

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

Meeting Three

Online MS Teams 15 December 2023

The comments below were received by Working Group (WG) members during a WG meeting on December 15 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. Recap

AM provided a recap on Skates and Rays FMP background, including issues and proposed measures. AM then provided feedback on the proposed FMP measures, gained from the recent engagement events in November and December. AM focussed on the feedback which had caused most discussion.

2. Engagement feedback

Maximum Conservation Reference Size

AM - Following the feedback on this measure and considering the split between commercial and recreational sectors, FMP team are considering two options but are very much open to input and further options from the WG.

- 1) Push it back to mid-term measure, gather further evidence and reconsult specifically with stakeholders on the outcomes of any work – or:
- 2) Introduce it as a voluntary measure.

Or a combination of both, but reiterated that we are open to suggestions.

AM opened floor to WG:

- Working Group (WG) member questioned option 1) - will there be any rays left by then if it is pushed back?
- WG member queried option 2) voluntary – what is the incentive? Until the commercial market value is increased it is important to protect recreational sector.
- WG member highlighted that using slot sizes would protect females.
- WG member noted that large females are often scrawny and spent, therefore potentially not as commercially valuable?
- WG member disagreed that rays have low commercial value, and that there needs to be commercial/recreational balance. They noted that all agree with

MCRS, but maximum size would penalise fishermen. WG member also highlighted that a large ray has had several generations to reproduce.

- WG member suggested that both options are balanced measures, and can both be implemented? Perhaps incentivise engagement.
- WG member highlighted it would need both sectors' buy in.
- WG member advised that if we don't set an upper limit until it's too late, it will take decades to recover the recreational sector. Large undulates have already disappeared from recreational catches.
- WG member raised concerns that maximum sizes will put fishermen out of work.
- WG member suggested introducing the measure while gathering data, it doesn't need to be mutually exclusive. Also stated that other FMPs have been non-committal, however this FMP has some good ideas.
- WG member suggested that maximum size would cause problems for commercial fishermen; currently commercial fishermen are scraping the barrel. Also, there is a need to stop recreational anglers removing tails of species, as observed at eastern end of Channel.

AM –

- 1) The tail-removing issue could be addressed via handling guidelines.
 - 2) Finding balance and working together to get the evidence – priority in FMP short term
- WG member emphasised that any measures need to be enforced; regarding tails being removed – is it recreational anglers? Sting ray is the only species where tail is removed when it is tangled in net.
 - WG member also highlighted the precautionary principle and suggested that we could put the measure in place then collect data.
 - WG member asked whether this measure would lead to an increase in discards?

AM – Advised we need evidence on survivability.

Conclusion: WG agreed to retain measure, but on the basis of additional priority scientific evidence being collected within short-term to understand A) if maximum measures are suitable for skate and ray fisheries, and B) if appropriate, what these measures look like (i.e. sizes). **ACTION:** AM to update and make clear in FMP that measure is dependent on additional scientific work.

Reviewing the prohibition on small-eyed ray in 7e

AM advised that a small amount of quota is available in the sentinel scientific fishery, which is a sensible approach; we will look at what evidence it gathers. Raised awareness of written record, which can be accessed here:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65731c0c33b7f2000db720f1/eu-uk-written-record-fisheries-consultation-2024.pdf>

- WG member stated this is a good starting point, thanks to MMO/Defra. There is currently 2-3 tonnes TAC undulate in 7d, and the data is being used by Cefas.

Spatiotemporal management

AM – Conflicting feedback again, with concerns around spatial squeeze and shifting baselines of areas and times that are important to skates and rays. Regarding spatial fidelity, this needs more work before we make decisions; it is still an evidence gap.

- WG member raised concern regarding offshore wind farm cable routes – few fish are seen within windfarms. This needs more study.
 - AM – This has been raised in area 4b/c, in particular electro-magnetic frequency issues. Something for the FMP evidence to pick up on.
- WG member highlighted there is a lot of work to implement. Perhaps a global review / desktop study on the impacts of offshore wind farms in other countries.
- WG member advised this measure would be a recreational concern as well as commercial; rays don't travel far, undulate is an example. As a result, the sub-species are becoming genetically distinct, for example blue skate; there are differences between Scottish and English blue skate. Would rather see a balanced fishery rather than intense measures.
- WG member highlighted that rays do aggregate to some degree, therefore wary of areas being closed. Landings would reduce – if it is clear it is juvenile etc that is fine, but need to be careful.
 - AM – Agreed we need to understand what is going on.
- WG member mentioned Cefas are now reviving tagging studies, and some SKR species are part of this study. Cefas are also collecting genetic studies. It is expensive but useful. Also, Cefas have teams looking at offshore wind farm impacts, but that is a longer-term timescale.
- WG member said rays can move around; would prefer to see a focus on less fishing activity over a larger area.
- WG member suggested that a potential project would be to tap into recreational and commercial knowledge.
- WG member highlighted the species moves all the time, from shore to offshore. Major storms can ruin years of experience and knowledge.
- WG member suggested that due to MCZs there will be trawler exclusion areas – e.g. Lyme Bay within the next 12-18 months.
 - AM – Agreed we will aim to explore effectiveness of already protected areas.
 - AM – Will consider using an example to demonstrate that spatial temporal measures can work.

AM – asked the WG for an indication as to whether the measure should be retained. No objections from the WG.

Conclusion: WG agreed on pathway of collection of specific site/seasonal evidence prior to any management being considered.

Recreational/commercial balance

The WG briefly discussed the Skerries Angling zone as an example.

Next steps

AM confirmed that he would be taking parental leave following Christmas, returning in early March. Nick French with MQ supporting will be picking up lead of FMP. Thanked everyone for their valuable input against tight timelines.

- MMO FMP team aim to share Stakeholder record of engagement and draft FMP with WG. The Draft FMP to be submitted to Defra by 09/02/24.
- Next meeting W/C 22/01/24 to allow WG to provide initial comments to MMO.

MEETING CLOSED

Attendees:

Alex Maydew (chair)	MMO Fisheries Management Plans Team
Mark Qureshi (minutes)	MMO Fisheries Management Plans Team
Catriona New	MMO Fisheries Management Plans Team
Julie Urquhart	CCRI
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
Allison Atterborne	Natural England
Richard Stride	Fisherman/Fishing Association
Grant Jones	Angling Trust
Hannah Rudd	Policy & Advocacy Manager, Angling Trust
Rui Vieira	Cefas
Neil Witney	Newhaven Fisherman
Dale Rodmell	Chief Executive, Eastern England Fish Producers Organisation
Esther Gilson	Whitstable Fishermen's Association
Jack Renwick	The Shark Trust
Martyn Youell	Waterdance (trawlers, netters, and potters)