

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

## **Meeting Four**

**Online MS Teams 25 January 2024**

The comments below were received by Working Group (WG) members during a WG meeting on January 25 2024. 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. Introduction**

- MMO team introductions to those on the call - Mark Qureshi, Fisheries Manager; Nicholas French, Principal Fisheries Manager; Catriona New, Fisheries Officer and Daniel Bush, Project Delivery Lead.
- MQ discussed this this being the final WG meeting prior to the FMP submission to Defra. We are currently unable to share a copy of the draft FMP and Record of Stakeholder Engagement due to them being in internal review. Instead, the FMP will be shared directly in this meeting.
- Thanks to all members for their input and advice so far.

*MQ provided a summary of Skates and Rays FMP process to date.*

#### **Key dates:**

- The draft FMP to be submitted to Defra by 9 February for quality assurance.
- Final FMP submission to Defra in March 2024.
- Public consultation likely during summer 2024.
- Final FMP publication December 2024.

MQ emphasised that these plans may be subject to change. No questions posed to MQ.

#### **2. Draft FMP run-through**

*NF walked through the structure of the draft FMP.*

Overall, the structure of the FMP is consistent/similar with the published Channel FMP.

- WG member highlighted that different ICES areas can have different stock assessments for the same species and requested that these differences are made clear in the FMP.

- NF agreed. Currently, the FMP breaks down the species list into stocks assessed by ICES and data limited stocks with no assessment.
- WG member responded that it is hard to keep track of species stock status when they are presented on different pages. This is a bigger FMP so there are differences in the stock assessments depending on the area you are in.
- NF agreed. Considered how to make this clearer, either by presenting on a species basis or there is potential to include a summary table above to show whether stocks are assessed or not. Gentle reminder that the FMP structure is steered by Defra's requirements for publication.
- There was a discussion regarding the ICES category stock advice criteria, WG member clarified the criteria.
- NF highlighted that the management measures discussed are not set in stone and are up for change. We need to assess whether they can be effectively implemented. The details discussed here may be slightly different to what goes out for public consultation, which can also result in significant changes. Any stakeholder comments are appreciated to help this development.
- WG member queried whether ICES area 7F will be included?
  - NF responded that 7F will not be included in the scope of this FMP, 7F falls under the Celtic FMP. WG member confirmed this.
  - WG member asked whether there is an intention to harmonise measures between FMPs for the same species.
  - NF confirmed this is something we are considering.

### **Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS)**

- WG member questioned how the MCRS can be applied to winged individuals?
  - NF responded that there will be a separate MCRS for winged and whole catch. Kent and Essex IFCA and Southern IFCA already have this as practice. We would be looking to adopt this over the whole FMP area. NF acknowledged the MCRS may be too small for thornback and blonde rays. There is ambition to make these species-specific in the longer term.
- WG member reiterated, if increasing the MCRS, make it species-specific quickly. They suggested the possibility of seasonal closures on landing purse bearing, large females (e.g., berried lobster).

### **Maximum Conservation Reference Size (MaxCRS)**

- NF highlighted that this is unlikely to be effective if it is set too high, with the need to look at the economic benefit to fishers who benefit from larger skates and rays. It may be best to set the MCRS higher and then manage it using technical measures, this may need trialling.

- WG member concerned that having a MaxCRS will result in good fish being thrown back to keep people happy. Larger individuals are more valuable. Would rather see an increase in the MCRS and no MaxCRS.
  - NF agreed, will need further consideration. It is about deciding what will work best for the stock. Larger MCRS may be more palatable.
- WG member questioned whether this should be a medium-term measure, allowing it to be investigated first?
  - NF agreed it would make sense to build the evidence base first, we can look at the current wording and commitment around this measure.
  - WG member supported the previous query. Fish and chip shops are tied to 'big players' that aren't local or English-caught fish, so others are not able to supply to them.
  - WG member showed interested in the previous point and would be happy to look at the data for this. This may allow for less effort and more financial return than picking up lots of smaller fish. Low prices have been seen with merchants being oversupplied. It would be better to increase MCRS so that people targeting fish more selectively can attract a good value for a lower take. Welcomed the discussion.
- WG member pointed out they had run into issues with the maximum landing sizes on dogfish as there is no value in smaller sizes. Therefore, supported raising the MCRS if it removed the need for a maximum landing size.
- NF highlighted these are good points and are things we will try to work on. These are points that may be changed and questioned by the time of public consultation.

## **Reviewing the prohibition on small-eyed ray in 7e**

UK and EU have expressed an ambition for a small-eyed ray fishery to be re-opened as a scientific fishery.

- NF caveated - we are looking to get Defra's steer on this measure to make sure it is in tune with what they are doing. This is linked to EU and UK negotiations.
- WG member questioned if a particular footnote that was referenced in the document had been published?
  - NF advised he would check if the referenced reports were publicly available document. Links below:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1118791/MMO1297\\_Smalleyed\\_ray\\_Technical\\_report\\_1\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1118791/MMO1297_Smalleyed_ray_Technical_report_1_.pdf)

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

- Regarding the scientific fishery, WG member queried whether there is a plan for how the UK quota can be used?
  - NF responded that would sit with Defra policy leads. He will raise these queries.
- WG member asked what is the timeframe of a medium-term measure?
  - NF suggested that this could be between 2 and 6 years. This is something that Defra would provide guidance on.
  - WG member suggested this is brought forward as a short-term goal (0-2 years) to align with planned data collection work occurring this year.
- WG member followed up on a previous query, inviting the individual to get in touch with Cefas for further details – To discuss offline.

### **Species-specific Total Allowable Catch (TACs)**

NF highlighted that there is an intent to move away from a joint TAC.

- WG member questioned how to get ICES to do more work on the individual species?
  - NF responded that it is about information and evidence gathering. ICES respond to information it is provided. We will also be working with Cefas to feed the system with evidence.
  - WG member reiterated NF point. Given the nature of these species and stocks, we may have to look more at the medium term opposed to short-term. This work is all about collaboration.

### **3. Closing remarks**

- WG member questioned whether the WG will get sight of the plan to make comment after this meeting as this was a very quick run through?
- WG member highlighted that sharing the document will make the consultation process smoother so would be good to see.
  - NF will seek advice from Defra regarding engagement with the WG moving forward, including any further sight of the draft plan - **Action**

On behalf of the MMO FMP team, NF thanked the WG members for their input into this FMP and looks forward to future engagements.

**MEETING CLOSED**

**Attendance**

Nicholas French (chair)	MMO Fisheries Management Plans Team
Mark Qureshi	MMO Fisheries Management Plans Team
Catriona New (minutes)	MMO Fisheries Management Plans Team
Daniel Bush	MMO Fisheries Management Plans Team
Fran French	Mersea Fishermen's Association
Neil Witney	Newhaven Fisherman
Jack Renwick	The Shark Trust
Allison Atterbourne	Senior Fisheries Biologist, Natural England
Chris Ranford	Cornish Fish Producer Organisation
Freya Sandison	Cornwall IFCA
Edward Baker	Plymouth Fishing and Seafood Association
Celie Mullen	Southern IFCA
Grant Jones	Angling Trust
Harry Owen	Western Fish Producers Organisation
Judith Farrell	Humberside Fish Producers Organisation
Richard Hards	Fisherman
Rui Viera	Cefas
Simon Cadman	Cornwall IFCA
Andrew Collin	Anglo-Scottish Fish Producers Organisation
Vanessa Simons	Sussex IFCA