

REGIONAL FISHERIES GROUP

Meeting Notes 23rd January 2024

North West 7a

15:00 – 17:00 MS Teams Conference Call

Attendees

Industry

Terry Davies
Stu Fagan
Paul Fagan
Mark M
Steven Brown

MMO

RFG Team:

regionalfisheriesgroups@marinemanagement.org.uk

- Daniel Wardle: Fisheries Manager –
Daniel.Wardle@marinemanagement.org.uk
- Caley McIntosh: Fisheries Manager –
Caley.McIntosh@marinemanagement.org.uk
- Courtney Inch: Principal Fisheries Manager –
Courtney.Inch@marinemanagement.org.uk

Defra

Andrew Carroll
Lydia Osborne
Kate Kurton
Lynn Fardon

Quota Team:

inshorequotamanager@marinemanagement.org.uk

- Katie James: Quota Manager - 07747638655
- Jacob Bestwick: Quota Manager -
07469443840

Seafish

Katrina Wignall

PMO/Chair

- Steve Johnston – Principle Marine Officer
Steve.Johnston@marinemanagement.org.uk

Cefas

Kieran Hyder

Other MMO Personnel:

Eleanor Johnston
Louise Price
Alex Murphy
Angela Matson
Elizabeth Wyatt
Jonathan Parr
Philip Collier

University of Oxford

Dr Claire Tanner

NWIFCA

Joseph Moulton

1) WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS – Steve Johnston (Chair/MMO)

- Steve Johnston introduced himself and updated on the actions the Regional Fisheries Group team have undertaken since the last North West RFG meeting:

You said	We did
You asked for more information on IVMS rollout, delays, whether funding would be available for new devices fitted and assistance with purchasing a new device.	We held a drop-in session in Blackpool on 2 nd November 2023 along with colleagues from our I-VMS Support & Engagement Team, answering questions and assisting fishers with ordering devices and completing applications for grant funding.
You requested a visit to Fleetwood to discuss local concerns and feed views into future fisheries management decisions.	We carried out a port visit to Blackpool on 2 nd November and Fleetwood on 5 th December to speak to local fishers and merchants. Further port visits will be taking place this year, if you would like us to come to your area, let Dan know – Daniel.Wardle@marinemanagement.org.uk
Many of you have voiced concerns regarding the volume of seals in the area and the affect they have on catch.	Caley from the Regional Fisheries Groups Team has now partnered up with 2 researchers from Oxford University who are looking into seal depredation of fisheries catch and are discussing their work on the call today.
You wanted more information on the bass Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) and the opportunity to feed your views into the FMP consultations.	We carried out visits to a range of ports across the North West to discuss short-term and long-term goals of the FMP and assisted fishers with completing consultation responses.

2) QUOTA UPDATE - Katie James (MMO)

- Katie James introduced herself and gave an update on the quota allocations in the region. Please see the PowerPoint attached for more information:



NW 7a Quota
Presentation Januar

Quota Leasing Scheme

Vessels in the non-sector pools with under-10m capped licences and over-10m category B, C and no-quota annex licences were able to apply for access to additional quota. At this stage only stocks where the MMO are confident there is excess within the non-sector pools were released. This is the first time MMO has offered quota leasing this early in the year.

The quota leasing scheme ([Quota Leasing Scheme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/quota-leasing-scheme)) closed on Monday 22 January 2024, however, your applications are still welcome by email on a case by case basis.

Applications for this additional quota should be emailed to: fmc@marinemanagement.org.uk

If you would like to request amendments to be made to catch limits, please contact Katie or Jacob on the below details and they will endeavour to assist where possible:

- Katie James: 07747638655
- Jacob Bestwick: 07469443840
- inshorequotamanager@marinemanagement.org.uk

Industry Questions:

Q: Katrina Wignall asked if someone could explain why the sole has been cut by 66% and it is now bycatch only.

A: Katie James advised that sole will be subject to a ICES benchmarking exercise on the stock. Jacob Bestwick explained that the stock assessment showed that there has been low recruitment over the last couple of years and the spawning stock size has also declined, which is why ICES recommended the MSY approach and why they have gone with bycatch only allowance. This is the normal approach when there is a zero TAC recommendation. Andy Carroll stated that he could feedback the specific survey data to the group.

Q: Steve Johnson asked about the benchmark process and the last time this had been done. Would this potentially affect the allocation for this year or would this be for next year.

A: Katie James stated that it will be subject to the benchmark process by ICES in February this year, once this is complete, we will submit a joint request to ICES to publish revised advice based on the outcome. Kieran Hyder explained that in 2024 the same model will be run and alongside that there'll be a process for the benchmark, and it all depends on how quickly that benchmark is done. If it is done before May when the working group meets, then it will likely come in this year. If it goes beyond that then it will come into 2025 advice.

Q: Steve Johnson asked if there is a low uptake within the sector fleet, would quota be redistributed amongst the u10m fleet.

A: Katie James explained that the allocations for sectoral and non-sector are done through owned units of quota known as FQA units, and so they cannot move that as the units are held on the licence. Jacob Bestwick added that we can still look to trade that quota in with the Producer Organisations, but they can't do that until the provisional allocations are out which may be end of March or April.

Q: Steve Johnson asked on behalf of industry why 7A wasn't included in the additional quota leasing.

A: Katie James explained that they only have enough quota to support the fleet and the stocks that were advertised were stocks that they predicted to have an excess for this year. The MMO will look to replicate this process and offer another leasing window later in the year once there is a greater understanding of uptake trends for the year and the impact of allocation changes.

Q: Steve Johnson asked about capped licences

A: Andy Carroll explained that they are hoping to have more information by February. The cap was reinstated at the end of 2023 as the policy in place only covered a temporary suspension of the cap until 31st December 2023, and we did not want to make people to pre-empt the outcome of the consultation before a decision had been made. We are not currently looking to remove the cap permanently; however, this does not mean the cap won't be lifted at some point.

3) STAGE 4 MARINE PROTECTED AREAS – Eleanor Johnson (MMO)

- Eleanor Johnson gave an update on the Stage 4 Marine Protected Areas. Please see the PowerPoint attached for more information:



OFF SEN Stage 4
MPAs - NW RFG.ppt

If you have any questions, please contact conservation@marinemanagement.org.uk or call 0300 123 1032.

The call for evidence is currently live and will be open until **13th February 2024**:

consult.defra.gov.uk/mmo/stage-4-call-for-evidence

Industry Questions:

Q: Kat Wignall asked if they are considering the current wind farms and the potential wind farms that are going to be put in place on the disturbance and displacement of the birds and harbour porpoise. She also raised spatial squeeze and asked how the data is gathered.

A: Eleanor stated that they look at fishing alone and in combination with other non-fishing activities, and having a fair approach is key. Eleanor explained that they rely on fishing activity and VMS data and working closely with coastal teams to gather data.

Additional information: The MMO will consider the contribution of different activities towards any impacts in the MPA. We appreciate that if fishing is causing any disturbance, it may be a small part of the overall disturbance caused by all activities. Other activities such as windfarms are subject to assessments of impact on these species too, they are required to carry out surveys and mitigation measures to reduce impacts. We are not ignoring the impact of other activities but need to complete the assessment and understand the impact of fishing alone first, and so encourage any information you can provide in the call for evidence. We want to take a fair approach if any measures are required.

Q: Terry Davies asked how we know where the birds are, as from his experience they are always far out in deeper water. How is IFCA going to get the data to prove the evidence for inshore?

A: Eleanor explained that they take evidence from statutory advisors (Natural England and JNCC), which is normally aerial surveys for bird counts and distribution maps. Eleanor stated that any personal observations on locations and interaction behaviour are appreciated, and we welcome any further sources.

Q: Steve stated that IVMS enforcement isn't in place at the moment and asked if this will be factored into the evidence.

A: Eleanor explained that we are working to decide at what point we can start using it for data as currently effort is based at an ICES Rectangle level. The Marine Conservation Team are working together with coastal teams and expert advice to understand where the under 12m activity is. AIS data is also used for now, but we recognise that smaller vessels don't need to have it.

4) FRONT RUNNER FMPS UPDATE – Louise Price (MMO) and Alex Murphy (MMO)

- Louise Price introduced herself and Alex Murphy, and provided an update on the crab and lobster, whelk, and bass FMPS to the group.
- BassFMP@defra.gov.uk



FMP Overview -
RFG 23012024 1.ppt

Industry Questions:

Q: Steve Johnston asked what discussions have been going on with the devolved administrations and Isle of Man in terms of harmonising potential rule changes relating to the whelk FMP?

A: Alex Murphy advised that we are aware Wales already have their own permit scheme in place, however he could not provide an answer on behalf of Defra currently and will come back with an answer after the meeting.

Q: Kat Wignall asked on behalf of industry why the ban on bass drift netting hasn't been lifted, which was originally to be in place for 2 years.

A: Louise Price advised she could not answer this directly now, however, all methods of capture are being considered under the bass FMP. There are working groups being put together involving industry to shape the FMP, if you are interested in being part of these working groups, please contact: BassFMP@defra.gov.uk

Q: Steve asked about the composition of the bass management group and how it will be formulated.

A: Louise Price advised we are unaware as these groups are being formed by Defra, we can take this away and send the response following the meeting.

5) UK SEAFOOD FUND UPDATE – Kate Kurton & Lynn Fardon (DEFRA)

- Kate Kurton introduced herself and Lynn Fardon and gave an update on the UK Seafood Fund:



UK Seafood Fund
(UKSF) - Jan 2024 up

- Update on Round 3 of the UK Seafood Fund (UKSF) Infrastructure scheme, which is focused on supporting the catching sector through fleet modernisation.
- Round 3 is currently open for applications to purchase new, more fuel-efficient engines for commercial fishing vessels, or to modify existing engines.
- Defra is considering options to provide further support for projects that will help improve energy efficiency and emissions on boats, infrastructure at ports, and the health, safety and wellbeing of the workforce.
- Unlikely to have FaSS (Fisheries and Seafood Scheme) updates at the meeting. Though the scheme is likely to resume in February 2024.

Industry Questions:

Q: Kat stated that Liverpool market building is dilapidated and asked whether they would fit into a category to qualify for some help?

A: Lynn Fardon advised that the slides include contact information on the MMO grants team. The team would be able to provide advice on how to apply for the grant funding and what would be required to apply. There is also guidance available online for the UK Seafood Scheme and further information on the Fisheries and Seafood Scheme will be coming out in February 2024.

6) SEAL DEPREDATION – Claire Tanner (Oxford University)

Summary: Dr Tanner from the Marine Conservation and Ecological department at the Uni of Oxford has been looking at quantifying the proportion of catch partially eaten by seals in the UK, as well as the economic impact it is having on fisheries around the coast. They've recently been granted further funding to achieve aims including (1) assessing seal depredation mitigation strategies; (2) collecting

longer term data for individual fisheries; and (3) assessing the frequency of depredation. As part of this work, they are planning a range of extra activities, including workshops with fishers to discuss mitigation ideas and approaches, reports of findings to date and additional data collection from one fishery with daily contact. The workshops to discuss mitigations will be a series of 3 workshops across the coast, and this is where the Regional Fisheries Groups at the MMO are partnered with them to deliver these workshops. Currently proposed in the Southwest, South and Southeast.

- Please see the PowerPoint attached for more information.



Tanner_MMO_RFG
Meeting.pptx

If you would like to request a workshop in your area, attend face-to-face interviews or provide evidence of seal depredation in your area, please contact Dr Tanner at:
claire.tanner@biology.ox.ac.uk

Industry Questions:

Q: Dan Wardle raised a pre-submitted question – “It was reported this week that a was seal supposedly rescued 30km up the Ribble in a farmer's field next to the river. It's not the first-time seals have been seen up river. I actually got a report from Salmon Bailiff a few years back saying he'd been watching seals up at Ribchester eating Salmon and trout, yet he was powerless to do anything as seals are natural predator. I've had seals in my salmon nets up river trying to take salmon out the net. I can also show the damage that they do and the amount of fish they take out of our bass nets. This went some way to getting the salmon fisheries closed also.”

A: Dr Claire Tanner advised she is happy to receive and photos and can set up phone interviews to discuss.

Q: Terry stated he has serious problems with seals damaging his nets and will email Claire.

A: Claire stated they are hearing that this is a problem everywhere, with seals following fishers out of ports and waiting for them. She is happy to have any further information.

Q: Steve asked about potential deterrents and mitigation measures.

A: Claire said they will be putting together some suggestions and will be presenting these management strategies at the workshops and will take the views and concerns of these strategies from stakeholders.

Q: Terry said fishers don't seem to get a lot of damage when fishing in the dark, only during the day.

A: Claire stated the fishers they have chatted to have been seeing seals while fishing mornings.

7) AOB – Steve Johnston (MMO)

RESEARCH FOR FVL WEBSITE REDESIGN – Angela Matson (MMO)

- There is currently an opportunity to support fishing vessel licensing improvements at MMO.
- MMO is aware that getting the right fishing vessel license can be a complicated process for people to follow, and over the next 3 years we are looking to make improvements to how we do this. A key priority is to make understanding and applying for a license much more straightforward and accessible for all who need it.
- We are starting by looking at MMO's [fishing vessel licensing webpages](#) and MMO's Service Design team is looking to speak to fishers about their experiences with the website. We want

to understand how the website helps or hinders those who are trying to get licensed or make changes to entitlements, vessels and authorisations fish. The Service Designers are keen to set up one-to-one interviews to speak to you about your experience in these areas and what things you find most challenging currently.

Are you part of the below groups?

We would like to speak to a range of fishers:

- We are looking to speak to fishers who have fishing entitlements, domestic licences (all categories), and fishers with authorisations for Bass, Sole Recovery Zone (SRZ), Western Waters Crabs & Scallops.
- We are very interested in speaking to people who have struggled to use the website in the past (e.g. finding information easily, filling application forms for your fishing vessel license).
- We are also keen to hear from people who do sometimes use the website to try to get information you need, so we can understand what works and what doesn't work for you.

This is a chance to have your say and help the MMO to understand what your needs and preferences are, so we can design services that are much easier to use. We will be attending upcoming stakeholder meetings, where possible, to reach out to people who might be interested in sharing their experiences with us. If you are interested in taking part, please contact Courtney Inch or the Regional Fisheries Groups Team at: regionalfisheriesgroups@marinemangement.org.uk

Industry Questions:

Q: Steve Johnston asked whether Angela Matson will be looking at variations that go out for licences as well.

A: Angela Matson advised that over the next 3-5 years she will be looking a complete redesign of the current systems. But currently is looking at website and applications, with a view to look at processes and computer systems and data sharing in future.

Q: Steve Johnston asked whether fishers will be able to monitor quota uptake on the Catch Recording App.

A: Angela Matson advised that in future she will be looking to join up services with this team to try and bring information into one place.

Q: Terry Davies commented that with the Catch Recording App would be handy if when you took a picture of the revised catch record it could show the date of when the picture was taken.

A: Angela Matson advised we can pass that information over to Alex Palmer who is looking at Catch App improvements. Steve also added that it has been mentioned to him that fishers would like to be able to monitor their uptake. This has already been passed onto the Catch Recording team to address.

MCA MEDICAL EXEMPTION CONSULTATION – Andy Carroll (Defra)

- Andy Carroll provided some information on the MCA/Department for Transport consultation on Certificate of Medical Fitness exemptions for vessels 10m and under. MCA have provided the public.relations@mcga.gov.uk email address for any enquiries in relation to the consultation.
- An industry-wide 6-week consultation started on 16th January to give industry a chance to have its say on concessions which would benefit fishers on vessels of 10 metres or less. In November 2023, regulations came into effect requiring fishers working on small UK flagged vessels to have a certificate of medical fitness. The Government has worked to support those who can still fish but would otherwise be unduly forced ashore. Some grandfather rights have

been extended for eyesight, BMI, diabetes and most recently seasonal fishers. Unlike larger fishing operations, those who operate vessels of 10 metres or less are usually independent and require more support, which is why today the Department for Transport is seeing how to best deliver medical exemptions safely so hard-working, small-scale fishers aren't unduly forced ashore. The potential concession is being considered by the Secretary of State for Transport after listening to the concerns of those in the fishing industry as well as Members of Parliament representing coastal communities. Industry is being urged to have its say on the proposals which are being published by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

- **The blanket exemption would only apply to those who have already been working on vessels of 10 metres or less for at least four weeks between 30 November 2022 and 30 November 2023.**

[Government to support small-scale fishing industry across the UK in latest medical consultation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/medical-exemption-existing-fishers-on-vessels-of-10-metres-and-under)

[Medical Exemption – Existing Fishers on Vessels of 10 Metres and Under - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/medical-exemption-existing-fishers-on-vessels-of-10-metres-and-under)

Industry Questions:

Q: Terry Davies advised he was unable to access the consultation via iPhone.

A: Andy Carroll advised that MCA were going to upload a MS Word document version of the consultation to be able to access this from iPhone and iPad. This has now been uploaded onto the consultation page and should now work as intended.

NORTH WEST INITIATIVE UPDATES – Steve Johnston (MMO) and Kat Wignall (Seafish)

- Seafish held a workshop on 18th January in Whitehaven with members of the steering group and local merchants to discuss opportunities for greater collaboration and cohesion across the North West seafood supply chain. There were a number of actions which came out of the meeting.
- The meeting was focussed on the seafood chain as a whole and how logistics can be improved to transport fish from Cumbria to Lancashire.
- The new Fish Park at Fleetwood should be completed by hopefully March. The aims of Fleetwood market are to increase the amount of fish going through the market and processors there. Once the construction is complete, the market will be investigating ways to improve the prices they are able to pay fishers for their catch.
- Kat Wignall will be circulating notes from the workshop in due course.

Q: Terry Davies commented that local fishers feel as though they are being let down, particularly with the cap being reintroduced to licences, the low catch limits for sole this year, and poor prices at Fleetwood. If fish was sent to an auction that could be accessed across the country prices would be improved for sole and other species. This won't work unless it can go nationwide.

A: Steve Johnston and Kat Wignall acknowledged Terry's points and these will be taken onboard and discussed with Fleetwood and across the NW Initiative.

CLOSING STATEMENTS

- Thank you very much for everyone's time today, the next meeting will be held in September to tie in with EU negotiations, however, there may be an interim meeting before this.
- There will also be port visits taking place over the next few months, Dan Wardle will be sharing information regarding these visits closer to the time.