have a full structure in place to manage the disposal of fishing gear. Whilst there are some good best practice initiatives there is a lot of uncertainty over legislative reach and any recycling will be linked to the disassembly of the components. There are issues over transport costs with ports currently taking the financial hit for managing this. Seafish is looking at six case studies on emerging best practice.

11. End of life fishing gear recycling project in the SW. Gus Caslake, Seafish.

https://seafish.org/media/DAG_Nov2019_RecyclingGearProject_Seafish.pdf

This is a joint project between Seafish, Odyssey Innovations and Brixham Trawl Makers looking at recycling end of life fishing gear – the options and the issues. A typical trawl (by weight) is made up of: 25% trawl netting, 50% ground gear and 25% fishing line, flip-ups and headline. This project has shown how the trawls can be broken down into their component parts and all can be recycled in different ways but there is a large cost associated with disassembly. The current cost of sending complete trawls to landfill is £110 per tonne and the current cost of recycling complete trawls is around £250 per tonne so this is clearly not comparable.

Discussion

- **Q.** How much is paid to the labourers involved in the disassembly? **A.** £15 per hour was paid and there is certainly a job. There is more concern about the bottom-line rather than recycling and net makers are not really considering recycling at the moment but this is being looked into with different ways to disassemble.
- There is now more focus on changing the design and construction of nets with recycling in mind.

12. The future of DAG

Over recent years there has been plenty of discussion over meeting the requirements of the LO. This discussion has naturally evolved and has become more about information sharing and awareness raising about what the industry is doing. This group will continue but it would be very useful to receive feedback on what direction the group should take.

There was a vote at the end of the meeting on a new name for the group. Going forward the Discard Action Group (DAG) will be called the Fisheries Management and Innovation Group (FMIG). As well as covering discards the FMIG will also now cover technical, innovation, automation and (scientific) fisheries management issues relating to the catching sector specifically:

- Delivering legislative and regulatory requirements: discards and meeting the requirements of the landing obligation including the use of existing flexibilities and exemptions, choke risks and mitigation measures; Bycatch Reduction Plans (BCRPs); Fully Documented Fisheries (FDF) schemes and other CFP flexibilities.
- Stock assessment issues: prioritised data limited stocks and the environmental impacts of wild capture fishing (both direct ecosystem issues and environmental footprint issues).
- Technology, Innovation and Automation: selective gear developments, geographical digital traceability and fleet efficiency issues etc. going forward.

13. Date of the next meeting.

Mike thanked all the speakers for their insight, and the attendees for their participation. The first meeting of the Fisheries Management and Innovation Group (FMIG) will be in April/May 2020. The date was later confirmed as **Wednesday 8 April 2020** in London.