



Marine
Management
Organisation

Cuttlefish Roadshow Outputs

13-15 May 2024



...ambitious for our seas and coasts

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Contents

Rationale and Purpose of Roadshow	3
Background	3
Attendees	4
Roadshow Discussion Outputs	4
Key Themes.....	4
Issues and Risk.....	6
Other Issues	6
Questionnaire Outputs Summary	7
Actions	9
Annex	10
Questionnaire analysis.....	10
Question 5	10
Question 5. If you were asked to record the specific species of cuttlefish to improve data collection for stock assessment how easy would this be for you?	10
Question 8 and 9	11
Question 8. Codes of practice on cuttlefish trap handling is an effective management measure to implement Channel-wide.....	11
Question 9. How likely would you be to follow these guidelines if implemented as a management measure?	11
Question 10	12
Question 10. What is your opinion on the following proposed management measures? (rate from 1 being very Negative and 5 Very Positive)	12
Questionnaire sent out to stakeholders.....	14

Rationale and Purpose of Roadshow

Background

As part of the Channel demersal non-quota species (NQS) fisheries management plan (FMP) published in December 2023, the cuttlefish fishery was highlighted as a data poor species, a fishery of high economic importance and was identified as a critical targeted fishery at risk of over exploitation. The management measures proposed in the FMP for cuttlefish were to develop an action plan through discussions with stakeholders to deliver sustainable exploitation of the cuttlefish fishery within the first six months of 2024. Short to medium term measures proposed were to improve science and evidence, consider introducing codes of practice, consider introducing seasonal closures for trawlers, investigate the benefits of underwater structures to cuttlefish (i.e. in spawning), and consideration of wider changes such as MPA management and habitat improvements to benefit cuttlefish.

A stakeholder round table meeting was held on 15 February 2024 in Portsmouth where initial views and opinions were gathered on the management and issues of the cuttlefish fishery. A two -pager summary and full report was published on the [Cuttlefish Fishery Action Plan - GOV.UK](#) page under Stakeholder Engagement Documents section [here](#). From 13 -15 May the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) held a cuttlefish roadshow to build on initial findings of the stakeholder meeting and to gather a wider understanding of stakeholder views and opinions to develop the action plan. Four in person drop-in sessions were held in Newlyn, Brixham, Shoreham and Hastings to cover the extent of the south coast. An online questionnaire was presented at each drop-in session and emailed to identified stakeholders to capture responses of those that were unable to attend.

The aims of the drop-in sessions were:

- To gain wider stakeholder views and opinions of the importance of the cuttlefish fishery and understanding of issues in the cuttlefish fishery.
- Identify wider stakeholder's views on the implementation of voluntary codes of practice on cuttlefish traps.
- To gain wider stakeholder views and opinions on possible management measures considered in the Channel Demersal NQS Fisheries Management Plan for cuttlefish.
- Identify potential support from industry to partake in potential evidence and data gaps projects.
- Formulate an action plan for the cuttlefish fishery.

Attendees

- 5 attendees Newlyn, 27 attendees Brixham, 12 attendees Shoreham and 21 attendees Hastings. Most of these attendees were fishers, also in attendance were representatives from the Producer Organisations, Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (Cornwall, Sussex IFCAs), Fishing Associations, Trawler Agents and Environmental Non-governmental Organisations (eNGOs).

Roadshow Discussion Outputs

At each of the selected locations, Newlyn, Brixham, Shoreham and Hastings discussions were held focussing on gathering stakeholder views and opinions on the following subjects:

- Opinions and insight on the importance of the cuttlefish fishery and whether it required management.
- The implementation of voluntary codes of practice on cuttlefish trap handling.
- Potential management measures proposed in the FMP.
- Identifying support from industry on gathering data and evidence.

It is important to note that the roadshow discussion outputs in this section are only based on the geographical locations where drop-in sessions were held and the demographics of the fleet sector of those stakeholders present was not officially recorded. Below is a summary of those discussions, the summary has been divided into three sections:

- Key themes – this section summarises views and opinions that were frequently raised by stakeholders throughout discussions relevant to the cuttlefish fishery.
- Risks and issues – this section identifies risk and issues suggested by stakeholders in relation to management measures proposed for the cuttlefish fishery during discussions and/or issues relating to geographical localised areas.
- Other issues – This section outlines comments that were made that were partially related to or not directly related to the cuttlefish fishery. Comments raised that were separate from the cuttlefish fishery will be relayed onto the relevant teams within MMO and Defra.

Key Themes

- Cuttlefish fishery in Newlyn, Brixham, and Hastings reportedly in **good condition**.
- All locations stated **no management** of the cuttlefish fishery was required and was supported by the majority of stakeholders present.
- The cuttlefish fishery is hugely affected by the **weather** and **temperature**.

- Rising water temperatures leading to earlier spawning and longer fishing season.
- Easterly/South-Easterly winds causing turbidity which pushes cuttlefish to deeper water and makes them less likely to lay on traps and enter them.
- Freshwater runoff decreases catch inshore due to decreased salinity.
- Cuttlefish are **voracious predators** and if management measures put in place would significantly affect other species populations.
- Cuttlefish fishery follows **two-year cycle** – larger cuttlefish landed one year will be followed by a year of generally smaller cuttlefish landed, suggested due to two-year life cycle of species.
- **High level of dependence on cuttlefish** by both trawlers and potters alike, any management could have severe economic consequences. Quotas have “pushed” fishermen towards NQS species such as cuttlefish. Warnings that minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) or seasonal closures could lead to bankruptcy.
- Seasonal closure or MCRS **might increase effort**, suggesting there would be an increase the number of cuttlefish discards and lead to fishers being forced to make more fishing trips to off-set loss of income. Low survivability of cuttlefish would make returning them pointless.
- Many pot-fishers already abide by **voluntary codes of practice** (e.g., safeguarding eggs).
- The lack of **EU data** pertaining to where and how much cuttlefish the EU are actually catching needs to be addressed. Suggestions that they should be recording to the same level as UK vessels.
- **More data and evidence** required before suggesting any form of management.
- **Technical measures:** reported that large numbers of trawlers were already using 100mm cod ends. However, suggested that more research was needed into impacts/effectiveness of these gear restrictions. Number of fishermen showed appetite to **volunteer in gear trials** using different gears to test effectiveness.
- The 80mm mesh size on **Beam trawls** unfavoured by many (least efficient and not environmentally friendly) and suggested it should be 100mm across the board. Beam trawlers unfavoured in the inshore.
- **Trawlers** highlighted for catching large quantities of small/juvenile cuttlefish, which could impact breeding stock.
- Suggested that the biggest impact on cuttlefish was from **fly seiners and large trawlers** and if any management was brought in it should focus on these vessels.
- **Seagrass** highlighted as potential key egg-laying habitat.
- Potting season is **extremely short** (two months). A seasonal closure would completely stop this fishery.
- **Torbay, Tidmouth Bay, Exmouth, Start Bay and Hurd’s Deep** (not a definitive list) highlighted as important areas for cuttlefish. Suggestion that

management of trawling effort in Hurd's Deep could protect over-wintering stock.

Issues and Risk

- **Bad weather** significantly affects the inshore potting fishery, if bad weather, pots are deployed later, resulting in the **potting season** being **extremely short**. Any management restrictions imposed on the potting season could further impact the fisher's livelihood.
- Abiding by the voluntary codes of practice poses a risk to gear left in the water, such as lost gear and damage to gear which would incur a significant cost to the fishers. Some stakeholders stated it was discrimination against the more sustainable way of fishing.
- Difficulty distinguishing common cuttlefish (*Sepia officinalis*) from elegant cuttlefish (*Sepia elegans*), some fishers reported being unaware of two separate species being present in UK Waters. Highlighted that supporting material would be needed to help distinguish between the two species.
- **Shoreham localised issue:** reports of cuttlefish **decline in Sussex Bay**. It was suggested that it was attributed to large quantities of pollutants in the area (resulting from industry and dredging), in addition to windfarms and habitat loss (kelp beds).
- **EU data** suggested as a big issue, not exactly knowing where the EU vessels are landing and how much. Suggested that EU are catching larger quantities of cuttlefish compared to the UK.
- General **poor communication** from MMO and Defra: people were not aware that MCRS had been taken out of final FMP for example.
- **Increases in predator populations** (conger eels, bass, dogfish and seals) impacting cuttlefish landings, especially in Shoreham and Hastings (cuttlefish eaten in traps, gear damaged, reductions in populations in certain areas etc.).
- Monetary costs of gear modifications highlighted. Questions raised as to if there will be a grant scheme if implemented.
- Gear restrictions which are too stringent (e.g., 120mm cod ends) could have severe economic consequences by significantly reducing landings.
- **Windfarms** and associated electro-magnetic fields (EMF) and vibrations suggested as a cause of habitat loss and interrupt migration routes of cuttlefish. Rampion windfarm was noted as a primary example of this.

Other Issues

- Warnings of complex regulatory landscape at sea: fishers were unsure what they could and couldn't do in certain areas, specific regulators were not identified when this comment was raised. The need for better communication was raised.
- Lemon sole identified as another species of concern with regards to management laid out in the Channel NQS FMP. Current MCRS suggested in FMP is considered a "large" lemon sole – most caught by fishermen are

far smaller than this (roughly 60%). MCRS for lemon sole could have severe economic consequences.

- Bass regulations: issues around having to discard small quantities caught in traps when they could be landed for a profit and benefit fisher's income.
- Seals: netting not viable around Hastings due to seal population (gear damage).
- Spatial squeeze: windfarms, mussel beds, closed off areas. Impacting cuttlefish fishery and fishing in general.

Questionnaire Outputs Summary

In total the MMO received 63 responses to the questionnaire, submitted in person, online or via email. It is important to note that the geographical locations were not requested in the questionnaire, and the name and boat PLN fields were optional, as regarded as personal information under General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and therefore not officially recorded. The MMO received responses from industry representatives, individual fishers, IFCA members and NGO's. Below is a summary of the questionnaire responses, a more detailed analysis can be found in 'Questionnaire Analysis' section in the Annex. It should be noted that during the in-person events many of the participants views were not captured using the questionnaire. As a result, the questionnaire does not represent all the stakeholder views and opinions captured as part of the engagement process, for more information on the wider more detailed discussions at the in-person events please refer to the 'Roadshow Discussion Outputs' section above.

62% of respondents stated that the cuttlefish fishery was important or very important to their yearly income, making up a large proportion of this. Reasons for this stated was the seasonal abundance of cuttlefish, quotas restricting access to other species, population increases in cuttlefish and population declines in other species.

The majority of responses stated that the cuttlefish fishery overall was in good health. Areas in the Western Channel generally reported stable or increasing catches. Approximately 20% were significantly opposed to any management. More stated that the whole fishery did not need management, but that some smaller specific management might be beneficial. Management suggestions included technical measures (100mm minimum cod-end, mesh size increases etc.), bans or restrictions on fly-seiners and larger vessels, codes of conduct protecting eggs, 5% bycatch of smaller individuals, protection of key sites, MCRS, quota for cuttlefish, and pot limits. For further information on the on opinions for specific management measures please see figure 4 in the Annex.

It should be acknowledged that some respondents (both NGO's and individual fishers) did report declines in the fishery or a need for action regardless due to the precautionary principle, overfishing, targeting of small (potentially young) individuals, increases in predators, windfarms and pollutants. Other issues facing the fishery included spatial squeeze, gear conflict, catching of small cuttlefish (especially in Hurd's Deep) and a lack of data on EU vessels. Local declines were reported in Shoreham, Littlehampton, Worthing and the Sussex Bay area (although despite this it was stated that this localised decline was not a reason to implement restrictions on the whole fishery).

Responses indicated that cuttlefish landings could be naturally variable due to weather conditions (turbidity, wind preventing gear deployment, freshwater run-off etc.) and the cyclical nature of the fishery (most suggested this followed a two-year cycle).

As part of the questionnaire stakeholders were asked about potential management measures (e.g., potential effectiveness and need). Voluntary codes of practice for potters to help protect cuttlefish eggs have been highlighted as a potential option for management, 50% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that this would be an effective management option, with 48% stating that they would be likely or very likely to abide by these voluntary measures (see figure 2 and 3 in Annex for further details).

The majority of responses stated that more evidence was required to better understand cuttlefish biology, ecology and the fishery as a whole.

To improve data on cuttlefish landings stakeholders were asked whether it was viable for them to record cuttlefish to species level should this option be added to the catch app. 59% reported that this would be somewhat or extremely difficult (figure 1, Annex for further details). Many respondents reported the need for some sort of educational material (e.g., ID cards) to be provided to make this viable.

The MMO sought views on the evidence commissions established at the stakeholder round table meeting in February (see 'Potential Evidence Commissions' (pages 16-18) [here](#)). Respondents provided useful insights into many of these: including important areas for cuttlefish, key cuttlefish habitat, migration patterns, threats, catch per unit effort trends, interactions with/impacts on other species, and trends in the fishery. Many members of industry showed willingness to help gather data and evidence on the cuttlefish fishery, with a few members volunteering to test technical measures and fund further research.

Additional evidence gaps highlighted through the questionnaire included EU data, sizes of cuttlefish landed by trawlers, predation (seals etc.,) and impacts of silt in the Solent/Isle of Wight.

Actions

1. Implement Voluntary codes of practice on cuttlefish Trap Handling (MMO Commission).
2. Improve Species Identification and recording (MMO Commission).
3. Investigate Gear mesh size Trials (MMO & Industry).
4. Conduct experiments and monitoring to assess benefits of underwater structures to cuttlefish egg survival (Cefas/Defra R&D Commission).
5. Investigate catch per unit effort (CPUE) (MMO Commission).
6. Investigate impact of cuttlefish populations on other species (MMO Commission).
7. Seek additional input for evidence/ data gaps projects.

Additional evidence and data gaps commissions

- Potential research project on reported localised declines in Shoreham/Sussex Bay area.
- Potential research into impacts of increasing predator populations (conger eels, dogfish, bass and seals) on cuttlefish populations.
- Size of cuttlefish landed by trawlers.

Annex

Questionnaire analysis

The questionnaire contained several multiple-choice questions (see Annex pages 14-16) to make opinions quantifiable by giving them a numerical value. The results of these multiple-choice questions are discussed further here.

Question 5

Question 5. If you were asked to record the specific species of cuttlefish to improve data collection for stock assessment how easy would this be for you?

Currently, cuttlefish (regardless of species) are recorded under a generic “cuttlefish” label in the catch app. Recording cuttlefish landings to a species level would give a greater insight into catch composition and populations of the individual species. However, the two primary species likely being caught by fishers in the channel, the common cuttlefish (*Sepia officinalis*) and elegant cuttlefish (*Sepia elegans*), are very similar in appearance and could potentially be difficult to distinguish (especially after being caught).

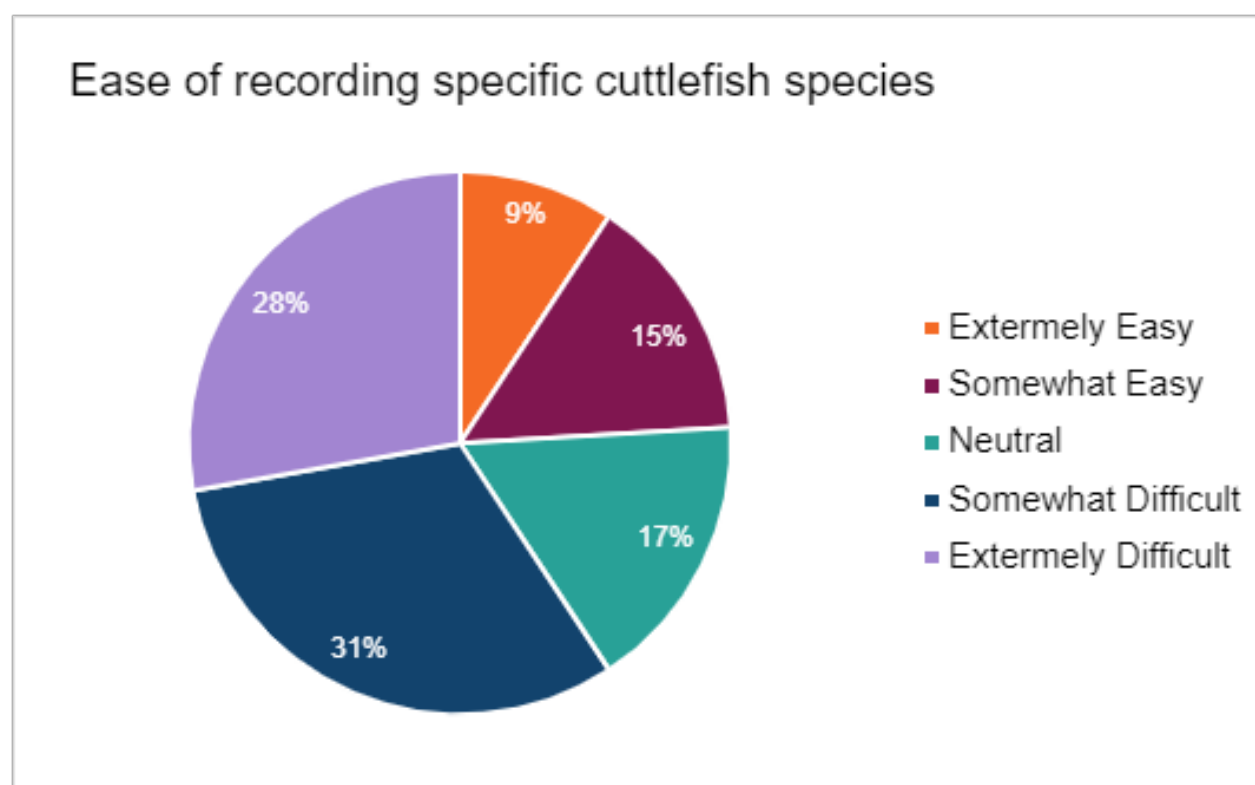


Figure 1: Stakeholder opinions on their ability to distinguish between common cuttlefish (*Sepia officinalis*) and elegant cuttlefish (*Sepia elegans*). Percentages of respondents who believed this would be Extremely Easy, Somewhat Easy, Neutral, Somewhat Difficult and Extremely Difficult to distinguish between the two species.

Question 8 and 9

As 59% reported that this would be somewhat or extremely difficult (figure.1) the MMO is proposing bringing out assistive materials (e.g., ID cards) as part of the action plan. This will enable fishers to correctly identify cuttlefish landed, and in conjunction with species specific codes will result in more detailed catch recording.

One potential management measure proposed in the FMP was introducing voluntary codes of practice for pot/trap handling in all areas (for more details see an example from Southern IFCA [here](#)). The aim of this measure would be to protect cuttlefish eggs, increasing the number which successfully hatch, while having minimal impact on the landings and income of pot/trap fishers. Opinions were gathered on the potential efficacy of these measures (Question 8, Figure 2), and how likely stakeholders would be to abide by them (Question 9, Figure 3).

Question 8. Codes of practice on cuttlefish trap handling is an effective management measure to implement Channel-wide.

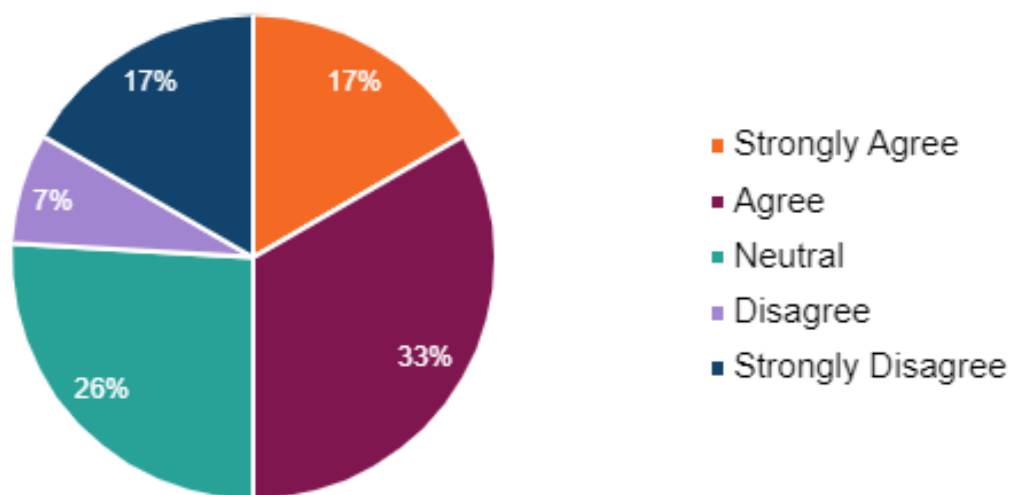


Figure 2: Stakeholder opinions regarding the efficacy of voluntary codes of practice for cuttlefish pot/trap handling. Percentages of stakeholders who selected Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Neutral, Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed displayed.

Question 9. How likely would you be to follow these guidelines if implemented as a management measure?

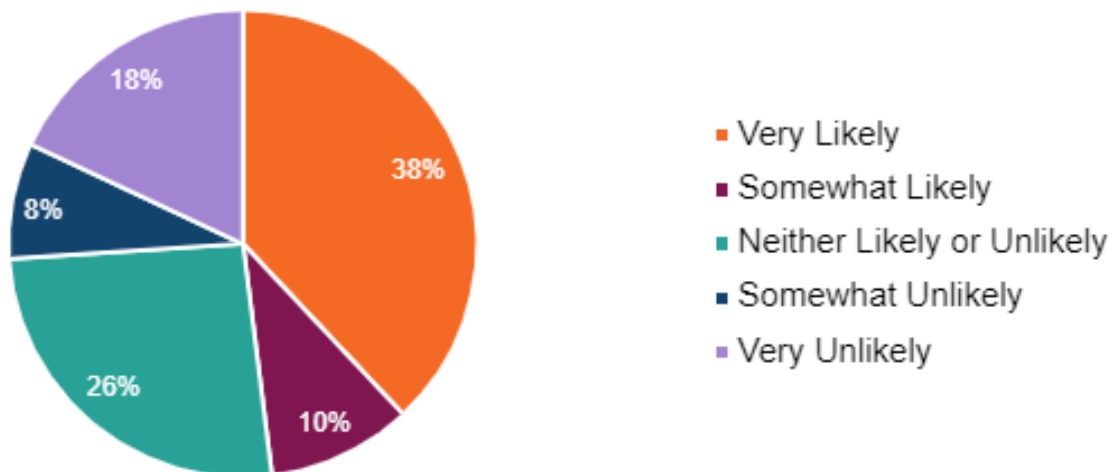


Figure 3: Likelihood stakeholders would be to abide by the proposed voluntary codes of practice. Percentage of stakeholders who believed they were Very Likely, Somewhat Likely, Neither Likely or Unlikely, Somewhat Unlikely or Very Unlikely to abide by the voluntary codes of practice.

Of the stakeholders 50% agreed or strongly agreed that this would be an effective management option, with 48% stating that they would be likely or very likely to abide by these voluntary measures (figures 2 and 3). Of the respondents 24% disagreed or strongly disagreed that voluntary codes of practice would be an effective management measure and 26% stated that they were unlikely or very unlikely to abide by these guidelines (figures 2 and 3). For both questions 26% were neutral (figures 2 and 3).

Half the respondents (figure 2) were in favour of the voluntary codes of practice. This indicates to the MMO that implementing this measure would be a viable and effective management option which would potentially improve the health of the cuttlefish stock without drastically impacting fisher's livelihoods.

Question 10

Question 10. What is your opinion on the following proposed management measures? (rate from 1 being very Negative and 5 Very Positive)

Between the in-person events and the questionnaire there was a general feeling that management of the whole fishery was not necessary. However, there was some support for certain targeted management measures, although this was not overwhelming. Within the questionnaire the MMO sought views on different potential management options. It should be noted that the inclusion of these is not an indication that these measures are being considered for the cuttlefish fishery – the MMO simply took this opportunity to gather views and information on them.

The questionnaire showed that there was some support for pot limits and seasonal closure to trawlers, although this was not overwhelming (figure 4). There was some support for gear restrictions, however the majority of respondents were still opposed (figure 4). Seasonal closures to potting, an MCRS, and MPA management/habitat changes indicated a large majority of respondents not in favour of these management measures (figure 4).

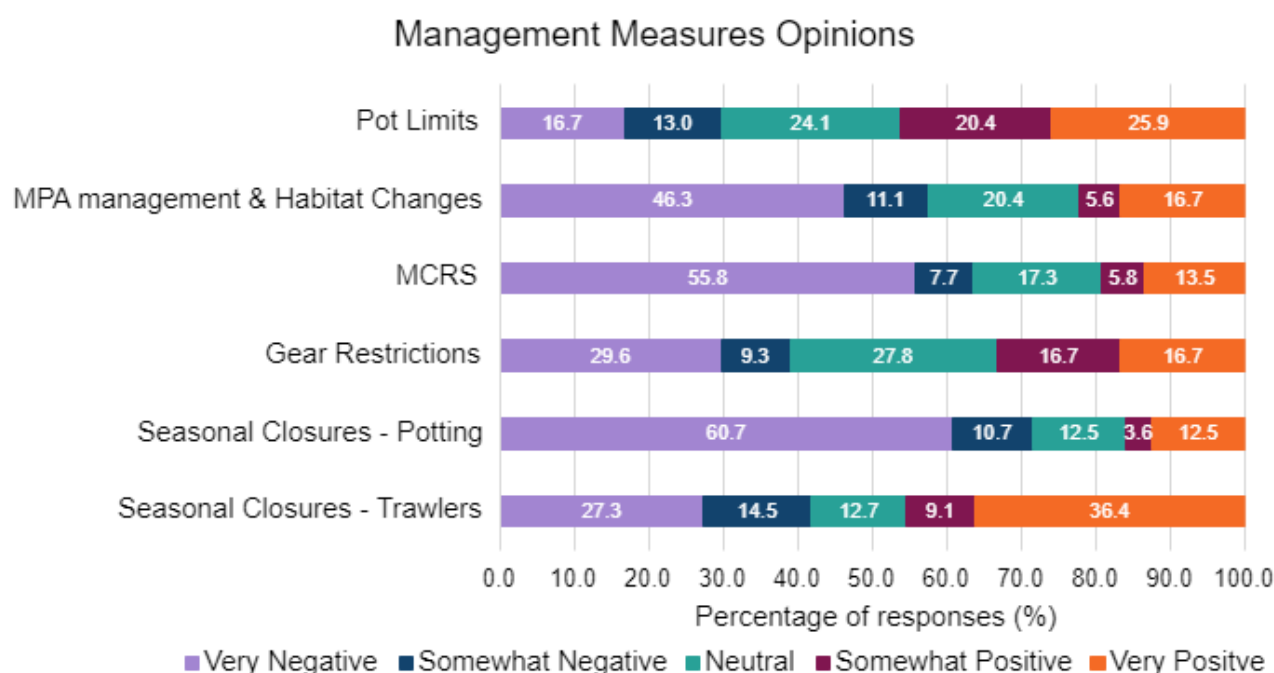


Figure 4: Percentage of respondents who held Very Negative, Somewhat Negative, Neutral, Somewhat Positive or Very Positive views of potential management measures proposed for the cuttlefish fishery.

Questionnaire sent out to stakeholders.

Cuttlefish Roadshow Questionnaire

- To gather wider stakeholder ideas and opinions on the proposed FMP management measures
- Gather stakeholder input and opinions on what needs to be delivered in the action plan for the cuttlefish fishery
- Gather opinions on implementation of voluntary codes of practice beyond the 6nm
- Gather insight on evidence and data gap proposed commissions

1. Name or PLN (OPTIONAL)

Enter your answer

2. How important is the cuttlefish fishery to you? And why?

Enter your answer

3. Have you noticed any trends which relate to how your landings have been over the last few years?

E.g. declining catches, catches lower after a cold year or catches higher after a warm year, cuttlefish generally smaller or bigger increased fleet pressure ?

Enter your answer

4. Have you noticed any impacts on the local fishery?

E.g. Windfarms, Spatial squeeze, large quantities of juveniles being caught?

Enter your answer

5. There are two main types of cuttlefish in the channel, the common cuttlefish and the elegant cuttlefish. There has been concerns raised over mistaking mature elegant cuttlefish for small common cuttlefish.

If you were asked to record the specific species of cuttlefish to improve data collection for stock assessment how easy would this be for you?

Extremely Easy Somewhat easy Neutral Somewhat Difficult Extremely Difficult



6. What management measures would you like to see put in place to help regulate the cuttlefish fishery?

Enter your answer

7. What would you like to see in the cuttlefish action plan?

Enter your answer

8. One of the short-medium management measures proposed in the FMP for cuttlefish was to consider introducing codes of practice on cuttlefish trap handling Channel wide. The Southern IFCA already have a cuttlefish Traps voluntary code of practice in place (*Southern IFCA Code of Practice Leaflet*)

Codes of practice on cuttlefish trap handling is an effective management measure to implement Channel-wide.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

9. How likely would you be to follow these guidelines if implemented as a management measure?

Very likely Somewhat likely Neither likely nor unlikely Somewhat unlikely Very unlikely

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

10. What is your opinion on the following proposed management measures? (rate from 1 being very Negative and 5 Very Positive) (*FMP Proposed Management Measures Leaflet*)

	Very Negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral	Somewhat Positive	Very Positive
Seasonal closures for trawlers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seasonal closures for potting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gear restrictions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
MCRS for cuttlefish	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Changes to MPA management and habitat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pot Limits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. The MMO has compiled a list of potential evidence Commissions to fill evidence and data gaps for the Cuttlefish Fishery and its ecology in the Channel (**Potential Evidence Commissions Leaflet**).

Can you provide any insight on these evidence/data gaps?

Enter your answer

12. **Are there any important data/evidence gaps that you think haven't been covered in this list?**

Enter your answer

13. **Do you believe you could/ would be willing to assist in any way? If so, which ones? Estimated times for data/ evidence collection?**

Enter your answer

14. **Please add any other thoughts or opinions you wish to submit regarding the cuttlefish fishery**

Enter your answer

Bodies responsible: MMO, Defra, Cefas.

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