

Skates and Rays Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) Working Group Meeting

Meeting Two

Online MS Teams 2 November 2023

The comments below were received by Working Group (WG) members during a WG meeting on November 2 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. Actions from October meeting:

- Working Group Terms of Reference (ToR): now agreed, ***AP closed***.
- FMP Scope and issues: no further comments, ***AP closed***
- MMO FMP Engagement plans: covered later in this meeting, ***AP closed***
- Any key contacts, either as part of WG or workshops?: covered in this meeting, ***AP ongoing***

2. WG Terms of Reference

No further comments on ToR, therefore now agreed.

3. MMO Engagement plans update

AM confirmed dates and locations of the Channel and Southern North Sea engagement events. MMO are currently undertaking our own stakeholder analysis to ensure we are engaging with the right people, but please circulate the dates/locations with others.

AM also confirmed that MMO will be undertaking online sessions, and recreational sessions with the Angling Trust.

4. Draft management recommendations and evidence gaps

Short, mid and long-term measures/evidence gaps were shared with the WG via presentation slides, comments are captured below (A – comments on short term recommendations, B - mid-term comments, C - long-term comments).

A) Short term measures/evidence gaps

- Good that we have something to discuss at this meeting. There is a tension/conflict between Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) measurements and enforceability for instance some species have small wings and large bodies, and vice versa (WG member).
 - AM – Aim is to harmonise, then longer term introduce more species-specific MCRS. This is initial measure to bring up to standard, also harmonisation within an IFCA area.
 - (WG member provided link to Angling Trust MCRS guidelines [Minimum Conservation Reference Sizes \(MCRSs\) - Angling Trust](#))
- Regarding landing sizes, will this impact on discarded stock? (WG member).
 - AM - Anything below 20cm is not being picked up due to gear selectivity, and whilst we feel this is an evidence gap, we understand this is not a big issue; we will however consider this.
- Defra have stated any discussion with EU on TAC shares may take some time (WG member).
- Pointed out that undulate species is measured from nose to tail (WG member).
- There are a lot of good wins if they can be implemented. Feedback from fishers is they understand the need for balance, but don't want a maximum size restriction. Also, will this lead to large dead fish being discarded? This measure appears to be a few years away from fruition/implementation, therefore perhaps this is not a deliverable? (WG member).
- Regarding the review of restriction on small-eyed ray landings, is this based on actual data or anecdotal? If anecdotal, it would be interesting to see if it aligns across the whole area? Would like to see the data (WG member).
 - AM – There is a precedent with reviewing the restriction on small-eyed ray landings, in that other areas (i.e. Bristol Channel) were also under the prohibition, but this was lifted due to evidence from fishers. Also important to note that these are recommendations and will be for Defra to implement. It is possible this recommendation could be moved back to a mid/long term recommendation. Also to be noted that any measures need to be implemented gradually and sensibly. Point around large fish and high discard survival
 - AM – Information comes from various sources, including IFCA, MMO, fisheries - [MMO1297 Smalleyed ray Technical report 1 .pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)
- Some positives, but some concerns regarding the MCRS - i.e. the measurements don't appear to be anatomically accurate? Where does the data come from? (WG member)
 - AM – The sizes are based on IFCA reference sizes
- Regarding measures 3 and 4 on handling and ID guidelines, the Shark Trust have this data, and will be happy to share (WG member) (*link provided in meeting chat [Fisheries Advisories | The Shark Trust](#)*)

- The MCRS measurement seems a little under maturity, this measurement can be variable between species, e.g. blonde ray, and can differ between male/female (WG member).
- Regarding maximum landing size, this is essential; however it's not perfect, would like to see evidence that it can be implemented in non-selective fisheries, i.e. that they have survived 3 months later (WG member).
- Guidelines on regulations are needed, in particular in relation to wing/body size. With regards to reviewing the restriction on small-eyed ray landings, there is a need for caution, is the recorded abundance more localised rather than across the whole area? Has the stock been assessed on class size as well as abundance? Anecdotal evidence of abundance of small fish (WG member).
- Regarding the MCRS measurements – neither IFCA have many cuckoo rays, they have a different anatomical shape which may negate the universal MCRS (WG member).
 - AM – The recommendations can be viewed as a blunt tool at the beginning to bring all marine zones up to the same standard of management, with a gradual progression to being species-specific. Also need to recognise there are socio-economic issues to consider, so we cannot bring in species specific MCRS without consultation
- Is there much data on post release mortality? (WG member).
 - AM – There is some data and literature available (i.e. literature review), but this is also a significant evidence gap that will be explored through the FMP.
- Regarding the MCRS mid to long term evidence requirements, IFCA hold much of the relevant data, so this could potentially move forward to a short-term recommendation? (WG member).
 - AM - Potentially, but there will still be a requirement to gather social and economic data to understand the impacts.

B) Mid-term measures/evidence gaps

- Why has the thornback ray been identified ahead of other species at this stage? Agreed that species-specific TACs are needed (WG member).
 - AM – Thornback ray is the primary commercial species, with reported choke caused by localised abundance of thornback in 4.c which leads fishers unable to land blonde ray later in the season.
- Are there any other surveys on transient nature of the species? Useful to understand spatial behaviour (WG member).
 - AM – This is an evidence gap.
 - (WG member provided link to Solent Tagging project [Angling for Sustainability - Angling Trust](#))
- TACs are not within the gift of FMPs, these are agreed via UK/EU discussion, therefore the FMP should make it clear this is an aspirational measure (WG member).
 - AM – Agreed, this is a recommendation through the FMP.

- Regarding stock specific thornback ray TAC, need to be cautious – UK has a certain quite low proportion, and any change to quota share between two states (UK/EU?) could take some time (WG member).
 - AM – Agreed this might need to be pushed into long term, but we need to be ambitious, so we have made the recommendation.

C) Long term measures/evidence gaps

- Any long-term intent to incentivise rod and line? (WG member)
- Skerries Angling Zone Good Practice It is a gentlemen's agreement currently, it is a code of conduct, it restricts numbers of rays caught by angler, also restricts vessel size and long lines – introduction of i-vms data will allow for better understanding of how commercial vessels use the site – the overall aim is to ensure a good balance of recreational/commercial use of the fishery (WG member).
- Regarding spatio-temporal measures – fishers are saying that we are '*taking stuff away*', so it's important to offer something in return (WG member).
 - AM – Acknowledged, ultimately the measures are aimed at protecting the fishery
- This goes over people's heads (WG member).
- AM – It's good this is being raised before engagement next month – the species exhibits site fidelity, so we need to look into this.
- Need to consider spatial squeeze within the Southern North Sea. Are we benefitting from current network of site closures? If so, this needs to be highlighted as it will help us to take fishermen with us moving forward (WG member).
- The effect of aggregate extraction is often overlooked, so there should be evidence gathering on this matter (WG member).
- Regarding the poster – undulate is no longer a bycatch fishery – this is now a targeted fishery since the enhanced TAC – bycatch should now be removed from wording (WG member).
 - AM - Not sure if undulate is a target fishery, more the 200kg trip bycatch limit? Need to investigate this but will remove from poster.
- Lots of broad long-term aspirations – Cornwall engagement will be difficult, in particular if no mention of common skate. This is similar to spurdog anecdotal evidence – there is pressure to consider a limited fishery, west part of 7e is important (WG member).
 - AM – Agreed, common blue skate abundance in western 7.e is an evidence gap that can be picked up.
- Ambitious aims for evidence requirements– how will this be funded? Clear criteria for filling evidence gaps, and clear link to socio- economic value (WG member).
- Most valuable is the catch and release sector – need to consider recreational sector. There is a lesson to be learned from undulate ray example, when TAC was increased it became a targeted fishery. The fishery has now gone, due to the TAC increase. There is a need to avoid yo-yo fisheries (WG member).

- Regarding mid/long term gaps – we are seeing common blue skate in the FMP area; we need something in mid to long term evidence gaps to understand what is happening with stock size? (WG member).
- Regarding localised undulates, never seen one, there appears to be a cut off around Beachy Head (WG member).

AM – This is exactly the information we need, as we are looking at smaller spatial areas to understand why rays are there.

Next steps

- Please email AM/MQ with any more comments on the draft recommendations
- AM will circulate a Doodle poll for December meeting, it is planned to be held during w/c 11 December, i.e. the week following Southern North Sea engagements.
- Will the Plymouth event be a workshop or drop-in session, will there be an agenda? (WG member).
 - AM – It will be a structured workshop and we will provide further details
 - Can the WG circulate the draft measures? (WG member).AM - No, it is just a draft, the measures can be discussed but not circulated.
- Will there be a simplified version available for circulation? (WG member).
 - AM – The draft measures need to be checked internally; however, we will take this away and consider if a simplified version can be made available.

Action Points

Who	Action	By
Alex Maydew	Consider if a simplified version of draft measures can be circulated	10/11/2023
ALL	Provide contact details for potential interested parties to attend upcoming coastal engagement events	10/11/2023

Attendees:

Alex Maydew (chair)	MMO Fisheries Management Plans Team
Mark Qureshi (minutes)	MMO Fisheries Management Plans Team

Graham Furness	Sussex IFCA (Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority)
Freya Sandison	Cornwall IFCA
George Balchin	Conservation and Research Manager, Sussex IFCA
Mat Mander	Devon and Severn IFCA
Will Wright	Chief Officer, Kent and Essex IFCA
Edward Baker	Plymouth Fishing and Seafood Association
Harry Owen	Western Fish Producers Organisation
Judith Farrell	Humberside Fish Producers Organisation
Grant Jones	Angling Trust
Hannah Rudd	Policy & Advocacy Manager, Angling Trust
Rui Vieira	Cefas
Zachory Radford	Cefas
Jim Ellis	Cefas
Dale Rodmell	Chief Executive, Eastern England Fish Producers Organisation
Esther Gilson	Kent and Essex IFCA (Board)
Richard Hards	Fisherman
Johnny French	Fisherman
Jack Renwick	The Shark Trust
Allison Atterborne	Senior Fisheries Biologist, Natural England
Martyn Youell	Waterdance (trawlers, netters, and potters)
Simon Thomas	Researcher