



Meeting Notes 21st December 2023

South West – 7efg

16:00 – 18:00 MS Teams Conference Call

Attendees

<p><u>Industry:</u> Toby Wright Lee Carter Toby Wright Nathan de Rozarieux Steve Parker Nick West Rob Adams Andrew Pascoe Dave Smith John Balls Mandy Wolfe Martyn Youell Scott Wharton Tich Preston</p>	<p><u>DEFRA:</u> Andy Carroll Lydian Osbourne</p> <p><u>CEFAS:</u> Paul Dolder</p> <p><u>IFCA:</u> Matt Mander (DSIFCA). Samantha Davis (CIFCA)</p> <p><u>MCA</u> James Gilbert</p>	<p><u>MMO:</u> Emily Theobald Anna Ni Donnchadha Courtney Inch Eleanor Johnston Chris Collins Eilidh Siegal Jacob Bestwick Alex Maydew Isobel Johnston Jonathan Brooks</p>
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1. Welcome and updates from last meeting – Emily Theobald MMO.

Emily welcomed everyone to the meeting and provided the following updates from the last meeting and other RFG engagement:

You said	We did
You wanted an increase in the skates and ray quota for area VIIIf	The skates and rays quota in areas VI & VII (excluding VIIId) was increased in October from 10t to 15t
You said help was needed with i-VMS grant applications, before the deadlines for both 6-12m vessels and under 6m vessels.	We arranged 2 drop-in sessions in Hayle to assist with I-VMS grant applications.

<p>You wanted the MCA to attend the next meeting to give clarity on the regulations that are affecting the inshore fleet</p>	<p>Engaging with the MCA to arrange attendance at the next meeting</p>
<p>You wanted breakdowns of the Lyme Bay consultation results</p>	<p>Those that requested this have been provided with an opportunity to request specific data which the Fisheries Management Team can pull from the consultation results, while allowing all respondents to remain anonymous.</p>

2. Quota Update – MMO - Jacob Bestwick

Jacob, Inshore Quota Manager, provided a quota uptake update of 2023 to date and detailed early plans for quota limits in 2024.

The presentation was recorded and can be viewed at the following link:

<https://youtu.be/KsI9moQT8Cw>

A copy of the presentation can be found here:



SW Quota presentation Dec 20

Of particular interest to industry, Jacob provided an update on Pollock. Highlighting that the proposed catch limit from 1st January will be 100kg. This stock will be bycatch only. It was confirmed that there is not a catch composition percentage on this stock.

Comments raised by industry members:

Industry would like the quota management team to be considerate of potential changes in uptake of other stocks as a result of fishers using alternative stocks to Pollack when trading out stocks for 7efg. It was suggested that stocks are not traded out as they normally are in January and instead wait to see what uptake of other stocks occur once the bycatch only designation comes in. Herring was identified as an example of a stock that may be targeted as an alternative to Pollack.

It was suggested that catch limits are increased for Sole in early 2024 (around February time) to allow increased effort at this time and to not hold much Sole for late in the year where it may not be caught.

Q: Undulate Ray quota utilisation was less than 10% but set at 200kg per trip. It was requested that this was increased from 200kg to 400kg but that was denied by the MMO. What was the rationale for this decision?

A: The decision record can be found here and on the South West/South RFG pages on .gov.uk:



Decision record - RJU_7DE - Jan 2024.

Q: An industry member asked whether there would be movement on the restriction to catch Small eyed ray?

A: Emily Theobald explained that there will be a small eyed ray quota in 7e in 2024. But this quota allocation will be for scientific allocation to look at population studies and the potential for opening or removing the non-retention policy. This is not yet available for commercial fisheries. Fishers expressed interest to participate in Small eyed ray scientific survey. Emily explained that the group would be informed if the project is going to be looking for participants.

Q: Will there be restrictions on Pollock for recreational sector? Recreational vessels can catch a significant amount of Pollack. There needs to recreational restrictions similar to what there was for Seabass.

A: Defra response:

- While the evidence base is limited, the ICES advice for pollack in area 6 and 7 notes that recreational catch is likely to be a large component of the total catch. Further work is needed to explore the potential to reduce pressure on the stock through management of the recreational fishery, underpinned by data and the best available scientific evidence.
- This is in line with our commitments under the Joint Fisheries Statement, including ensuring that recreational sea fishing is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.
- As this is a jointly managed stock with the EU, we have committed to take forward work on this important issue in the Specialised Committee on Fisheries as a matter of urgency in 2024. We will work closely with the recreational sector throughout this process.

Q: A £849k stock assessment of Pollack stock being done by private industry (Angling). Why was this not being issued to the commercial industry?

Emily Theobald responded by saying that the project mentioned was a Fisheries Industry Science Partnership (FISP) project. The purpose was necessary for stock assessment but instead they were acoustic tagging Pollack to understand movement. Angling boats were used because of the rod and line availability to catch, tag and return the fish. Commercial contacts were put forward to the project team at Plymouth University, but the selection process is not known. The project is funded for a further two years so there may be options to get commercial fishers involved. The study will feed in and be utilised when making management decisions moving forwards.

DEFRA to provide answer on why commercials were not involved.

Q: Can unused Pollack quota be carried over to 2024?

A: Pollack is a bankable stock and will be banked from 2023 into 2024. It will be allocated by the usual method.

3. James Gilbert – Principal Surveyor MCA – Q&A.

James Gilbert introduced himself, identifying himself as a Principal Surveyor for the MCA and based in the Falmouth office.

James opened the floor to questions from those on the call, acknowledging the amount of change that has come in to the under 15m commercial fishing vessel industry.

Q: Industry asked whether there was any possibility for the MCA code to be rewritten in layman's terms, stating that the current format is confusing and open to interpretation.

A: James explained that the last amendment occurred in 2021, but the next opportunity for review would be in 2028 as any changes would need to go through parliament. James encouraged fishers to contact their local MCA office and inspectors ahead of inspections for guidance as necessary to identify what sections apply to their vessel.

Q: An industry member asked for clarity on grandfather rights in relation to the requirement for a certificate of medical fitness. It was raised that last minute changes to the rollout of the certificate of medical fitness (allowing inactive fishers to delay medical certification) is unfair on compliant fishers and in some instances causing compliant fishers additional costs compared to those that have delayed.

A: James acknowledged that there is not publicly available information on what medical issues fall under the grandfather rights exemption but has provided the following links to the guidance post meeting for reference for industry members:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/min-575-ilo-work-in-fishing-convention-medical-certification-grandfather-rights>

He added that MIN 575 includes details regarding grandfather rights for existing fishermen and gaining a medical fitness certificate. The main requirements for medicals are contained in MSN 1883 Amend. 1.

Industry raised concerns that compliance with new MCA regulations is adding significant financial costs to fishers. In particular, industry have found costs of safety equipment is going up and that it is cheaper to get a new lifejacket than to get one serviced and a new canister fitted. Cost is increasing for required features since regulatory requirements have come into force.

Multiple industry members stated that they would like to see safety issues within the leisure industry being addressed and regulated.

Industry members raised concerns that MCA are failing vessels that have been operating for 20 years, causing them to make modifications that are unsafe. An example was used of Cheetah catamarans where scupper height rules is causing vessels to make modifications that make the vessels water removal ability reliant on bilge pumps and limiting their ability to get rid of water on deck.

4. Isobel Johnston – Fisheries Management Planning Team – MMO.

Isobel provided an introduction to Fisheries Management Plans (FMP) and an update on the development of the Skates and Rays FMP.

A copy of the presentation can be found here:



Skates & Rays FMP
presentation.pptx

It was explained that the FMP has been carried out over 4 phases:

Scoping phase – identify data, evidence and stakeholders. Identify issues, draft management measures.

Engagement – Two weeks of face-to-face engagement across the Channel and Southern North Sea ports as well as online meetings and surveys.

Drafting – Compile all feedback from stakeholders and use this to draft the FMP alongside scientific evidence and data. To be completed and submitted to DEFRA by February 2024.

So far it has been found that Skate and Rays stock are in good health, but slow growth and low fecundity of the species indicate sustainability needs to be ensured into the future.

The Management proposals which are being proposed are:

Short term:

Harmonised MCRS to 20cm winged or 45cm whole.

Explore maximum conservation reference size – needs further evidence.

Guidelines on handling, welfare and regulations.

Lift in prohibition of small-eyed in 7e.

Mid-term:

Implement species specific MCRS.

Establish TAC for thornback ray.

Provide ID Guidelines / workshops.

Long term:

Explore species specific TAC for other species.

- Explore spatiotemporal management options.
- Explore support for commercial markets.
- Explore support for the recreational sector.
- Explore specific areas to balance commercial and recreational need.

An industry member suggested that resources and funding should not be used for improving markets. Instead, resources should be focused on improving science. However other industry members stated that maximising value is desired and suggested that price is strongly linked to things such as good food guides.

Industry members highlighted information on survivability research which was carried out with fishers and is publicly available.

5. Offshore MPA Call for Evidence (Stage 4). Eilidh Siegal and Eleanor Johnston.

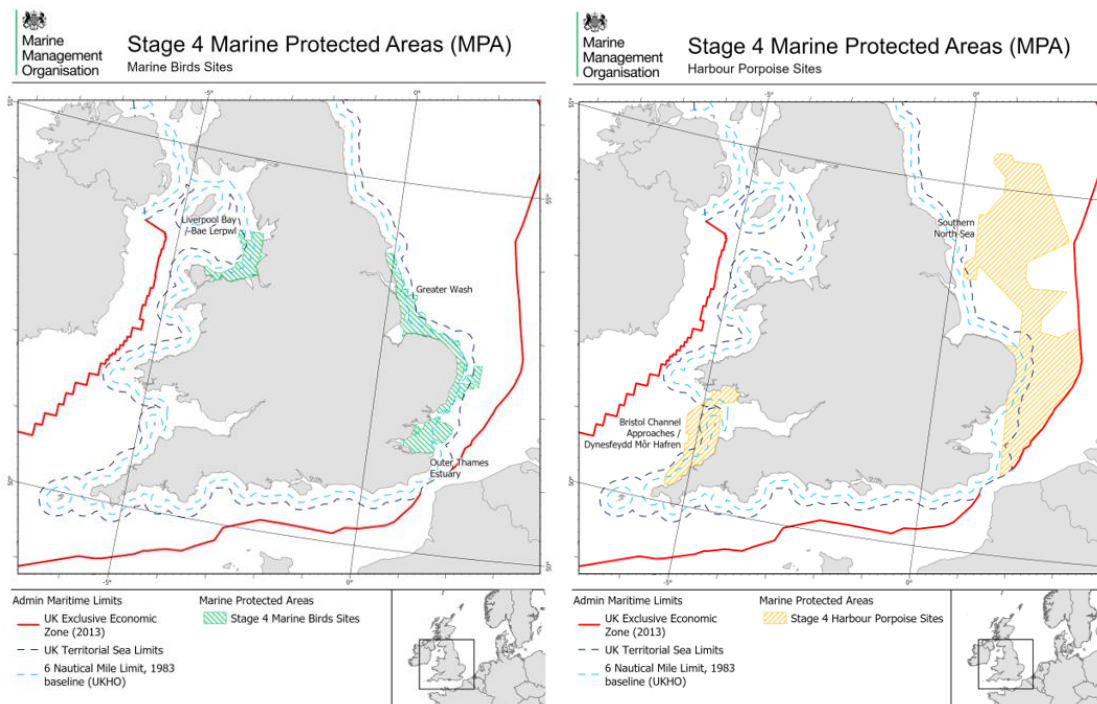
A presentation was provided by Eilidh Siegal detailing an overview of the MMO work on offshore MPA areas. It was explained that Stage 4 is addressing five MPAs designated for highly mobile species (marine birds and porpoises).

A copy of the presentation can be found here:



Offshore MPAs presentation.pptx

Of interest to this group, these areas include Bristol Channel Approaches (MPA) which is designated for harbour porpoise.



It was explained that this work is to assess the impacts of fishing in these MPAs. The MMO will be delivering on this for the areas outside 6nm and IFCA for areas within 6nm.

The MMO has launched a call for evidence on the pressures of interest such as bycatch in gear or removal of prey species. The MMO is also seeking feedback on the proposed management options which includes spatial or seasonal closures, fishing effort reductions, or mitigation measures.

The Stage 4 call for evidence is live and fishers can provide consultation responses online at the following survey:

[Call for evidence – Stage 4 fishing in marine protected areas - Defra - Citizen Space](#)

Alternatively, fishers can provide responses by emailing conservation@marinemanagement.org.uk or by calling 0300 123 1032.

Industry members raised ongoing issues of seal, dolphin and tuna populations impact on fisheries and asked whether this would be considered as part of this work. It was explained that it was not within the remit of this specific work but would be raised as a discussion point with the IFCA if there are sites where these seals are identified features.

Emily Theobald explained that there is a partnered project between the MMO and Oxford university to study the impact of seal depredation on fishers. This has been conducted by interviews with fishers. It is expected that there will be further workshops in 2024.

Q: An industry member asked how will IFCA's be assessing these site assessments.

A: CIFCA – Samantha Davis explained that IFCA's are currently reviewing existing evidence but will be coming out to fishers for engagement in the new year for the inside of 6nm areas.

6. Chris Collins – 7d and 7e Scallop Closure – Fisheries Management Team MMO.

Chris provided a presentation on the proposed closure for King Scallop.

A copy of the presentation can be found here:



Scallop closure & crawfish presentatic

The closure for King Scallop dredge fishery is being considered following consultation with UK Fisheries Administrations following scientific advice from CEFAS which indicates 7d and Lyme Bay (7e) stocks have been exploited close to and above sustainable rates for past 6 years.

It has been identified that protection during summer months is most likely to deliver the most benefit.

The proposed closure options for 7d are:

15th May to 30th Sep 2024.

1st July to 30th Sep 2024 (this is the same period as 2023).

The proposed closure options for 7e are:

Lyme Bay (7e) closure aligned to 7d closure.

No closure.

The closure would be enacted though a licence condition and apply to all UK and EU vessels >10m vessels in 7d and all >12m in 7e.

Industry member raised concern for the possibility of displacement of fishing effort from the visiting scallop fleet from 7d into rest of 7e outside of Lyme Bay during the closure period. The

industry member stated that the inshore fleet has already been impacted from increased scallop effort and that the 7d fishing effort is largely made up of Scottish registered vessels.

Q: Another industry member raised that they were unhappy that some <15m vessels were included in the proposed closure and believe the closure measures to scalloping should be applied by classification of <15m and over 15m. They would like to know what impact the two fleets' classifications are having on stocks.

A: Chris recommends that other industry members read evidence document available on consultation page. It was stated that <15m vessels had previously been excluded from the closure in Bay de Seine. This provided fishing opportunities where it was not economically viable previously when they cannot fish there at the same time due to it not being economically viable.

Chris asked for these and any other comments to be submitted in the formal consultation where they will all be reviewed in detail and used for the consideration of the closure options. The online consultation which can be found at the link below:

[ICES area 7d and Lyme Bay king scallop dredge fishery closure proposals summer 2024 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/ices-area-7d-and-lyme-bay-king-scallop-dredge-fishery-closure-proposals-summer-2024)

The consultation will be open until midnight on 13th of February 2023.

7. Chris Collins – Crawfish Seasonal Closure – Fisheries Management Team MMO.

Chris provided a presentation update on the Crawfish seasonal closure and the increase in the Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS).

A copy of the presentation can be found here:



Scallop closure & crawfish presentatic

As background on the changes in this fishery, in 2012 landings were at 19 tonnes rising to 55 tonnes in 2022. The number of vessels actively fishing for Crawfish increased from 10-15 in the early 2000's, up to over 50 in 2021.

On industry request, a workshop was held in October 2023 to discuss the issue and proposed management measures.

Management measures were heavily supported by industry and had over 40 consultation responses.

On 1st January 2024 the MCRS in area 7 will increase from 95mm to 110mm.

A closure of the fishery will take place from 5th February 2024 to 30th April 2024. For all UK and EU vessels in area 7. This closure will be by way of prohibiting retention, storing, and landing of Crawfish in English waters for all gear types.

A further workshop to be held in February 2024 to look at effort management which was raised by industry in consultations and previous workshops.

Q: An industry member raised disappointment that the closure was only until the end of April. It was said that the closure is needed to be in place until the end of May (when hens release eggs and most prone to scrubbing). Up until the last few years Crawfish has not been targeted during the months from October to May.

A: Chris responded by saying that the closure period was decided as a result of a balance between multiple factors to come up with the best and most acceptable option. Full details on this are available in the decision document which is available online.

Another fisher supported this comment of disappointed with the closure length of the closure. A few years ago, 90% of the active fishing stakeholders at the workshop in 2023 would have been happy with 31st October to 31st May.

Crawfish has a very high stock level and is potentially increasing; fishers want regulators to be more proactive and be keener to act to aid a growing and highly productive stock to keep it truly sustainable.

Q: Why is the closure starting from 5th February 2024? Is it because of requirement to notify EU before implementation. If an earlier closure will be brought in in future years can this be communicated clearly.

A: This was due to the EU 45day notice period. Under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, notifying the EU about new measures which are likely to apply to their vessels, it has been agreed that 45 days' notice should be provided prior to new measures being applied.

Chris closed his presentation by encouraging fishers to look out for communications on the workshop that is due to be held in February 2024.

8. **AOB**

Q: Will there be changes to bass authorisations? Industry member stated that they were unhappy to be discarding large quantities of dead bycatch as they are having to discard more than they can retain.

A: Answer by Emily Theobald. Review of the domestic bass authorisations and is a short terms objective of the Bass FMP which has now been published. The published Seabass FMP is available online: [Bass fisheries management plan \(FMP\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/bass-fisheries-management-plan)

Q: Can a map of fisheries regulations (MMO, IFCA) be produced to make accessing regional fisheries rules easier. Kingfisher has a mapping site that could be enhanced to include gear requirements.

A: Emily Theobald. Agreed that a tool such as this could be of value. This was noted by Regional Fisheries Team and will be considered for as an option for making regulation more accessible to fishers.

Q: When will questions in this meeting be answered?

A: Emily Theobald. Questions will be answered within 2 weeks with the draft meeting notes for feedback, comments and questions from industry. Then agreed and finalised minutes will be published online: [Regional Fisheries Groups - South West 7efg - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/regional-fisheries-groups-south-west)

Q: What is going to happen to the Bluefin Tuna fishery? Fishers estimate there are at least 10,000 fish in channel at any time in the season, which will be consuming a significant quantity of other stocks.

A: Emily Theobald: The fishery opened in 2023 for 39 tons to 10 vessels. It is looking likely that this quota allocation will not change for next year, and the detail of the commercial fishery is yet to be confirmed. The trial has gone well and will likely be repeated next year.

A statutory instrument will be introduced next year to allow a recreational fishery by application.

The meeting was concluded at 18:22.

Thank you for attending this Regional Fisheries Group meeting. If you would like comment on these or previous minutes, be added to this groups contact list or contribute in any other way please contact the MMO Regional fisheries Mailbox: regionalfisheriesgroups@marinemanagement.org.uk. Or find out more at the Regional Fisheries Groups webpage: [Regional Fisheries Groups - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/regional-fisheries-groups)