

# Meeting Notes 12<sup>th</sup> February 2025

## North East – 4b

15:00 – 17:00 MS Teams Conference Call

### Summary

<b>Meeting title</b>	NE RFG Meeting
<b>Attended participants</b>	20
<b>Start time</b>	15:00
<b>End time</b>	16:01
<b>Meeting duration</b>	01:01

### Attendees

<b>Industry</b>	<b>DEFRA</b>	<b>Apologies</b>
David	Emma Place (Discards)	Mike Roach (NFFO)
Tom Davidson	Alan Dell (Discards)	Mark Southerton (NIFCA)
Richard Ward	Yuki Lim (Discards)	Alex Aitken (NIFCA)
Jo Ackers	Thomas Valderrama (NQS)	
Jenny Price	Iain Glasgow (EU Negotiation)	
	Hannah Sterling (EU Negotiation)	
<b>MMO</b>	<b>NIFCA</b>	
Christian Proud (Chair)	Vicky Rae	
Caley McIntosh (RFG)		
Dan Wardle (RFG)	<b>NEIFCA</b>	
Jacob Bestwick (Quota)	Ralf Bublitz	
Andy Earle (NE SMO)		
Danielle Davis		
Niamh Hawdon		

## **Agenda**

- 1) Christian Proud, MMO – Welcome and Introduction
- 2) Jacob Bestwick, MMO – Quota
- 3) Emma Place & Alan Dell, DEFRA – Catch Accounting
- 4) Vicky Rae, NIFCA – Northumberland IFCA Update
- 5) Ralf Bublitz, NEIFCA – North Eastern IFCA Update
- 6) Mike Roach, NFFO – NFFO Update
- 7) Thomas Valderrama, DEFRA – Crab and Lobster FMP
- 8) Iain Glasgow, DEFRA – EU Negotiations Discussion
- 9) AOB

## **Contact Details**

Quota Team – Katie James / Jacob Bestwick  
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Jacob – 07747 638 655

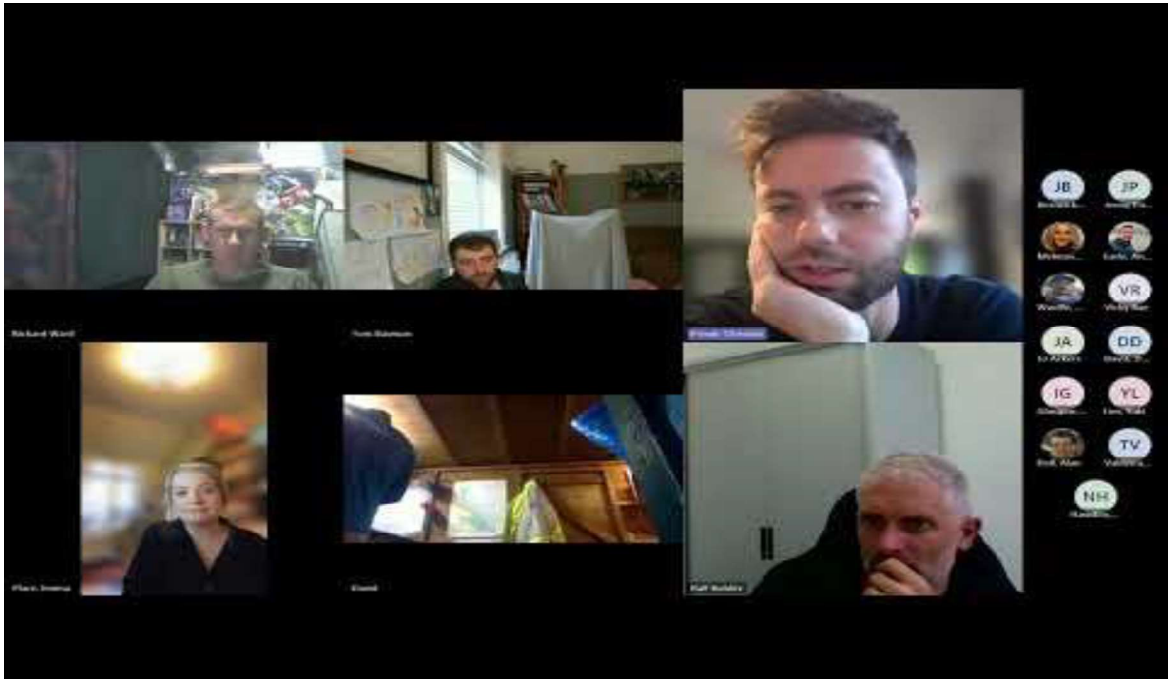
Regional Fisheries Groups (RFG) Team –  
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Defra Discards Team – Emma Place / Alan Dell / Yuki Lim  
[discards@defra.gov.uk](mailto:discards@defra.gov.uk)

Iain Glasgow – Defra Quota Policy and Negotiations Team  
[iain.glasgow@defra.gov.uk](mailto:iain.glasgow@defra.gov.uk)

## **Recording**

The meeting was recorded and can be viewed at the following link: <https://youtu.be/-4i2SytSJHl>



## **1. Welcome & Introduction – Christian Proud (MMO)**

Christian Proud introduced himself as Principal Marine Officer for the Northeast and the chair of this meeting and thanked everyone for attending the call.

Christian reiterated the code of conduct and asked attendees to remain polite and respectful, not to swear, and keep any comments short to make sure everyone has a chance to have their say.

There were no comments or questions prior to the start of the first speaker slot.

## **2. Quota Q&A – Jacob Bestwick (MMO)**

Jacob Bestwick introduced himself as one of the inshore quota managers, along with Katie James. He stated that they are still in the process of finalising the figures for 2024 uptake and will provide a presentation on those as well as the confirmed 2025 allocations later in the year.

Jacob gave a recap of the headline TAC changes which were included in the 2025 provisional catch limits video released before Christmas, which can be viewed here: [Catch limit video 20241217 161350 Meeting Recording](#).

North Sea nephrops -30%, allocation expected to drop from 540 to 400 tonnes. Usual uptake for the area is roughly 680-730 tonnes, so there is a shortfall, however, Jacob has been trading quota to support catch limits to what they were previously.

North Sea sole has had a significant increase, but we have not had the uptake on this species in past few years and so Jacob will be interested to know any thoughts on the increase from industry.

There has also been an increase in mackerel uptake in the past couple of years, so again Jacob would be interested to know thoughts on this from those catching it.

If you have any questions or comments relating to inshore quota, feel free to contact Jacob or Katie using the details found in the 'Contact Details' section.

Jacob then went on to mention that for any over 10m vessels, there has been a new process that Defra have released called QAMs (Quota Application Mechanisms) where fishers in both the sector and non-sector fleet can apply for additional quota.

For anybody interested in this trial, please visit: [Quota Application Mechanism - Quota Application Mechanism: Application for the allocation of English quota – GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/quota-application-mechanism-quota-application-mechanism-application-for-the-allocation-of-english-quota)

### **Questions, Comments & Answers:**

N/A

## **3. Catch Accounting – Emma Place & Alan Dell (DEFRA)**

### **Introduction**

Emma Place introduced herself and advised that she works for Defra on the Landing Obligation discards policy with her team, Alan Dell and Yuki Lim. Emma's team are looking at ways to manage discard reform in England and are aware that discarding is a complex problem. Discards refers to any discard of any quota species that fall under the Landing Obligation. The scope of this work is mainly on the discarding of demersal whitefish. The team are trying to understand the reasons behind discarding and reduce discarding as much as possible. Discard reform was consulted in 2023, and Defra have published the responses here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/discards-reform/outcome/summary-of-responses-and-government-response>

### **Overview**

Emma gave a brief overview of the work, stating that some of it involves looking at ways of reducing discards by working with industry to understand how we can make it easier for more selective gears to be taken up. Another key reform is changing how we account for catches against quota uptake, the focus of the presentation.

Currently, only landings counted against quota, not discarded catch, so there is a risk that catches could be exceeding UK TAC shares. It's worth noting that for most TACs, even when discards are considered, they do not exceed the UK TAC share, but there are some that do.

Defra are planning on changing this by counting both discards and landed catches against quota to support sustainable stocks. This would apply to all English vessels that fall under the quota system, however, there will not be any changes this year.

### **Progress so far**

Cefas & MMO ran a trial in 2024 to see if the proposed method of catch accounting would be possible and how it would work. The trial will be running again this year to



further develop the approach. For now, Defra want to raise awareness of this work, with more information and engagement to come. If you have any questions on the work, feel free to contact Emma and her team using the details found in the 'Contact Details' section. A copy of the presentation can be found here:



RFG NE meeting 10  
Feb 25.pptx

## **Questions, Comments & Answers:**

N/A

### **4. Northumberland IFCA Update – Vicky Rae (NIFCA)**

#### **Coquet to St Mary's Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ)**

Vicky provided an update on the Coquet to St Mary's MCZ management plan. IFCAs have the statutory duty to manage fisheries within the MPA and ensure that fishing activity does not adversely impact the features of the designated site. Specifically, for MCZs, they must seek to ensure the conservation objective is furthered.

The presentation includes a map of the MCZ which covers from Alnmouth Bay to the South at St Mary's Island, and at its furthest the site extends out to 3nm. The site is designated for a ranged of intertidal and subtidal habitats. The objective of the site is for all features to maintain a favourable condition.

In the assessments carried out by Natural England looking at the interactions with bottom towed gear, mainly light otter trawling, they concluded that it did not pose a risk for subtidal features with mixed sediments, sand and coarse sediment. However, they could not rule out risks for mud (indicated by red areas on the map). Based on these conclusions, as most of the trawling for nephrops in the site occurs on the mud habitats, it was deemed that management measures had to be developed to address the risk on the conservation objectives of the site.

Proposed options:

- 1) Do nothing
- 2) Adaptive management approach under a management plan
- 3) Prohibition of towed gear in the MCZ

Currently to trawl within the MCZ, vessels must be under 12m in length, hold an IFCA trawl permit and have an additional exemption to fish within the site. Terms of the exemption are holders must submit monthly returns detailing their fishing effort in the site. Under this option, there is not any limit on number of exemption holders, or any other measures that manage the fishing effort within the site.

Adaptive management approach under a management plan would allow the function of limiting the amount of trawling in the site, for which there is no mechanism now. The final option was a ban on all towed gear in the MCZ, which would be following the precautionary approach.

NIFCA Members voted for the adaptive management approach. Measures under this plan will aim to limit effort within the site by introducing a cap on the number of exemptions permits issued, a cap on hours fished in the MCZ by those permit holders, and requirement for vessels to have a tracking system onboard.

Criteria for exemption:

- Hold NIFCA trawling permit,
- <12m in length
- Have functioning tracker and gear sensor system fitted
- Hold track record of fishing in the MCZ for a reference period in 2022.

NIFCA will pay the cost of the devices and the installation per vessel. The trackers will record the location and heading of the vessel, while gear sensors (attached to the otter boards) will record the actual fishing time.

The information from these devices will be fed into an external database, NIFCA will only have access to the vessels data for activity within the MCZ. Fishers should have access to all the data, but this still needs to be checked with the external company.

As a result of the track record capping exercise from the best available data in 2022, 4 or 5 vessels can apply for exemption permits. The number of hours able to be fished within the MCZ will be a maximum of 1000 hours.

The management plan will be implemented alongside a monitoring and control plan. This will gather further information on the impacts of gear to the pressure. There is also ongoing work to investigate lower impact gear adaptations. Alex will be ordering semi-pelagic otter boards to trial and see if this reduces the overall impact of the gear without influencing catch ability.

It is important to emphasise that this is a pilot plan which will run for a year before being reviewed. Based on information that is collected, including survey data and views of fishers inside and outside of the trial, a decision will then be made on how to move forward with the plan.

A copy of the presentation can be found here:



NIFCA Updates Feb  
2025.pptx

### **Questions, Comments & Answers:**

Q: Tom Davison – you mentioned there are only 4 or 5 vessels allowed to fish there currently, so it's a grandfather rights system if you're already there you're allowed because you're already there. So, nobody else would be allowed to go in that area?

A: Vicky Rae – Alex and Mark have mentioned grandfather rights, and it has been noted that feedback has been that it's going to become a closed area and not going to be open to new entries. There have been discussions around that, but it has not been put forward for this pilot plan. Keep engaged with Alex and Mark throughout this

process and put that feedback in. There are 4 or 5 vessels that can get a permit but if they don't want the permit or don't want to put the equipment on, they will not be able to go in the MCZ. No one knows what that would mean down the line.

Q: Tom Davison – It looks to be going the way of the salmon/trout fishery where they'll cap the numbers and when someone dies and packs up, there will be one less person in the area until there's nobody left. If they limit to only 5 permits a year, and when somebody relinquishes that permit it's then available for someone else, you will have a strong argument for that being fair. But if someone hands in their permit and retires, and it is not issued out again, it's not a way forward. If you're going to cap the number to limit the impact, that's absolutely fine if that's what the studies have come out with, but if it's suitable to have 5 vessels fish within that area, there needs to be 5 permits issued each year, even if that means there is a waiting list.

A: Vicky Rae – As far as the thought has gone now, it is just for this first year, no one is thinking beyond the first year yet. Vicky is unsure what happens to the permits if anyone who is eligible doesn't apply for the permit this year and so will take the question back to Alex and Mark and provide a response once she has an answer.

#### Written response regarding permit exemptions for the Coquet to St Mary's MCZ

As it stands for the pilot trial, only the vessels which meet the criteria will be entitled to apply for an exemption with the total allowable fishing time for all vessels capped at 1,000 hours. For any eligible vessel that does not apply for exemption, no further exemptions will be issued, with the 1,000 hours permitted fishing time remaining the same amongst the remaining vessels. As explained, this is a trial management plan and will be reviewed after its first year. It is important that fishermen are involved, and we capture your feedback to include into this trial and review process. Additional data will also be collected and reviewed for the adaptive gear trial of pelagic otter doors to explore their effectiveness in reducing impacts on the subtidal mud habitat.

If you have any further questions on the topics mentioned by Vicky, feel free to pass these on to the regional fisheries group team using the details found in the 'Contact Details' section.

### **5. North Eastern IFCA Update – Ralf Bublitz (NEIFCA)**

Ralf Bublitz advised that there was not much to update on other than the 3 byelaws which are currently in the pipeline.

#### **Beam Trawling Byelaw XXXIII**

The beam Trawling byelaw is currently with DEFRA awaiting sign off, but there is currently no timeline of when that will happen.

#### **Humber Estuary Fishing Byelaw XXIX**

The Humber Estuary byelaw has just been revised, making the Spurn Point eelgrass area bigger to have a better buffer zone for the eelgrass to expand. The revised byelaw is about to go to DEFRA for sign off.

## **Shellfish Permit Byelaw XXVIII**

The new shellfish permit byelaw is still at stage 4 of quality assurance with the MMO. The byelaw has been back and forth between NEIFCA and MMO for a year for quality assurance and corrections. Ralf is unsure when this is going to be finalised before going to Defra for sign off.

## **Shellfish Stock Status Report**

NEIFCA have been working on the stock status data for the last couple of months. In March, there will be the scientific advisory meeting where they will be presenting all the results, and these will then be published on the NEIFCA website. These reports are for the stock status of lobster crabs and scallops within the district.

If you have any questions on the topics mentioned by Ralf, feel free to pass these on to the regional fisheries group team using the details found in the 'Contact Details' section.

## **Questions, Comments & Answers:**

N/A

### **6. NFFO Update – Mike Roach (NFFO)**

Mike Roach was unfortunately unable to attend the meeting due to a last-minute meeting conflict and has sent his apologies. He will be providing a written update:

The NFFO have been supporting members in the Northeast with individual issues such as challenges associated with local council decision making and help with members going through MCA inspections. We have also ensured that Guard Vessels working on projects in the Northeast are acting appropriately, resulting in one vessel being removed from a project due to acting not in accordance with their contract. We have liaised with MMO planning team to ensure projects, such as cable decommissioning and offshore wind projects are aware of fisheries concerns and assessed impacts correctly. We have also supported fisheries in the Northeast with understanding the complex fisheries management plan landscape and what the implementation phase of the Crab and lobster FMP will actually entail. We have facilitated discussion and represented concerns from Northeast fishermen to the Defra leads on the plans. As always, we are there to help and encourage anybody struggling or needing advice to reach out.

If you have any questions for Mike Roach, feel free to pass these on to the regional fisheries group team using the details found in the 'Contact Details' section.

## **Questions, Comments & Answers:**

N/A



## **7. Crab and Lobster FMP – Thomas Valderrama (DEFRA)**

Thomas Valderrama from the Defra non-quota species shellfish team provided an update on progress of the crab and lobster fisheries management plan.

### **Lobster MCRS Increase**

The lobster minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) is going to be increasing to 90mm. This policy was included in the FMP which was published in 2023 as a short-term measure to be introduced within the first 2 years.

Initially this was going to be a one-step increase, however, following feedback on this to mitigate economic impacts, it will now be a phased approach. Defra engaged with Northeast inshore fleets in December to understand the best way to phase this in. There should be some information on this coming out soon. In general, the stakeholders favoured a longer period of over 5 years, recommending an increase of 1mm every other year (increase one year, no increase the next and so on).

Defra are still assessing the implementation approach and have not made a formal decision. This will be available soon and will be communicated. Implementation is either going to be by the very end of this year or by the start of next year.

### **Soft-Shelled Crab Ban**

Currently legislation allows for soft-shelled crab to be landed as bait. Defra are working on removing that exemption. This is currently going through the legislative process. The measure received a lot of support during consultation and other areas of engagement.

### **Effort Management Trials**

In the FMP, it was proposed that there will be effort management trials consisting of one crab trial in Southwest and two lobster trials in the Northeast around the IFCA boundaries. The reason there are two in the Northeast is that Defra have identified two distinct stocks with differing economic and social considerations.

The trials can be very broad and so there is the option of pot limitations or effort restrictions. They will either be something more restrictive or could involve trialling of gear adaptations. Trials are meant to be introduced and developed with industry, so expect engagement soon.

There is no decisive plan of action yet for which measure will be introduced. The timeline to bring these in is within the next year, although depending what industry want this could change. The MMO is responsible for leading on the trials and will be setting up meetings and other engagement later this year.

### **Berried Lobster Ban**

Defra have completed a review of the berried lobster ban and the wider legislation that it is a part of, which will be shared on the gov.uk website and shared through various mailing lists.

The result of the review is that we will be retaining the legislation as it does provide some stock benefits in a time that stocks are being overexploited. There will be ongoing monitoring of the berried lobster ban as well as wider legislation and regulations on v-notching. The legislation will be up for review again in the next 5 years. Defra will be looking at better enforcement methods in the meantime.

### **Questions, Comments & Answers:**

Q: Caley McIntosh raised a question on behalf of fishers in Holy Island, commenting that fishers are accepting of the 90mm increased MCRS as long as it's a phased increase of 1mm every other year. There are concerns of cross border issues with Scotland, as Scotland are further behind in the FMP process, putting the Northeast fishers at a real disadvantage. As we increase the MCRS, any undersize lobster they return will be captured by the Scottish fleet. Do we have an idea of where Marine Scotland are currently at with their timeline for implementation. If there's a large lag, this may cause issues for the local fleet. Caley also commented that the fleet have suffered from storm damage and die offs, so it would be good to help if we can.

A: Thomas advised that he is unable to speak about Marine Scotland's plans, but that Defra are aware of this issue and will be monitoring the impact of increasing the MCRS throughout. Defra will consider options to relieve pressures.

Q: Richard Ward advised that local boats are currently losing 75-80% of catch to the Scottish boats with the increase of this (MCRS). Can Marine Scotland be 'given a kick' to catch up so that the increase is linked with Scotland and there is no problem with conflict in the area? With Scotland being behind, there is not going to be a benefit at all. Fishers are not opposed to the gauge going up to 90mm and happy for the increase to be phased over 5 years.

A: Thomas advised that we cannot push Scotland to do anything, but he's discussed this with Scotland. They have their own considerations to look at and Defra cannot change their minds on this as of right now. Defra will be looking at how this can be enforced and minimise the damage.

Q: Jo Ackers asked how the FMPs are integrating with IFCA's agendas. An IFCA byelaw is already talking pot limits, who takes precedence and is there going to be integrated between the two sides?

A: Thomas advised it is the hope to integrate. At the time of FMP effort limitations being published, this was demanded by a lot of industry and so to address that, the potential trials were included. The trials do not specify exactly what we can do and so we will be aligning measures as much as possible with those being introduced by the IFCA's to avoid additional burden on industry and either expanding on or aiding the IFCA measures.

Q: Jo asked if trials are successful in one area, will they be expanded nationwide?

A: Thomas stated that the goal of the trials is to test management measures or to gather data that would inform management measures which 'could' be applied nationwide. Defra are not committed to extending them if they would not work, or if they are not wanted. Thomas also added that the crab trials in the Southwest would

also inform measures that could be introduced in the Northeast. So, even though we are not trialling everything in one area, the data from the trials could inform future management in other places. But it is being kept simple now, limiting it to species in the area as much as possible.

Q: Tom Davison mentioned that he has asked this question before, but not had any clarification yet, on rumours on the 140mm crab size increase for UK, not just within the IFCA district. Can you share some clarification on this?

A: Thomas advised that this is something that has been included as a medium-term measure, meaning in 3-5 years of the FMP being published, but this has not been committed to, it is more of a timeline if Defra were to go with it. Therefore, it is not being looked at nationally for now. Defra had a lot of engagements and discussions in the Southwest where people want a regional increase, and this is being looked at.

Q: Tom asked if this was implemented, would it take precedence over all the IFCAs sizes? He added that in some areas there are crab landed that are less than the 120mm and commented there has been a poor crab price this year, especially for those working at 140mm. Further South, in areas such as Cromer, they can land very small crab. If there's a low price, there is a surplus and affected by supply and demand. Not only are those catching over 140mm unable to catch as much, but they are also getting much less of a price for their product.

A: Thomas advised that the intention of the FMP is to see if we can simplify the management landscape as much as possible. He also commented that there are regional differences with sizes that need to be considered. More engagement is to be done on this in future, and so Defra start looking at the increase they will be coming back to the Northeast to test it as well.

Q: Tom commented that he is worried about this as IFCA are already talking about introducing limits on permits issued within the 6nm limit. Concerns that the permits will limit new entrants to the industry and the size going up when really the size should be increased and monitored for a few years to see the impact on stock. IFCAs should then use the data to see whether there is a need to cap the permits or not. This seems to be happening the other way around and it's a lot harder to reverse something once it is already in place.

A: Thomas commented to say these are very good points. In terms of developing the trials, MCRS increases are also part of the possibilities. Defra and IFCAs will discuss the best approach to this problem.

If you have any questions on the topics mentioned by Thomas, feel free to pass these on to the regional fisheries group team using the details found in the 'Contact Details' section.

## **8. EU Negotiations Discussion – Iain Glasgow (DEFRA)**

Iain Glasgow from the Defra Negotiations team stated that the annual fisheries negotiations concluded in December where we agreed Total Allowable Catches (TACs) and UK quotas for 2025. Iain is seeking feedback from the local fleet on how the changes may have affected you and what your priorities are.

For North Sea nephrops, we had a 25% cut in TAC, giving the UK a quota of 13,600 tonnes. Uptake in 2024 was only 51% of the quota, however, Iain is aware that uptake in between different functional units, such as the Farne Deeps, can be quite high, and so he is interested to know how you think the cut will affect you and gather more information on what the fishing for nephrops in the Farne Deeps is presently like. The latest ICES advice for Farne Deeps shows that biomass has fallen below its biological reference points, and that pressure is rising. Has this been something any fishers have noticed?

There were not any representatives from the nephrops fishery on the call to provide feedback to Iain during the meeting and so any direct feedback would be greatly appreciated. Chris Proud advised that the North Shields team get approached by fishers to share their experiences in the Farne Deeps and mentioned that last year concerns were raised on changes they had seen from the way the fishery is being exploited. A change in the way the Scottish fleet operating by using more capable freezer vessels who can operate in heavier weather for more sustained periods of time was a cause for concern for some fishers. There will be other views on that and counter views as well, but Chris and Caley will put those fishers in touch with Iain to provide feedback directly.

Iain went on to provide examples of the other stocks that he would be interested in receiving feedback on including:

- North Sea anglerfish – significant increase in TAC
- North Sea sole - significant increase in TAC

If you have any questions or comments on quota stocks, feel free to pass these on to the regional fisheries group team, or to Iain Glasgow directly, using the details found in the 'Contact Details' section.

**Questions, Comments & Answers:**

N/A

**9. AOB**

**Questions, Comments & Answers:**

N/A

The meeting was concluded at 16:01

## **RFG Annual Survey**

The Regional Fisheries Groups Team are inviting you to complete a short survey to share your thoughts and feedback to help us improve the services we offer.

Please follow this link to complete the survey:

<https://forms.office.com/e/fTbbuGdu9U?origin=lprLink>

**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](mailto: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))**