



Marine Management Organisation

Date: 26 February 2025

Location: MS Teams

Subject: Seabream FMP Working Group (WG) 3

Attendees:

Name	Affiliation
Kate Drewery	Defra, Non-Quota Species Team
Callum Williams	MMO FMP Implementation Team
Rui Vieira	Cefas
Kieran Hyder	Cefas
Martin Peverly	Natural England
Colin Trundle	Cornwall IFCA
Freya Sandison	Cornwall IFCA
Sarah Birchenough	Southern IFCA
Imogen Wright	Southern IFCA
George Balchin	Sussex IFCA
Freya Sandison	Cornwall IFCA
Mike Bennett	Recreational fisher, The Fisherman's Cafe
Tom Russell	Commercial fisher
Richard Stride	Commercial fisher, South Coast Fishermen's Council
Ed Blanchard	Commercial fisher
Hannah Rudd	Angling Trust

Alice Hall	University of Plymouth
Antony Jensen	University of Southampton
MMO FMP Development Team	

Apologies:

Name	Affiliation
Sarah Clark	Devon & Severn IFCA
Mat Mander	Devon & Severn IFCA
Tim Smith	AIFCA

Agenda:

1. Welcome and introductions

2. Overview of South coast engagement

- MMO gave an overview of the FMP engagement that took place across the south coast in January 2025. A summary of key conversations and stakeholder viewpoints was also provided.
- WG member queried why the team only covered south coast in engagement.
 - MMO responded that commercial landings data and online survey responses indicated that this was where there was most interest. The online survey and online webinar gave the opportunity for those who could not make in person sessions to share their views.

3. Review and discussion of DRAFT Seabream FMP policy goals

Policy goal 1

WG Feedback:

- A WG member highlighted they do not want regulators to focus on the few comments on the online survey that suggest that black seabream abundance is low. From their experience, most fishers report a high seabream abundance.

- MMO responded that they also have anecdotal evidence to support the high abundance of seabream, however, the fact that there are differences in perception further supports the need for a stock assessment.
- A WG member noted concern that in the years it may take to research whether the stocks are in a good place, black seabream may be being overfished, and no measures will be in place to prevent this.
- A WG member queried at what point we think that a stock assessment will take place. This action is currently mentioned in the short-, medium- and long-term goals.
 - MMO responded that although the detail is somewhat lost in the slide, this is meant to display a pathway to show what it could take to develop a robust assessment of black seabream and gilthead bream nationally or internationally, depending on appetite. The accumulation of evidence for this is likely going to require data collected over different timeframes.
- A number of WG members discussed stock assessments, highlighting that the current wording of the policy may need amending. Noted that given current timelines, it is unlikely the process for a stock assessment could start until 2027 at the earliest.
- A WG member recommended that the recreational data collection action is moved into the short term. Black seabream are currently recorded in the Sea Angling Diary and there are limited recordings of gilthead bream. There may be work they can do in this area to fit in with the broader data collection aims.
- A WG member recommended that the incorporation of recreational data into assessments is placed in the medium term and then the development of an evidence base is moved to the long term. It was also suggested that these actions may work best if they are merged. Attention was raised to the wording of the goal itself, WG member offered to help to finesse the wording of this policy goal.
 - MMO acknowledged that the terminology around policies, goals and actions has been a point of confusion.
 - **ACTION:** MMO to work with WG members to resolve sequencing issues.
- A WG member noted it may be best to not overcomplicate the FMP at this stage with the inclusion of other species. Recommended including an action to assess the use of other species in recreational and commercial catch data. Queried whether the FMP needs to include other species if we don't yet know if proposed measures could be used to manage them. Agreed FMP should leave the goals open to including new species that may move into English waters.

- A WG member expressed concern that stock assessment work should not delay the implementation of practical management measures for seabream. The MCRS should be increased and there should be attention paid to commercial catch limits.
- A WG member recommended changing the wording of the policy so that it is more holistic and streamlined. Look at recreational data collection and the use of the Sea Angling Diary data.
 - A WG member agreed with this, noting there is a new ICES roadmap on recreational data.
- A WG member noted that some recreational anglers may have a defensive response to FMPs implementing change that may limit their activities e.g., bag limits. Hopes to see recreational and commercial fishers working together to take responsibility for the fisheries.

Policy Goal 2

WG Feedback:

- A WG member queried the timeline of mandatory measures given the support that was received by stakeholders. Noted the importance of a mandatory measure for chart vessel skipper. If recommendations are bought in too late, it could be devastating for stocks.
 - MMO responded that guidance has been received from Defra suggesting that voluntary measures would be a preferred method to start. With evidence as to why mandatory measures would be preferable, we may be able to push back on this.
- A WG member showed support for the implementation of mandatory regulation for black seabream, suggested fishers generally seem to share this opinion. Queried whether MMO are leaving IFCAs to implement spatial temporal measures or whether they will be referenced in the FMP so that all management is documented in the same place.
 - MMO responded that IFCAs have their own remit and jurisdiction, and these different pieces of work will remain distinct. MMO and IFCAs will aim to ensure the outcomes of these projects are complementary to each other.
 - A WG member highlighted that FMPs could propose recommendations that may or may not be within IFCA jurisdiction
- A WG member agreed with other's concerns around a mandatory bag limit not being implemented. Some anglers will be unwilling to comply with voluntary measures, which

undermines those who would otherwise be adhering to them. Highlighted that if the opinions given by industry are not reflected in these documents, it may negatively influence FMP interaction and support.

- A WG member noted that they have heard anecdotally from charter skippers that there is a real need for mandatory bag limits. Confirmed that this opinion is strongly felt amongst much of the charter industry in Southern IFCA region where there is significant recreational exploitation of black seabream. Recommended FMP team report back to Defra that this measure is heavily supported by fishers.
- A WG member noted that some charter vessel guests may feel a bag limit of 6 fish would be too low if they are paying up to £100 for a day's worth of fishing. 8-10 fish may be more widely accepted. Mentioned that this opinion was shared by several anglers.
 - A WG member responded that charter fishing should be for sport, not profit.
 - A WG member noted that the bass bag limit had similar feedback and concerns at the time, but now many charter skippers are content with the limit. The skippers that the WG member has spoken to did not believe that a bag limit will impact business.
 - MMO responded that the FMP will not suggest what a bag limit should be. The bag limit value will be based on further consultation.
 - A WG member recommended that the decision for a bag limit value should be made in close consultation with IFCAs, anglers and charter skippers.

Policy Goal 3

WG Feedback:

- A WG member noted that some of the wording comes across as negative when from what we are seeing, climate change is having positive impacts on the UK fishery. Furthermore, the investment required for Essential Fish Habitat mapping needs to be considered.
- A WG member queried how the mortality rate of seabream can be monitored in scientific studies.
 - A WG member noted that Plymouth University have been working on assessing post release survival rates by surgically placing acoustic transmitters inside seabream to monitor post release behaviour. Preliminary results indicate that post release mortality is quite low.

- A WG member used an example of assessing post release survival in seabass. Fish are caught and kept for periods of time to see the selection of those that survive. Different variables are considered, and these are accounted for in the studies. One thing that could be done in the FMP is encourage better handling practices and voluntary codes of conduct for seabream to change fishing behaviour and improve survival rates.
 - MMO noted that correct handling and use of various gears to improve survivability are mentioned. Acknowledged that a lot of work can be done to monitor and maximise post release survival.
- A WG member acknowledged a practice amongst some recreational anglers fishing for bass where they keep the smaller fish alive in a tank while they attempt to catch larger fish, given they can only catch two bass per day (known as upgrading). Recommended researching the impact that the upgrading process may have on the fish that are subsequently released.
 - MMO recommended that the handling guidelines could include reference to upgrading.
- A WG member noted that although lots of anglers already have good handling techniques, encouragement/promotion of these methods could be useful to fishers that are new to the sport. It is good to have this information readily available.
- A WG member highlighted that seabream are important in net fisheries and a targeted net fishery for seabream is emerging in some areas. As a result, WG member believed there is an urgency to increase the MCRS.

Policy Goal 4

WG Feedback:

- A WG member recommended the FMP also looks at the social values of recreational fisheries and the private boat sector in addition to the charter vessel industry.
- A WG member queried what investment will be necessary to achieve certification and would will pay for the collection of data. Need to consider how action timeframes may vary depending on these factors.
 - MMO responded that MSC status has been shown to improve the value of some fisheries, however, the team may need to establish whether it will bring greater benefit than the cost incurred.
 - MMO also noted that additional costs will be having a consultant lead the Fisheries Improvement Plan (FIP) but highlighted there is currently a large

market for imported gilthead and black seabream. Seems that there may be a growing fishery that we need to maximise the market for while ensuring sustainability.

- A WG member acknowledged that farmed fish is a reality in many other European countries. Believed it may be difficult to do anything about this in the lifetime of the FMP.
- MMO explained to some WG members the background behind MSC and that to gain accreditation, a FIP is required to show that the fishery has met certain sustainability requirements. The clam fishery in Poole harbour was used as an example.
- A WG member highlighted that an objective of the Fisheries Act is that fisheries are managed at MSY and if they cannot be, or there is insufficient evidence, then the FMP should lay out the steps to gather data and evidence to achieve this goal. Seabream is an emerging fishery and WG member believed the team should consider the benefits and unintended consequences of trying to achieve MSY. Queried whether MSC certifications and FIPs are just for fisheries that are well-established, or whether they can be applied to emerging fisheries. Noted that gathering data for MSY can take considerable time and investment.
 - MMO highlighted that this was suggested as a longer-term aspiration for the fishery. Agreed that the unintended consequences and potential benefits of the certification need to be investigated.
 - A WG member questioned whether there are benefits to including an action that we know may not be started or achieved in the six years leading up to the FMPs first review.
 - MMO responded that there is currently nothing to suggest that this action would not have been started by the time the FMP is reviewed.
 - A WG member raised their experience with getting MSC certification for the clam fishery in the Southern IFCA district. Noted that everything does not have to be perfect to receive certification. Due to data limitations, there is no established MSY for the clam fishery but each year they evidence how they work to make their data collection more robust. The MSC process can be started without necessarily having all the elements established.
- A WG member noted that from their understanding, black seabream seem to have a fairly low commercial value and are not targeted on a large scale.
 - MMO responded that it was suggested throughout engagement that the commercial interest in black seabream may grow in the future.

- A WG member noted that there are ports where charter boats are dependent on black seabream and so they believed it is important that social and economic evidence underpins future decisions. Also noted that other FMPs seem to reference maximising socioeconomic factors whereas in this policy goal, it just references evidence gathering.
- A WG member mentioned that most seabream harvesting occurs in the offshore trawl/seine fishery.

Policy Goal 5

WG Feedback:

- A WG member noted that this policy may just be creating another WG which may be difficult to manage at the implementation stage. If this is a policy goal that goes for consultation, there will be a set of expectations that must be managed.
 - MMO responded that they are looking at the bass management group as a forerunner. The management group could be used to discuss management going forward. The group would be involved in fine tuning the policy actions.

Additional WG comments

- A WG member noted that there is currently a lack of understanding on mid channel fisheries and so it could be useful to have mention of this in the FMP, referencing what occurs beyond the 6nm limit.
- A WG member raised that management, policy and science seem slow with decisions around emerging fisheries. Enforcement and management are not put in place fast enough and by the time they are established, it may already be too late.
 - A WG member agreed. Efficient management is really important for fisheries that are boom and bust.
- A WG member showed concern that the fisheries management seems to freeze adaptive management being put in place while the FMPs are being developed. Queried whether management could be introduced, if necessary, before the FMPs are published.
 - MMO responded that if there is concern and evidence agrees that significant measures are required then management could be implemented prior to the publication of the FMP.

4. Next Steps

MMO noted that a document with the full draft policy goals will be circulated following the meeting for further comments. MMO reminded stakeholders that, as per the WG Terms of Reference, details of the draft policies are not to be shared outside of the group.

Once the draft policies have been reviewed and the internal MMO quality assessment has concluded, the WG will receive copy of the draft FMP to review. Further detail on this will be provided in due course.

5. AOB

No AOB raised.

Appendix 1: Actions

Reference	Action description	Assigned to
26/02/24/01	MMO to work with WG members to resolve sequencing issues related to Policy Goal 1.	FMP team