

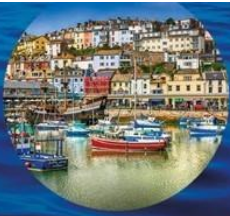


Marine
Management
Organisation

Southwest crab trial group: summary of online meetings

June 2025

...ambitious for our seas and coasts



1. Overview

This document has been drafted by MMO (Marine Management Organisation). The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of two online meetings of the Southwest crab trial group (on 3 and 5 June 2025) for those unable to attend. The meeting notes have been reviewed by Southwest crab trial group members who attended these meetings, prior to wider circulation around the trial group.

The two online meetings were scheduled to discuss the options presented in the options paper (sent to the group on 15 May 2025) and get the groups advice with the next steps and how best to engage more widely with the fleet.

A summary of the attendees of each meeting is provided in annex 1.

2. Summary of key points

- MMO provided an update on the octopus bloom and the process of the government response, where to find the latest information with regard to octopus and presented latest available octopus and crab landing data.
- Four main options were presented to the group.
- Industry representatives and IFCA's (Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority) were supportive and recommend minimum landing size 'MLS' (minimum conservation reference size 'MCRS') being progressed as the preferred option for the trials. Initial views are that an increase could be adapted to quickly following previous experience with IFCA measures.
- The group concluded following discussion of the other three presented options that they are either not supported, they are not right for now and/or octopus situation means it is no longer feasible (for example, pot counting option - fishing patterns have changed). Also, MMO can be taking action to improve current data (such as pot numbers) outside of the trial(s). More details for the options discussed is included in section 3 below.
- None of the other options in the paper (for example, days at sea) or options that had not been considered in the options paper were raised by attendees for further discussion. The interaction of other fisheries (such as the scallop dredge fishery) on crab/potting raised – i.e. displacement into ICES area 7e from 7d during scallop closure. Need to get a better understanding of the scallop closure on migration of crab. This will be feedback to the team working on the King Scallop FMP.
- No additional crab trial options were suggested by attendees in relation to current situation with octopus.

- Although octopus is putting extra pressure on industry, it is recognised that crab was prioritised to be a front runner FMP due to the stocks' vulnerability to over-exploitation, the economic value of the fishery, and lack of evidence to properly assess/monitor the stocks state.
- Industry representatives advised MMO and Defra to rethink engagement plans for the Southwest (unless the engagement is changed to refocus only on octopus). This is due to disengagement or there will be such frustration with other matters that no discussion regarding crab trials will be constructive.
- Although industry do not have capacity to engage on management or some of the options presented, it does not mean that they do not want to revisit options as the situation changes. There is desire for this to continue once the situation with octopus has died down, possibly next spring.
- Group recommend next steps are a short online consultation with industry on increasing the MLS (MCRS). The consultation should move away from the traditional online consultation as industry would find it hard to engage in that process at this time and be something more innovative like a Microsoft Form survey – something that is quicker and easier for fishers to respond to/could be done from their mobile in the wheelhouse.

3. Trial options: key points

3.1. Increase in MLS (MCRS):

- Overall support from industry and IFCA representatives on the calls.
- Expected that there will be support for an MLS increase.
- A lot of markets are already at this larger size and French authorities are expected to be increasing crab sizes as well.
- Initial feedback is that industry do not need a long time to adapt to an increase in the MLS. Anecdotally they have adapted to increase in a IFCA district "overnight".
- Geographic scope - needs further consideration and engagement by MMO as the Lyme Bay area might be the exception in supporting of an increased size (crabs get smaller as you move east).
Need to consider engagement and compliance complications (and any mitigation that could be possible, such as carriage clauses) with eastern boundary of the increase if brought in. Meeting with Southern IFCA already booked for 18 June and further discussions to be held with MMO compliance colleagues – they will be copied into this meeting note.
- Seek views from industry on how to tell if an increase in MLS (MCRS) has been successful (from a socio-economic perspective). There is a project

commissioned by MMO's Evidence Team that can be used to get some success criteria for an increase in size.

3.2. Pot counting:

- Industry representatives not supportive of this option at present.
- One of the main factors being that the crab fishery is not operating as 'normal' this year due to octopus bloom so any data collected may not be useful/representative of a 'standard' year.
- This is an option that could be progressed in future but at the moment now is not the time.
- MMO can progress improvements while something else is trialled. Examples include –asking stakeholders how many pots are used; improve data collection/recording on pot numbers and gear codes on e-logs/catch app.

3.3. 200 tonne (t) at the 6 nm (nautical mile) limit:

- Agreement that this would be best trialled in the northeast where it boundaries Scottish waters (where the Marine Directorate 'MDS' have the interim measure).
- Devon & Severn IFCA asked if more granular data could be presented re: number of vessels this is likely to impacted by this measure to be able to comment any further but not really supportive of this option.

MMO took this as an action – please see below:

- Clarified that this measure would be to match MDS interim measure and adapted for the trial - any 12 metre (m) and over vessel that has caught over 200 t in any rolling 12-month period would not be permitted to fish inshore of 6 nm. This option could support maximum IFCA size limits.
- Updated using data available on 4 June 2025 (this data is from a review of all English waters and had not been validated due to the time constraints between meetings).
 - 74 vessels affected nationally, 56 of these are thought to be over 12 m in size. 3 vessels in southwest (fishing inside the 0 to 6 nm) are thought to be impacted. These are not thought to be day boats.
- Concern from industry raised regarding CIFCA's byelaw undergoing approval. Concern that CIFCA measure/this option would unfairly impact larger day boats. The trials are separate to work by CIFCA (so this will be feedback/captured in this note). MMO recognise the need to consider cumulative impacts and concerns from industry. From initial review of the data available in between the online meetings MMO do not think this trial option would impact day vessels.

3.4. Gear specific areas:

- As with pot counting in 'normal' (non-octopus) times this would have made sense but now is not the time.
- Suggestions that MMO can progress with improvements to data collection outside of the main trial (for example, through more detailed pot codes and counting on catchapp/e-logs).

4. Next steps

- Summary of meeting notes to be circulated with attendees of both online meetings for agreement.
- Once agreed with attendees, meeting notes to be circulated to wider Southwest crab trial group and placed on Southwest regional fisheries group webpage (along with the crab options paper either amended or as provided to the Southwest crab trial group on 15 May 2025).
- MMO and Defra to update Southwest crab trial group on next steps for engagement (i.e. short online consultation via a form).
- Updates to be provided during upcoming stakeholder meetings (for example, including the crab management group 'CMG' currently scheduled for 19 June 2025).

Annex 1 – Attendees list

Attendees for online meeting 1 (3 June 2025):

- Tim Dixon, Sarah Errington, Sarah Bedingham and Chris Collins (MMO)
- Thomas Valderrama (Defra)
- Ella Brock (Seafish)
- Sarah Clarke (Devon & Severn IFCA)
- Beshlie Pool (South Devon & Channel Shellfishermen Ltd)
- Edward Baker (Plymouth Fishing and Seafood Association)
- Sam Jago (Fisherman, over 12 m)
- Martyn Youell (Waterdance)

Attendees for online meeting 2 (5 June 2025):

- Tim Dixon, Sarah Errington, Sarah Bedingham and Chris Collins (MMO)
- Thomas Valderrama (Defra)
- Lewis Tattersall (Seafish)
- Sam Davis (Cornwall IFCA)
- Colin Trundle (Isles of Scilly IFCA)
- Matt Mander (Devon & Severn IFCA)
- Ben Eglinton (Fisherman, Comfish Marine)
- Beshlie Pool (South Devon & Channel Shellfishermen Ltd)
- Edward Baker (Plymouth Fishing and Seafood Association)
- Martyn Youell (Waterdance)