

REGIONAL FISHERIES GROUP

Meeting Notes 24th May 2022

South East 4c

15:00 – 18:00 MS Teams Conference Call & Best Western Claydon Hotel,
Ipswich

Attendees:

INDUSTRY

Kirk Stribling
Paul Lines
Fran French
Robert Mole
Johnny French
Chris Holkley
Darren Holmes
Ken Bagley
Wayne Brewster
Martin
Paul Gilson
Trevor Armstrong
June Mummery

Independent Facilitator:

Ian Hiscock

Seafish:

Rebecca Treacy

Policy Lab:

Kate Langham
Eliza Collin

DEFRA

Andy Carroll
Lydia Osbourne
Phil McBryde
Thamy Duffield

CEFAS

Jim Ellis

MMO

Matt Baxter
Gurpreet Padda
Eleanor Holford
Katie James
Emily Theobald
Justin Rowley
Amedeo De Masi
Charlotte Floyd
Nick Greenwood
Charlie Wiseman
Hubert Gieschen
Tim Dixon
Edward Baker
Courtney Inch
Georgia Trelogan

IFCA

Julian Gregory

1. Welcome – Ian Hiscock, Independent Facilitator

2. Seafish Shellfish Working Group - Rebecca Treacy

- The Crab and Lobster Management Group (CMG) and Whelk Management Group (WMG) are currently undertaking work to identify and review current measures used to manage fisheries, identify knowledge gaps, and explore opportunities to improve the science and data behind the fishery's management.
- The key work areas include: FMP development; crustacean welfare issues; data improvement; Fisheries Industry Science Partnership research projects (FISP).
- The inaugural meeting of the Finfish Industry Advisory Group (FIAG) took place in March 2022 and was well attended by fishers, fishers' associations, regulators, scientists, recreational interests, and the wider supply chain. Future FMP sub-groups could include the bass FMP, southern North Sea flatfish FMP, and Channel non-quota demersal fisheries FMP.
- Seafish will have a phased stakeholder engagement process and will engage with industry in a number of ways including the Seafish website, shellfish working groups, external sharing sites, workshops, external meetings e.g., RFG meetings and mailing lists.
- In terms of FMP implementation, an Annual Plan will be produced each year by the Shellfish Industry Advisory Group (SIAG) setting out priorities and actions/activities that will be progressed during the coming year. An annual monitoring report is produced at the end of each year to report on progress.
- June Mummery and Paul Lines raised the issues of Crustacean die offs on the North East coastline, as well as concerns surrounding dredging, and the affects of it spreading down to the East coast, in particular the Wash. Seafish encouraged attendance of the Shellfish Working Groups to discuss further and raise concerns.

3. Bass Fisheries Management Plans – Policy Lab

The presentation contains more detail:



Policy Lab_RFG
presentation_new.pdf

If you would like to take part in the development of the bass FMP please complete the form: tinyurl.com/seabassFMP.

- Johnny French asked how long this process will take, due to lack of diversity in fishing opportunities in 4c, particularly by the Thames. Bass is a very important commercial species that needs to be prioritised. Policy lab explained the steps that are outlined in the presentation attached.
- Phil McBryde (Defra) recognises the challenges in fishing opportunities in East coast but explained that we are currently fishing within ICES advise range, and those limits are placed to ensure bass isn't targeted and that we do not regress to 2015 stocks where Bass were struggling. We can only currently be guided by the evidence that we have available.
- Fran French asked if there has been much research through the spring fishery of Bass as this is very important with understanding what is around.
- Phil McBryde responded by saying that there is body of evidence being put together that is being fed into the FMP for different elements of Bass and life cycle. 21st May – higher

bycatch limits that people can fish against; – Bass isn't a quota species, it is a bycatch species.

- Questions raised about pressures Bass are facing through illegal fishing. Justin Rowley responded by explaining the extensive work which is being conducted around illegal fishing from commercial/recreational fishers, which has been supported by EIFCA/KEIFCA.
- Multiple comments from multiple fishers asked about drift netting, and how it is the most effective method of fishing for Bass.
- Policy Lab commented that the ports chosen to have been fed by the first stage of research but that these are not set in stone. Suggestions are welcome for additional ports.
- Questions surrounding the uplift in Bass bycatch allowance, fishers have said it does not correlate to the number of fish on the grounds. Phil McBryde (Defra) responded by stating that the 5% bycatch cannot change this year as it has been negotiated with the EU as a shared stock. The reason it is placed at that percentage is to ensure Bass does not become a targeted species.

To summarise industries' main concerns:

- Speed at which changes are being made to Bass and the Bass FMP
- Bycatch allowance of Bass
- Lack of diversity in fishing in 4c; allowance for more Bass would help alleviate those pressures
- Calls for regional management of Bass

4. Development of scientific projects – Jim Ellis, Cefas

There have been scientific problems that have been raised and highlighted within 4C:

- Sole and population estimates: The North Sea stock of sole will be subject to new benchmark assessment from ICES 2014. Cefas and Dutch colleagues are leading on the assessment, and CEFAS are planning to work with Dutch colleagues to get available data sets. The aim is to get a small fish survey of the Thames up and running, and this will provide improved data of sole.
- Shellfish issues: Razor Clams, regarding the invasive species, and potentially looking at trying to get the MLS lowered for the invasive species to allow a targeted fishery.
- Spurdog: Conversations ongoing with DEFRA. The benchmarked assessment of Spurdog last year was one of the most robust assessments of elasmobranchs. The stock is still depleted but the assessment demonstrated that the stock is increasing. Fishers are reporting increased catches and improved numbers in assessments. In the not-too-distant future the standard advice approach may provide landings advice. There is evidence to demonstrate that there is a strong relationship between recruitment and population growth. Minimising mortality on that side of the stock should allow populations to improve. Any questions that Cefas can help and try to address, they will.
 - Questions from fishers regarding the increase in Spurdog in relationship to Cod: is there predator/prey relationships here? Jim Ellis stated that in stomach content of Spurdog, they do not see juvenile Cod.
- Thornback Ray: Paul Gilson raised the question about Thornback Rays coming further into shore, including brackish waters, to feed on Green Crab, however bait diggers and collectors

can't find any Green Crab. Why are the Rays there? What is their food source? Climate change was given as a possible reason for seeing range shifts.

- Robert Mole spoke about the use of drift nets to catch Bass as being a lot more effective, due to the lack of Spurdog bycatch within them. Paul Lines and June Mummery also mentioned they have taken this to Defra, asking for a dispensation in drift nets due to lines not being feasible.
- Fishers were encouraged to fill out the Bass Fisheries Management Plan survey and have their say on methods that would be favourable.
- During conversations surrounding netting, fishers also described how gillnets under two inches were banned in the Sprat fishery, and fishers questioned as to why this decision was made without consultation, there is concerned this will end the small vessel sprat fishery.

Fishers are being encouraged to consider questions or subjects for scientific projects, for which the Regional Fisheries Groups can assist in getting these projects running.

5. Marine Protected Area Byelaws – Charlie Wiseman and Nick Greenwood

- We are in a biodiversity crisis; the Government has recognised biodiversity recovery as a priority. We know and understand that fishers rely on this and care about marine ecosystems to support their work/business.
- Key aims are looking at whether activity has negative effect on protected features. We only have interest in restricting or stopping activities that are negatively impacting on the marine environment and protected features.
- June Mummery asked about building windfarms in the area where fishing has historically taken place. Nick Greenwood responded: windfarms have been seen to be compatible with what dogger bank wants to achieve, bottom trawling is not seen as compatible.
- Robert Mole asked whether environments are surveyed before and after MPAs are implemented, to demonstrate the effectiveness of them. Nick Greenwood responded: It depends on what you're protecting and why. IFCAs will look at what's there, working closely with Natural England, who advise whether there are favourable conditions, and if it is providing ecosystem services it needs to maintain/improve to a healthy state. This is an extremely expensive method, with taxpayers' money which is up against other priorities. If you're looking to demonstrate that an area is capable to be fished, we would be open to receiving this information.
- Paul Gilson questioned the effectiveness of MPAs, as they are seeing fish declines on the East coast, noting how wind farms are increasing in prevalence.
- Questions were aimed at EIFCA from Wayne Brewster about Marine Protected Areas and fisheries closures. Julian Gregory responded by explaining that MPAs are a complex issue. IFCA don't decide where an MPA will be, IFCA control fisheries management within those areas and within the 6nm limit.
- Wayne Brewster questioned stakeholder engagement within their fishing grounds and MPAs. Julian Gregory responded by saying that EIFCA put lots of resources in stakeholder engagement, but sometimes environmental pressures take precedence.
- Charlie Wiseman presented on Marine Protected Area Byelaws – presentation is attached below.

4C Marine Protected Area presentation:



South East 4.c.
Presentation.pdf

6. Quota Presentation – Katie James



IVc presentation May
2022.pdf

7. Fisheries and Seafood Scheme – Thamy Duffield

[Fisheries and Seafood Scheme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

8. Proposed 7d Scallop closure – Hubert Gieschen

The call for evidence has now closed but was open during the time of this meeting.

9. AOB – Ian Hiscock

- June Mummery requested that expenses be considered when running the RFG meetings. This has been raised in previous meetings and as a result we now offer hybrid meetings to all attendees, with the option to either attend in-person or online. We recognise attending in person is at the cost of the attendee and will not always be centrally located conveniently to each fisher and merchant, and that should not limit the option to attend, which is why we have now offered MS Teams as an option. The next meeting, August 23rd, will be hosted virtually via MS Teams.