

Note of meeting held at Friends House, London. Tuesday 2 April 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 Robertson	Skipper, SWFPA
Adam Townley	New England Seafoods
Aoife Martin	Seafish
Ben Collier	Northern Ireland Gear Trial Project
Cameron Moffat	Young's Seafoods
Dan Watson	SafetyNet Technologies
David Milne	Skipper, SWFPA
Duncan Vaughan	Natural England
Elaine Whyte	Clyde Fishermen's Association
Elena Balestri	Scottish Fishermen's Federation
Emma Lingard	Seafish
Harry Wick	Northern Ireland Fish Producer's Organisation
Heidi Guille	Defra
Helen McLachlan	WWF
Hugh Jones	Control Union
Jaswinder Kaur	Defra
Jenni Grossmann	ClientEarth
Jimmy Buchan	Scottish Whitefish Producer/Seafish Board
Julia Calderwood	Marine Institute
Ian Kinsey	Norwegian Fisherman's Association
James Stephen	Skipper, SWFPA
Jess Sparks	Seafish
Jim Portus	SWFPO
Jo Pollett	Marine Stewardship Council
Johnny Hughes	Pew Trusts
Kara Brydson	Fisheries Innovation Scotland
Karen Green	Seafish
Kathryn Gavira O'Neill	Satlink
Katrina Borrow	Mindfully Wired Communications
Kenny Coull	SWFPA
Kevin McNab	Skipper, SWFPA
Louise McCafferty	Joseph Robertson Ltd
Matthew Spencer	Consultant
Mike Montgomerie	Seafish
Mike Park	SWFPA, DAG Chair
Natalie Tellwright	OceanMind
Norman Fletcher	Marine Scotland
Polly Burns	Lloyds Register
Simon Collins	Shetland Fishermen's Association

Tim Davies
Tom Clegg

Marine Stewardship Council
Institute of Marine Research

Apologies were received from:

Alison Freeman	Fishmongers' Company
Barrie Deas	NFFO
Claire Pescod	MSC
Daniel Owen	Fenners Chambers
Kenn Skau Fischer	Danish Producer Organisation
Malcolm Morrison	Scottish Fishermen's Federation
Mogens Schou	AquaMind
William Davies	Seachill

2. Welcome and introductions/Minutes of the previous meeting on 10 October 2018. Mike Park, SWFPA, DAG Chair.

The final minutes were accepted as a true reflection of the meeting and have been added to the DAG page. Attendees were asked to take note of the meeting 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.

3. Implementation of the landing obligation - three months in - how is 2019 going?

3.1. Implementation of the Landing Obligation in 2019. Mike Park, SWFPA

https://www.seafish.org/media/DAG_Apr2019_SWFPA.pdf

Full implementation of the landing obligation is now firmly in place and the fleet understands their responsibilities. The quota pool is now in operation and a number of de minimis exemptions have been applied. Industry and regulators are discussing ways to fish smarter including special/temporal awareness, the sharing of information, continuing trials and new regulatory measures. The reduction in TACs for a number of key commercial species in 2019 does not help. It is a myth that whitefish vessels are discarding large quantities of fish. The real issue is being swarmed by foreign vessels which do not respect seasonal closures.

3.2. Implementation of the Landing Obligation in 2019. Heidi Guille, Defra

https://www.seafish.org/media/DAG_Apr2019_Defra.pdf

The current policy approach from Defra is to increase engagement with the industry through the creation of a Landing Obligation Forum with the catching sector; targeted consultations with fishermen in specific regions; meetings with the retailers, processors and eNGOs; is using a new reserve quota policy and approach to International Quota Swaps (IQS); as well as adopting bycatch reduction plans (for 5 zero TAC advice stocks). Defra has done its own calculation this year on reserve quota (previously 'uplift' quota was provided by the Commission). The aim is to help alleviate choke risks and incentivise more sustainable fishing by encouraging the use of highly selective gears. Alongside domestic work Defra is working on the production of bycatch reduction plans (BCRPs) and facilitated earlier access to IQS through pre-provisional quota allocations in February. Discussion centred on whether bycatch quota could be lost and how well IQS were working. There have been difficulties and this should really be a last resort option.

4. MSC Consideration of the Landing Obligation in fishery assessment. Tim Davies, Marine Stewardship Council.

https://www.seafish.org/media/DAG_Apr2019_MSC.pdf

Three main concerns have been indicated on the implementation of the LO namely: that discarding continues in many fisheries; that monitoring, control and enforcement is not sufficient to implement the policy with increased uncertainty (undocumented catches) and the ability of harvest strategies to achieve objectives; that exemptions to the landing obligation may not be based on sound evidence or decision making. The MSC has produced guidance on where and how the landing obligation may impact the outcome of a fishery assessment or surveillance audit. This is to support assessment bodies in considering the full range of interactions with the landing obligation and to ensure consistency between assessment bodies. The guidance recognises two sides to the landing obligation: the negative impacts, e.g. those resulting from non-compliance; and the positive impacts, e.g. improved data and knowledge. The MSC's Fisheries Standard Review will be seeking input into how monitoring, control and surveillance systems are evaluated in fishery assessments and what information is needed to assess compliance later in 2019.

Discussion

- **Question.** How are cameras onboard vessels viewed? **Answer.** How cameras would feature has not yet been determined.
- **Q.** What are the positives of increased selectivity? **A.** We have 28 indicators of a sustainable fishery. How selectivity measures are viewed is not clear cut. There could be clear benefits but not all fisheries need to have high selectivity in order to be sustainable. Selectivity would be viewed as part of the holistic management of the fishery. Good selectivity is not necessarily indicative of a sustainable fishery – it is evidence of implementation.
- **Q.** What evidence is used to demonstrate non-compliance? **A.** There is no definitive answer. Every fishery will be different and we would look at a combination of sources.
- **Q.** What can MSC do to drive the move towards installing cameras on vessels? **A.** The MSC is a global standard and would not as a rule be prescriptive above technology solutions however we are aware there is a global push to adopt the latest solutions. The MSC is looking at the different types of monitoring tools available and there is scope within the standard to strengthen the requirements as to what information is adequate.

ACTION: Share MSC report and guidance, and link to Electronic Monitoring conference.

Ways to evidence, map and monitor compliance and aid spatial avoidance

5. Electronic Monitoring as a compliance tool. Norman Fletcher, Marine Scotland.

https://www.seafish.org/media/DAG_Apr2019_MarineScotland.pdf

This covered the cod quota trials in Scotland between 2011 - 2016 where all cod was retained, landed and recorded (it also covered haddock and plaice in 2016), and the pelagic trials from 2013 - 2015 with a Fully Documented Fishery. There is strong evidence that remote electronic monitoring (REM) delivers compliance by providing a means to verify what has been caught. REM also brings about behavioural change. It is a data collection tool not just a tool to demonstrate compliance. The European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) has formed a REM Working Group to produce a document defining the technical requirements/procedures (LO objective). Now is an opportunity for the industry to help shape this and develop rules and standards.

Discussion

- **Question.** Quota uplift was the big driver re the cod quota trials. It only works if vessels have sufficient quota. If REM is to work how should it be rolled out? **Answer.** Pelagic first followed by the larger demersal.

- The scientific community needs to come onboard with this as an important data collection device.

6. Norwegian use of reference fleets. Tom Clegg, Norwegian Marine Research Institute.

https://www.seafish.org/media/DAG_Apr2019_NMR.pdf

The Norwegian Reference Fleet provides IMR with detailed information on fishing activity and catches on a regular basis. It is seen as an important data source to reduce bias and increase precision in stock assessments. The reference fleet data gives a much better and complete overview of total catches and discards than all other sources of fisheries data. Fishermen in the reference fleet also register bycatches of seabirds and sea mammals. The reference fleet records their discarding activity but there is a request not to use the reference fleet data for prosecutions. The activities of the reference fleet are seen to broadly mirror that of the overall fleet. Scientific quota is set aside for the reference fleet.

Discussion

- This model seems to work very well in Norway but it is unlikely it could work in the same way in the UK.
- **Question.** Is the reference fleet proportionate? **Answer.** It does not replicate proportionately the entire fleet in terms of fish and catch.
- **Q.** The reference fleet is documenting a certain level of discards. Is there a discrepancy between the reference fleet and the entire fleet, and are there penalties? **A.** The reference fleet cannot be selected by law. The Government can select to fill in gaps and to ensure all areas are covered. The behaviours are not significantly different.
- **Q.** Does the reference fleet set the 'norm'? **A.** The reference fleet does not set the standard for the rest of the fleet but there is evidence of there is a correlation in behaviour.
- **Q.** Has any catch profiling been undertaken? **A.** The aim is to do that in the Barents Sea.

7. Shetland Fishermen's Association paper on reference fleets. Simon Collins, SFA.

https://www.seafish.org/media/DAG_Apr2019_SFA.pdf

The seas around Shetland have a local abundance of several key pelagic and demersal species and healthy shellfish stocks, as well as a highly mixed demersal fishery with over 20 commercial species landed regularly and a 5+ average mix of species per tow. Reference fleets address two clear issues concerning discard reduction and accountability. This is the Shetland version of a reference fleet, which is not exactly the same as the Norwegian version with observers (not permanent) paid for by industry and tailored by fleet segment.

ACTION: Circulate link to report.

8. A new mapping app to identify discard hotspots. Julia Calderwood, Marine Institute.

https://www.seafish.org/media/DAG_Apr2019_MarineInstitute.pdf

This demonstrated a new mapping app to identify catch and discard hotspots. Hotspot maps could help to better target catches and optimise fishing opportunities. Fishers could actually share information to build a better picture. The two species example highlighted showed targeting whiting rather than avoiding haddock produced the best results. This app could be a useful product, but it isn't a final product yet and they are looking to continue to develop this alongside industry.

ACTION: Circulate link to website and survey.

Discussion

- **Question.** This focusses on the Irish industry. Is it transferable to the UK fleet? **Answer.** So far it has only been tested on the Irish fleet.
- **Q.** Have vessels been sent out to prove the results or otherwise? **A.** We would like to do more real-time views.

Improving selectivity

9. Overview of the DiscardLess project. Kenny Coull, SWFPA.

https://www.seafish.org/media/DAG_Apr2019_Discardless.pdf

The DiscardLess project has just finished. The aim of DiscardLess was to provide the knowledge, tools, and methods required for the successful reduction of discards in European fisheries. Two key highlights are:

- A DMS toolbox give an overview of landings or discards described by available data through indicators and knowledge based on case studies in Iceland, North Sea and Bay of Biscay. This reports on onboard handling solutions with a cost benefit tool to estimate investment and operational costs and likely economic returns.
- A selectivity manual and fact sheets are to make fishermen, net makers and fisheries managers more aware of possible modifications that are achievable to suit their selectivity requirements. They describe the different stages of capture, highlight how different parts of gear may influence selection and identify possible changes which can alter the selectivity of the gear.

Discussion

- **Question.** What happens now with all this information? **Answer.** It needs to be used and some of solutions offered moved forward.
- Q. Could some of the core elements be progressed in the UK? Is there a sense of how many of the selectivity measures have progressed from pilots to commercial usage? **A.** There is work on policy briefs and there is work across Member States.

ACTION: Circulate link to DiscardLess website.

10. Selectivity showcase

Showcase/case studies of new selectivity devices and how they are being used by skippers in the UK. This session included recent video footage and was an opportunity to quiz the skippers themselves. Participants were David Milne, Jimmy Buchan, James Stephen, William Hepburn and Paul Robertson.

Key points of discussion

- There is a lot of pressure to do the right thing.
- We must be accountable. Better selectivity should mean we can access available quota better.
- We need forums such as this to showcase these selectivity advances.
- We are on the road to 'perfection' and must not kill innovation on the way but for a vessel to be successful it needs the quota in the first place.
- The average of a fisher in the UK is 57. Where are the next innovators? Ageism is a problem and currently 20% of UK crew come from outside the EU.

New selectivity measures

- These are the market leaders in terms of advancing new selectivity measures.
- There are clear examples of new methods that have been adopted with whiting and cod.
- At what point is knowledge of gear innovation shared that could be beneficial to others? Or if this information kept quiet as it creates a possible commercial advantage?
- There is a natural resistance to change. There must be the economic stimulus for fishers to try something new. A skipper needs to see the value of the catch if he is going to forego one species in order to catch another (more valuable) species.
- The benefit could be in both quantity and improved quality of the catch. There should be equivalency.

- There are lots of new ideas. The important thing is to bring that together to look ahead to inform policy.
- It is all about balance. Mesh sizes can be made more selective to avoid smaller fish but then you will lose target species as well. You have to preserve marketable fish.
- The key is avoidance and technology can help here. If avoidance measures are used you don't need observers. The reality is that we are moving from one fishing area to another more than ever.

Quota/legislation

- Limiting small fish from the catch is not the issue – the issue is lack of quota which creates choke species.
- A lot of the gear solutions that have been tested are not legal. And have required a derogation from Scottish government.
- There is a recognition from industry that REM will happen but when is not at all clear.
- It is restricted quota and the limiting effect of choke species that is driving innovation.

What do you want to see in the next two years?

- Brexit sorted, choke issues sorted and more intra-species flexibility.
- More flexibility from the Government, better policy consideration and more control.
- Progress on gear selectivity and a reduction in catches of undersized fish.
- Keep driving innovation and invest in the next generation. Change the quota system.
- The environment is changing. Hake is a prime example. 70% of the entire Northern hake stock is now residing in the North Sea.

11. Wrap up and the future of DAG.

It was really good to have the skippers with their first –hand experience the room for such a lengthy discussion. There is a need to share experiences.

Mike asked, given the full implementation of the landing obligation, whether this group should continue. Assuming it does – should it be in its current format or how should it evolve? Two name options were Fisheries Information Group (FIG) or Landing Action Group (LAG). This group has been focussing on issues surrounding the implementation of the landing obligation and has evolved as the legislation has come into effect. I can't think of any other forum that brings together this collection of interested parties with this breadth of experience.

ACTION: Seafish to consider how DAG evolves.

12. Date of the next meeting.

Mike thanked all the speakers for their insight, and the attendees for their participation. The next meeting will be in October/November 2019. Date and venue TBC.