

Meeting Minutes

Area IVc Quota Advisory Group Introductory Meeting

25 August 2020 By dial in

Attendees

Chris Attenborough

Charles Lines

Paul Lines

Phil McBryde (DEFRA)

Ross Deadman (DEFRA)

Paul Tyack (MMO - Chair)

Edward Baker (MMO)

Apologies

David Ferris

Paul Gilson

Introduction

PT explained the format of the meeting and everyone introduced themselves

Quota uptake and catch limit discussion

Cod NS

EB presented uptake figures as per slides sent out prior to the meeting.

CA stated there was a lack of Cod on the ground

PL Cod has been replaced by Bass

PT agreed there appeared to be a correlation between reduced Cod and increased Bass.

Herring IVc/VIIId

EB presented figures as per slides stating that an additional 100t had been traded in. EB enquired as to anticipated catches for this winter.

CA said there could be an interest in the fishery, but it was not worth much which is why people go whelking.

PL 5t per week is not enough to get anyone interested in processing. Generally, it is only caught for bait and bird food and can't get more than £300/t. There could be a trawl fishery in spring but enough quota would have to equate to a lorry load per day.

PL stated that herring would be important as an emerging new fishery post BREXIT and that we need 500-600t to make the fishery viable.

PL stated that the only fisheries now are whelks and bass.

EB said he would try to get more quota for this season but cannot guarantee anything and suspects he has got all that is available.

PMcB stated that Policy developed by DEFRA has to be adaptive in the face of environmental changes and also led by what is commercially viable.

Skates and Rays NS

EB presented uptake as per the slides.

PL stated that uptake was significantly reduced due to COVID. He said catch the current limit should be enough but the landed value (<£1/kg) makes the fishery non-viable. 15 years ago he used to get >£3/kg.

CA marketing is the problem, at 1.1Euro it is easier to discard it. Even if increase in catch limit is given the price is not worth landing it for.

Quotas caused this problem – the reduction in quotas led to the markets disappearing. Skate is now caught and sold in the west country.

PL agreed that markets move on and the lack of quota killed the market in the east.

PL suggested the catch limit increased to 3t as this may tempt some people to land it.

EB agreed an increase in catch limit to 3t for U10 and O10 vessels. This will be effective from 7th September.

Sole NS

EB presented uptake data as per slides.

PL not worth targeting due to a lack of fish.

PT said some vessels are targeting but there is not much caught.

CL said he is not seeing sole, that it is not moving to the inshore.

CA said the Thames Estuary sole has been lost due to dredging or the Dutch fleet. He said that predatory fish do not help eg bass and skate always full of baby sole.

EB said there was a lack of quota uptake in both the inshore and offshore fleets.

PL said offshore was a problem as well and that the Pulse fleet only too 60% of their available TAC.

EB took an action to see if he could access any length frequency data on NS sole

It was suggested that Dutch vessels are using blinders to catch small soles. EB to put in an intel report.

CA suggested there should be a total ban whilst sole are spawning.

PL agreed.

EB agreed to see if we could get an explanation for why ICES advice had increased the sole quota for 2020 and a further increase was proposed for 2021 considering it appeared abundance had decreased.

NS Sprat

CA said large amounts of quota are needed to make this fishery viable. He explained that big buyers on foreign markets won't buy small amounts of fish (e.g. mixed boxes).

CL sprat gets 8 or 9 pence on Lowestoft market, it is not worth fishing for it.

PL this fishery used to do very well (100 boxes per day) but it is all taken now by large pelagic companies.

AOB

1. EB explained the MMO were considering allowing non-sector vessels to a) lease and fish against quota without prior permission from the MMO (instant leasing) b) retrospectively lease quota after the fish has been landed

Regarding instant leasing:

PL agreed it will boost income and allow vessels to work more flexibly e.g. in good weather.

CL good idea and noted that it was especially hard to contact MMO during COVID.

Regarding retrospective leasing:

CA said it seems logical and the way it should be really.

PL said this was a brilliant idea and would remove discrimination between sector and non-sector and bring the non-sector in line with the POs which is a good thing but would need to be closely monitored to prevent abuse.

PT agreed that it was a get out jail for those that would otherwise be liable for prosecution.

PMcB said that DEFRA were supportive.

RD asked how easy it was to source quota

CA said no one bothers because it is too expensive eg Skate used to be £40/t but is now £600/t but that it is a good idea because it would help reduce discards and some people may be able to lease.

PT said the PO may charge a lot of money because they know fish has already been landed.

PL suggested fishers may agree a lease to avoid prosecution but then not pay the PO. He suggested the POs may not allow people to lease unless they pay a bond. He said that the SWPO used to be a good bunch of guys but wondered whether there will be a reduced availability of quota now the Western PO has been created.

2. EB explained DEFRA wanted some opinions on the idea of merging the under-10m and over-10m non-sector pools and asked for input from the group.

PL said that there were so few over-10m vessels that the pool would be easier to manage if they were merged but he warned that O10 have a greater catching power and a merger could cause an increase of O10s in the pool. He said a merger could work now but said there may not be enough quota. Would the result be that O10 vessels had lower catch limits than they needed?

CA noted the west country has more O10s and agreed it would be good to get rid of the O10/U10 divide but said an offshore / inshore divide would still be needed.

3. Bass

CA asked for an update on previous requests to remove the by-catch % for trawlers. He stated that gear type was irrelevant, and they needed a viable amount 1-1.5t /month.

PL said they used to be able to catch 10-15t per month and agreed they need a realistic catch limit. He re-iterated that bass has replaced cod and that whelk and bass are the only fisheries now. He said the pressure on shellfish was now too much and bass were being caught in sole nets.

PL said that the seal population has increased from 300 to 1200 and they are eating the bass.

RD asked CA to email his opinions to him

4. Policy discussion forums

CA asked if there was a forum for discussion with government regarding fisheries management and that we needed a structure that was workable for fishermen as well as government.

EB explained that DEFRA intended to create regional policy discussion forums possibly similar to the current quota advisory groups and that they hope to have them in place for next year.

Next steps / next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting should be held in December.