



Meeting Notes 12th April 2024

South West – 7efg

16:00 – 18:00 MS Teams Conference Call

Attendees

<p><u>Industry:</u> Paul Braund Toby Wright Dave Bond Graham Eden Dave Smith Steve Parker Lee Carter Nickolas Chapman Ed Baker Martyn Youell Nathan de Rozarieux John Balls Nikolas Chapman Sarah Birchenough Terri Portman Mick Bacon Nick West Nicola White Ian Bramley James Ashby Oscar Miller Matt Slater</p>	<p><u>DEFRA:</u> Andy Carroll Lynn Fardon</p> <p><u>CEFAS:</u> Rebecca Skirrow Ewen Bell</p> <p><u>IFCA:</u> Colin Trundle</p> <p><u>Oxford University:</u> Claire Tanner</p>	<p><u>MMO:</u> Emily Theobald Anna Ni Donnchadha Courtney Inch Jacob Bestwick Jonathan Brooks Rachel Thirlwall Nicholas French Sarah Bedingham</p>
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You said	We did
You wanted RFG meetings at the end of the week rather than in the middle of the week	We organised this RFG meeting to be held on a Friday
You wanted to know more about how the small eyed ray quota for 7e was going to be used	We have asked Cefas to outline their plans so far at this meeting

You wanted the medical certificate exemption consultation form in a different format to work on iPads/ iPhones	We contacted the MCA to alert them and to request the form to be provided in another format that was compatible with iPads/iPhones.
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This meeting was online on Microsoft Teams. The meeting was recorded for future reference for industry members not in attendance. There were no objections to the meeting being recorded.

The full recording of this meeting can be found on the following link:

<https://youtu.be/K7Uexy354N8>

The minutes and presentation of this meeting are made available publicly online, which is where you can also find the minutes from previous meetings:

[Regional Fisheries Groups - South West 7efg - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/regional-fisheries-groups-south-west-7efg)

Welcome – Emily Theobald (MMO)

Emily Theobald, Principal Marine Officer for the South West marine area opened the meeting.

1. Pollack Compensation – Lynn Fardon (DEFRA). (0h0m – 0h20m).

Lynn Fardon from DEFRA, who works on grant schemes, shared an update on the Pollack Compensation scheme which has been announced on 10th April 2024.

The press announcement, which includes the eligibility criteria, can be found here:

[Compensation scheme announced to support pollack fishers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pollack-compensation-scheme-announced-to-support-pollack-fishers).

Lynn shared that the scheme was for fishers impacted by the Pollack bycatch only quota. This scheme is in addition to other measures such as the fast tracked FASS grant applications and the opportunity to apply to have paid participation in a CEFAS study on the stock structure of Pollack.

Eligible fishers for the Pollack compensation scheme are those that have at least 30% of their income from Pollack landings (using 2023 as the reference period). The compensation will pay up to 50% of the income from Pollack that was made in 2023.

MMO are the delivery partner for this scheme. MMO will be contacting eligible individuals. If you are not contacted by the end of the month but you believe you are eligible you should contact the MMO. Appeals will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Comments/questions raised by industry members:

Q – Is there a process in place for issues with data, such as incorrect sales note information.

A – If you believe you are eligible but are not contacted, you should contact the MMO where each instance can be considered on an individual bases.

Q – I don't meet the 30% income eligibility, but I am still affected by the Pollack restrictions. Part time fishers that solely engage with the Pollack will benefit but may not require it as they

may have income from a second line of work. Full time fishers have really struggled, especially the netters.

The timing was the biggest issue with the Pollack restrictions. It was right as the season was about to start. I've got thousands of pounds of Pollack nets that I can't use and no other gear.

A – There may be opportunities for support under schemes such as FASS.

Q – This is the first time in 7 years where I have had to let crew go during January to April and it is difficult to get the crew back.

Those that will benefit from the scheme will get a big head start for the season but leaving those not eligible behind and having to pay back incurred debts. The support should be more universal across all of the Pollack fishing sector.

A – The scheme looks to prioritise those that are most reliant on pollack for their income. There are limitations on the scheme.

Q – We have had the right for fishers to make a living taken away. A total ban is pointless as it makes wasted bycatch. Despite being eligible I do not think this scheme is suitable. If the species is banned and then reopened again in future years it will impact the ability for fishers to sell the catch as the public won't want it. Historically when there were poor periods for fishing pollack, fishers diversified and moved onto other stocks until it returned.

A – Emily Theobald - Pollock is a quota species so should not be discarded as it is part of the landing obligation. Therefore, if you catch over your quota, it is meant to be landed under the landing obligation.

Q - On behalf of Plymouth Fishing and Seafood Association (PFSA), why is funding only based on 2023? Can the scheme look at multiple years and take an average of those? This would help out remaining boats where the 2023 year period is not reflective of normal income. Fishers have tried to diversify away from Pollack but have not been able to make it work. Some fishers have found the support schemes very helpful and a lifesaver whilst others have not.

A – The 2023 landing data has been used as this is the most recent and up to date information. Although these are the parameters of the scheme there is appreciation for exceptional circumstances where there are individual reasons why 2023 is not reflective of normal fishing and where a wider data set may need to be looked at. If a fisher has these concerns, they should raise this with the MMO.

Lynn Fardon, provided her contact email (Lynn.fardon@defra.gov.uk) for those that wanted to explore alternative funding schemes such as FASS.

2. Quota Update – MMO - Jacob Bestwick. (0h20m – 0h52m).

Jacob Bestwick, Inshore Quota Manager from the Inshore Quota Management team proved a quota uptake update to date 2024 with details of estimated 2024 allocation for stocks.

The presentation was recorded and can be viewed at the following link <https://youtu.be/k7Uexy354N8> with the quota update starting at 00:20

Comments/questions raised by industry members:

Q - Herring is a reliable winter fishery and may be used more this year. Overall fishing landings have been down due to weather, especially for the under 10 metre fleet.

A – We're aware this may have extra effort on from the diversification from Pollack. Last year we traded some of it out. But we can look at retaining this to make sure we can support fishers diversifying into it.

Q – There is likely to be an increase in effort on Skates and Rays because of the Pollack closure. Especially next year once fishers have made gear and are ready to target it.

A – There should be plenty of flexibility to support any increase in uptake. This is because we can look to trade in this stock, we have a good buffer between our previous years uptake and expected allocation, and there is also inter-area flexibility where landings can be moved from one area to another due to the understanding that the stock is mobile across ICES areas.

Q – What is the trial fishery for Small Eyed Ray? There are so many they can be difficult to avoid.

A – There will be a session with Rebecca from CEFAS later on this call to discuss the trial fishery.

Q – The allocation for undulate ray has been increasing year on year, but we are not going anywhere near using the full allocation. If the scientists are telling us its sustainable to catch, why can we not allow it? Can we look at the 200kg catch limit?

A – We are aware of the potential need for an increase in this limit. Previously we have discussed with the Skates and Rays FMP team. The stock is due to have a closed season (May – August) soon, we likely to revisit once it reopens.

Q – Undulate Ray may as well be closed to fishing if the catch limit remains so low (at 200kg) as when it is present this catch limit removes any interest in working areas where they are present as you would easily catch over this limit and be discarding lots.

A – We will take that comment on board. It is one we can, we are aware there is extra quota to be used. There is potential some management measures in the Skates and Rays Fisheries Management Plan that we will need to balance against.

Q – When will we get the quota allocations to PO's and under 10 meters? And what is the time frame for allocations?

A – We are expecting allocation in the next couple of weeks and the trade window will open after that. We do a two or three week trade window.

Q - A copy of graphs would be helpful ahead of the meeting so they can be reviewed ahead of time and allowing for questions during the meeting.

A – This is normal process for the South West RFG but unfortunately, was not able to be available ahead of meeting. These will be completed and sent out to attendees ahead of future meetings.

3. Pollack Survey – Ewen Bell – CEFAS. (0h52m – 1h18m).

Ewen Bell from CEFAS, provided an update on the Pollack stock assessments. The presentation slides can be found in the presentation file.

Ewen provided an update on the ICES stock assessment, explaining that it was for all of area 6 and 7 and that is an international fishery which is mainly fished by France, Ireland and UK.

The assessment for Pollack changed in 2023 due to a review of input data and models. This review found that the previous model was not appropriate as it made assumptions that the stock was in a healthy state which it is not. The new model uses survey data in addition to catch data (the last model used only catch data). The advice from the new model is that the fishing mortality is too high and the stock is of small size.

There is another benchmark scheduled for 2025 and CEFAS are looking to develop a new category 1 assessment which will use more data points on size and age composition, with the intention for the ICES stock assessment to use this model.

There are no guarantees that this is going to change the perception of the stock, but it will try to absorb more information into the assessment.

On 18th April, the UK and EU are co-hosting a science group to share current and proposed research to agree priorities and next steps for improving the pollack stock assessment.

Q – Why would you use a trawl for catching pollack in a survey

A - The surveys used for the stock assessment were the otter trawls, they were not deliberately targeting Pollack, they are general ground fish surveys. They used to catch Pollack, but those numbers have declined rapidly. This is the same as the bycatch from the otter trawl fishery.

Something is happening which is stopping the Pollack that used to live on the wider more open ground. They are no longer there in the same numbers. This is the type of signal seen for other fisheries that have collapsed.

Pollack genetics project.

CEFAS have a genetics project that will come in two parts, with one part which will charter commercial fishing vessel for the sampling.

It is an alternative approach to estimating the size of the stock. You can use normal tagging but this conventional tagging on Pollack can cause high mortality, so can be difficult for use on stock assessment.

Therefore close-kin (genetic) mark-recapture method can use shared lineage to assess population and the size of the stock. This has been used successfully on other fish species.

The genetic information of the fish caught can look for shared linkages, such as parents and siblings, to see how many animals are closely related to each other. From that you can try to estimate the size of the stock.

The study is limited to part of 7e due to uncertainty on the stock structure in the Celtic Sea as the survey requires as 'closed population'.

There is 4tonnes of scientific quota, and the intention is to tag 3000 fish. This will be done by chartering fishing vessels over 100 fishing days spread across 10 months (1 day per month for 10 vessels).

Training will be provided at a paid training day. This is expected to be on the week commencing 20th May.

The study will allow targeted fishing, where 30 fish per chartered day will be measured for length, a tissue sample taken, and the fishing position recorded.

The other part of the project, will look to use genetic information to see if the stock is just one stock or multiple subpopulations across area 6 and 7, and how the stock boundary works with the North Sea. This will require samples from a total of 440 across 40 areas. Sampling will look to be done by observer work, catches on surveys, sampling on markets etc. But there is not paid chartered work for this portion of the assessment.

Q – What has been happening to the Pollack data that has been collected when CEFAS come to harbours to measure the length of the fish and take out otolith bones? Can this be used for a category one assessment?

A – This has been processed and used to make estimates on the numbers of fish at different lengths and age for the areas. This has been provided to ICES, but the current stock assessment does need this data. We have been collecting the data for several years with some type of sampling covering an excess of 80% of landings. This data is available for a category 1 assessment.

Q – Why is total number of fish being sampled being reduced?

A – The number of length samples taken last year is fewer than in previous years, but this is down to the sampling regime encountering a lower rate of Pollack. We are not specifically targeting catches of Pollack, the sample is looking at lots of different species that are in a vessels catch.

Q – Why are you not looking to get a category one assessment underway if you've got historical data? Why are we waiting until 2025 for this?

A – The next benchmark (2025) is looking to see if the data and international data are of sufficient quality to try and do a category one assessment. It hasn't been previously, but they are looking to see whether more recent data will warrant that. This will be looked at with the EU partners in the UK and EU science group meeting next week.

This will take time to review the data and they will try and get this model up and running at the beginning of next year (2025).

Q – Why was the need for a category one assessment not raised when Pollack stock declines were first seen?

A - We have flagged the issues with Pollack for a number of years. Getting the assessment changed requires international effort and desire. There was little appetite elsewhere.

Q – Why after having multiple years of stock assessment are we changing to a genetic survey to do a stock assessment.

A – The close kin mark recapture project is a good use of a novel technique to give another aspect and additional data.

Q - Is there any change the tagging programme area be extended into 7f to make it accessible for other fishers.

A – The study had to be in a compact area. If we had more scientific quota available and more resource, we could look to do it in multiple areas. Currently the government funding is on a year-by-year basis, but we will press for it provided it works.

4. Celtic Sea and Western Channel Fisheries Management Plan – Nicholas French. (1h18m – 1h20m).

Nicholas French of the Fisheries Management Planning team at the MMO provided a quick update on the development of the Celtic Sea and Western Channel Demersal Fisheries Management Plan, which is in development this year with publication due in 2025.

The Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP will cover stocks in English and Welsh waters within ICES divisions 7e 7f, 7g and 7h.

The draft FMP is being prepared by the MMO. To give your views or register your interest in future engagement events for the Celtic Sea and Western Channel demersal FMP, email fmp@marinemanagement.org.uk.

Also in development this year are:

- Wrasses Complex FMP
- Celtic Sea and Western Channel pelagic FMP
- The black seabream FMP

For more information please contact fmp@marinemanagement.org.uk or visit the following webpage: [Fisheries management plans: policy information - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/fisheries-management-plans).

5. RJE Sentinel Fishery – Rebecca Skirrow (CEFAS). (1h20m – 1h26m).

Rebecca Skirrow of CEFAS provided a presentation on the monitoring programme for Small Eyed Ray.

In 2024 an agreement was made between the UK and the EU that allowed a small quota for small eyed ray. These could be landed from 7e by vessels participating in a monitoring programme. This data will be used by ICES to assess small eyed ray in the English channel (7d and e).

TACs do not correspond with the assessed stock area. Landings from 7d are permitted for small eyed ray and are counted against the 7fg TAC but landings in 7e were previously not permitted. Landings in 7e that will now be permitted, will be counted against the Western Skates and Ray TAC.

Small eyed ray has a category 5 assessment because it is only based on landing data at present. The data collected won't have the ability to change the category of the assessment, but the additional data will allow us to explore trends and investigate the potential of developing an index of relative abundance for future assessments.

The data we want to collect (using scientific quota) will include information on fishing activity which includes the gear type, haul number, haul time and duration. We will also collect information on the catch including if it is retained or discarded, its total length, wing width and sex.

The proposal made to DEFRA suggests using a combined approach of industry self-sampling and Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM).

There are two vessels already operating in the Celtic Sea with REM and these would be asked to present their catches of small eyed ray to the camera to allow live measuring and the skippers would be responsible for recording haul weight estimates. The self-sampling would require skippers and crew to undergo training and collect information on each haul.

The next steps are that DEFRA need to approve the proposal and budget and then vessels will be invited to apply to participate. The full details will be confirmed in due course.

Q – What is the time scale for this to open for invitations to participate?

A – It is still to be confirmed. We will share information on the usual channels and via the Regional Fisheries Group once available.

6. Crawfish consultation update – Sarah Bedingham (MMO). (1h27m – 1h35m).

Sarah Bedingham of the Fisheries Management Team at the MMO provided an update on the Crawfish Fishery work that has taken place this year so far and what is due to take place.

In October 2023, the MMO had a workshop with industry. From this there were two strong recommendations by industry; increase the Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) to 110mm across area 7, and to consider use of a closure.

The MCRS increase came in on 1st January 2024. We then had a consultation for the closure for 2024. This took place in November 2023. The outcome from this was a closure from 5th February 2024 to 30th April 2024.

We had a further workshop to discuss further measures going forward and we will be having a consultation on these outcomes which includes a closure at the end of 2024 going into 2025. When the fishery opens we will spend time monitoring the fishery from landing data and vessel activity.

C – The meeting on 13th February was the worst online meeting I had attended. Sound was not turned back on after the break and online participants were left waiting when they had raised hands.

C – We've got a situation where the Pollack payouts will support vessels to go and join a different fishery, so this effort is being displaced. Compensation schemes usually pay vessels to tie up or stop fishing.

The closure is disappointing. 80% of the respondents wanted a longer closure. Unlike the other fisheries discussed we have something worthy of protecting and we need it. Sadly, I think there will be more boats on it again this year and we have been too slow to move things along. I would like to see monitoring of catch per unit of effort.

C – The extra nets and gear being bought to diversity away from Pollack fishing will be putting pressure on other stocks and species. Fishermen that predominantly caught Pollack

will be given 10s of thousands to move into the same fishery as I, but they will have the financial head start.

7. Seal Study workshops – Claire Tanner (Oxford University). (1h35m – 1h51m).

Claire Tanner from Oxford University provided a presentation on a project looking to quantify the extent and severity of partially eaten catch from seals within fishing communities.

The next stage in this project is aiming to gain views from fishers and concerns on potential mitigation measures and identifying factors that fishers favour within management strategies for the MMO to progress.

This will take place by face-to-face workshops over the next month or so in partnership with the MMO. This will be open to any fishers whether you had already participated in the previous parts of the study or not.

The session taking place in the Southwest will be in Cornwall at a date to be confirmed.

Fishers already involved will be contacted directly but others should look out for the advertisement from MMO / regional fisheries groups.

C - I've lost tonnes of fish to seals this year. We never had a seal 30 years ago in Brixham, now there are 30 or 40. As I don't have a bass entitlement, I throw them back and they are eating them.

Q – I fish from the Isle of Man down through the Irish Sea and out to the edge of the continental shelf and up to the Channel Islands. The Isle of Man was the first place to suffer heavy losses. There is a massive population of seals there. I used to go Hake fishing there in June and we would get 80% of what we caught wiped out. In my opinion it is the seal sanctuaries that are a major factor. They've made seals not afraid of people. I've done a lot of work with the Marine Mammal Research Unit, is the information from this going to be taken into account?

A – The research shown at the beginning is from published data, so it may be that this information was internal use or has not been published yet.

Q – Thank you for the survey, it now shows conclusive evidence that there is a major problem. Can we put this evidence in front of the people who need to know.

A – We appreciate there is a massive conflict between fishing and seals. Seals are protected under the Conservation of Seals Act 1970, so we cannot under any circumstances harm, injure or kill seals. This has been set in stone as a conservation priority for the UK Government, so we don't foresee any changes to that.

Q – Can we have an FMP on seals?

A – It is not appropriate to have a fisheries management plan for seals but it is appropriate to look at this within the set plans.

8. AOB – Emily Theobald

No topics raised.

Q – Can meeting be held over spring tides if possible?

A – We appreciate it is difficult to make this meeting fit with all types of fisheries, days and tides and we consider this when planning as best as possible.

The meeting was concluded at 18:00.

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 \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)