

Southern North Sea Non-Quota Species Fisheries Management Plan Working Group Meeting

Meeting Two

Online MS Teams 9-10am 8th November 2023

The comments below were received by Working Group (WG) members during a WG meeting on November 8 2023. Due to the fast-paced nature of the Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) development process, some draft proposals may have changed at the time these minutes are published and not all comments considered prior to public consultation.

Agenda

1. Welcome and aims of meeting:

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) provided the WG with a presentation outlining the remit of the FMP and the proposed management measures. The measures discussed are proposals at this time and wider stakeholders will be able to comment on them during the public consultation stage.

2. WG discussion on the proposed southern North Sea NQS FMP management measures:

Management measures were broken down into the following themes:

2.1 Restriction of Future Flyseining Effort

- WG member commented that any standardisation in mesh size would need to be compatible with other measures already in place.
- WG member commented that vessel engine power has little bearing on catch, and any restrictions in this respect could negatively impact UK vessels.
- WG member commented that spatial measures are not an appropriate management tool due to the seasonal nature of flyseining vessels. Marine Management Organisation (MMO) responded that landing data, particularly of European Union (EU) vessels operating in the southern North Sea (SNS), suggests fishing is occurring all year around.
- WG agree there is a need to obtain more accurate data regarding catch by flyseine vessels.
- It was highlighted that data confirming catch by gear type for UK vessels would be beneficial.

2.2 Emerging Cephalopod Fisheries

- Most WG members agree that climate change appears to be having a significant impact on the fisheries and stock migration.
- WG member does not feel that there is an abundance of octopus in the SNS, as this would cause a significant threat to the scallop grounds. MMO responded that octopus were included as a species of interest to this FMP following studies by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas). There is also anecdotal data that suggests an increase in octopus numbers within 4c. MMO reiterated that there are no proposed measures specific to octopus within this FMP, other than in relation to data collection and evidence gathering.
- WG member highlighted that there needs to be evidence to support the proposed measures. MMO responded that there is insufficient data for most of the species but that, as part of this process the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) will look at evidence gaps and come up with plans as to how to address these.
- WG member raised that there are emerging squid fisheries in other areas, so this is something that should be looked at as part of this FMP.
- WG member highlighted that John Dory is included within this FMP, yet it does not appear to be regularly encountered in the SNS. MMO responded that Cefas data collection suggests that John Dory are seen in the area, albeit not caught in great numbers. However, as they are present and likely to be impacted, they need to be considered.
- WG members agree that there needs to be consistency between this FMP and the Channel FMP with regards management measures.

2.3 Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) for Elasmobranchs and Flyseine Species

- The most valuable species for recreational anglers are not included within this particular FMP. WG member raised that smoothhound would be a species of interest and would likely result in greater engagement from sea anglers if it were included within this FMP. MMO confirmed that if there is recreational interest in SNS for this species then it can still be considered.

2.4 Education, Adoption of Voluntary Guidelines and Development of Codes of Conduct

- Cefas are aware that species misidentification is an issue and agree that measures should be taken to help address this.
- WG member raised that there is historic data available within the recreational sector which could help to identify changes in species or size and stock distribution over time. Unfortunately, due to its age, a lot of this information will not be digitized. MMO highlighted that this would be useful data for the FMP Evidence plan. Cefas are currently looking into how to digitize paper information, which could possibly be of assistance.

- Species distribution is key to the FMP and Cefas are open to new ideas on how data can be collected from stakeholders and other parties.

3. Southern North Sea Engagement and Workshops

MMO provided the working group with details of the in-person engagement sessions taking place across the southern North Sea area from the 5th to the 8th of December 2023. As a result of previous feedback and comments on stakeholder fatigue, these sessions will cover both the SNS non-quota species (NQS) FMP and the Skates and Rays FMP.

- WG member highlighted that recreational anglers have not received details of the engagement sessions, mainly due to delay in government announcements regarding this FMP. MMO confirmed that the schedule of engagement sessions will be shared as soon as possible.

4. AOB

- WG member highlighted concerns about not having sight of full responses from other government consultations and would like more transparency with this FMP.

Attendance

Attendees	
Name	Organisation/ Representing
Rachel Thirlwall	Marine Management Organisation (MMO) Working Group Chair
Lynne Greeves	MMO Working Group Secretariat
Georgia Clack	MMO Fisheries Manager
Louise Straker Cox	Cefas Senior Fish Biologist (NQS Specialist)
Richard Hards	North Sea Fishermen's Organisation
Frances French	Mersea Island Fresh Catch
Hannah Rudd	Angling Trust Policy & Advocacy Manager
Apologies*	
Drew Collin	Anglo Scottish Fish Producers' Organisation
Esther Gilson	Industry representative for Whitstable fishermen
Judith Farrell	Humberside Fish Producer Organisation
Phil McBryde	Defra Non-Quota Species Policy Lead
Peter Clark	North Shields Fisher

*All working group members who could not attend the meeting were contacted separately to give feedback. This has been included within the above meeting minutes.