

Whelk Management Group (WMG) – Inaugural Meeting

5th February 2020

The Rubens at the Palace, London

Attendees

Aoife Martin, Seafish (Chair)

Alex Passmore, More Seafoods

Andrew Brown, Macduff Shellfish

Andy Lawler, Cefas

Bill Brock, Brighton & Newhaven Fish Sales

Charlie Abbott, Lynn Shellfish

Charlie Brock, Brighton & Newhaven Fish Sales

Colin Charman, Welsh Gov.

David Beard, IOM Fishermen's PO

Gary Hodgson, Venture Seafoods

Helen Hunter, Defra

Iain Spear, Coombe Fisheries

Jeremy Percy, NUTFA

Jim Evans, Welsh Fishermen's Association

Jim Portus, SWFPO

Joanna Messini, Defra

Lewis Tattersall, Seafish

Lydia Osborne, Defra

Martyn Youell, Waterdance

Natalie Hold, Bangor University

Paul Brown, Brown & Bright

Phil McBryde, Defra

Stuart McLanaghan, Seafish

Tony Delahunty, NFFO

Vladimir Laptikhovsky, Cefas

1. Introductions

1.1 Overview by Aoife Martin:

- Increasing focus and consideration on how best to more sustainably manage/co-manage inshore fisheries; recent inshore conference, creation of the new Shellfish Industry Group and the new Fisheries Bill support this opportunity.
- Recognition that there is knowledge and shared understanding to be gained from other industry groups (perhaps most notably scallops)
- Scope to share information/data and objectives with other industry groups
- Aim of today is to discuss issues, better understand knowledge gaps and secure an ongoing commitment from participants, to pre-competitively collaborative, to address common challenges associated with delivering sustainable management of UK whelk stocks

1.2 Defra update by Phil McBryde:

- This is a valuable opportunity to explore collaborative working opportunities; Defra are committed to working with industry in this way.
- This should not be a top-down 'one-size fits all' approach, the input of industry is vital, particularly with regard to local initiatives (which are seen as key in the case of whelk fisheries)
- The group should aim to come up with solutions at a national level

1.3 Industry update by Bill Brock:

- The UK whelk fishery has expanded significantly in recent years; there is now a clear need for sustainable management to safeguard the fishery
- this group was proposed as a means of focusing specifically on whelk management issues but it is aligned to the SAIG. The Scallop Industry Consultation Group (SICG) is a good template for the kind of group the Whelk Management Group could become

2. Objectives and scope of the Whelk Management Group

2.1 Summary of discussion

2.1.1 Scope

- As a starting point, the UK Fisheries Bill should be reviewed to help inform the Group's main aims, objectives and work program vis-à-vis the sustainable management of the UK whelk fishery. This will assist the Group and its members to adopt a common frame of reference and speak the same language. The inclusion of Fisheries Plans in the Bill provides an opportunity for more coordinated fisheries management which is aligned with the direction of the Group
- The focus of the WMG should be national-level strategic management of whelk fisheries; however there is recognition that effective delivery will take place at a regional level. As such the remit of the WMG is to inform management and regulation at a national level whilst facilitating effective implementation at a regional level
- With only 11 months until the UK is out of the CFP, is there a risk of displacement of effort by EU vessels into UK waters - specifically, with reference to the east English Channel (7.d) transboundary fishery; and
- The risk of displacement should also be considered when looking at permitting and other restrictions – control of one fishery can potentially cause displacement into another (as seen in whelk): it is unlikely that legislation could be introduced for only one species because of this risk therefore, management must take a broader view of other fisheries
- Transboundary (across national boundaries) fisheries also exist which could potentially further complicate matters

2.1.2 Objectives

- As with many fisheries groups, there is a risk that action will only be taken when it is essentially too late and the damage, potentially lasting, has already been done. There is a need to learn from other fisheries and groups, to ensure that the same does not happen here
- Data gathering is a costly exercise and industry must be seen to contribute; commitments are needed from both industry and devolved administrations, to ensure that the right data are collected, to bring rigour and science-based evidence to identify and deliver appropriate management
- Member States can impose rules on their vessels that are stricter than the CFP. Whilst the WMG could recommend management measures stricter than existing inshore fisheries regulations, we need to be alert to the unintended consequences, including the potential displacement of effort;
- Whelk fisheries have always been on the 'agenda', but little has been happened to improve their management. Whilst there is management within 6nm, the offshore areas also need to be brought up to the same level of management, this again brings a potential risk of displacement of effort;
- Defining S-/M-/L-term objectives will help define who should be involved – membership should be informed by what the WMG wants to achieve and how it wants to interact with others
- From a processors' point of view, the long-term goal is supply-side 'stability' - where foreign markets are notoriously difficult to manage.) The short- to medium-term objectives are to establish the scientific base for management, control access and total take of whelk. The central need therefore is to develop mechanisms to deliver these objectives
- From a fisheries point of view, there is a very real need for scientific evidence and effective fishery management (i.e. a 'precautionary approach' for stabilisation of the fishery) until science 'catches up';

2.1.3 Representation

- To achieve the above, the WMG needs to be recognised by UK governments, not as a collection of individual voices, but as an industry group with one voice with representation from across the entire UK whelk supply chain

- There needs to be early consideration of how the views of industry, perhaps via this Group, feed into and inform, for example, the Defra/IFCA policy decision making processes
- The WMG provide should provide oversight, under which sits a number of specific working groups (perhaps for different devolved administrations or regions?) This may be an option depending on the WMG work programme
- The Devolved Administrations (DAs) will have a role to play, administrations should be giving the opportunity to get involved but attendance should not be mandatory (the model of the SICG should be looked at here, whereby all stakeholders are invited but the decision to attend is down to the individual)
- Membership of the WMG needs to be small enough to achieve its goals but large enough to be representative of the UK whelk industry
- IFCA representation on the group was discussed at length. While the IFCAs are focused on local management and the WMG has a national focus the need to align national management and regional implementation will be key to the success of the group and on that basis IFCA participation group could be valuable. Should IFCAs be invited to be part of the WMG?
 - Some members stated it would be a missed opportunity to exclude or overlook IFCA representation in the WMG;
 - Discussion around the need for national legislation as management measures already exist at the IFCA district level?
 - IFCA involvement is needed to improve understanding of how fisheries are already managed locally and how the inshore area would be impacted by any further legislation;
 - In terms of scope of the WMG it will be important not to focus solely on waters inside 6nm; we need to look at non-UK, transient, and offshore (outside 6nm) vessels too. These are the areas that are not currently managed.
- Lessons can be learned from the SICG:
 - Specifically, the formation of small working groups focused on particular issues which are then fed back to the overarching group. however, differences exist between the management needs of whelk and scallop (e.g. the sedentary nature of whelk stocks compared to the larval dispersal of scallop spat); as a result, the WMG will need to focus on whelk-specific considerations;
 - there was perceived to be some earlier 'drift' in the focus of the SICG; this was addressed with the release of the Poseidon report; this united members around common goals;

2.2 Actions

- Action 1: Review (and feedback at the meeting meeting) the SICG model in terms of membership, ToR, structure and funding model
- Action 2: Create a mission statement and series of short-, medium- and long-term goals for the WMG – broadly based on building an evidence base for sustainable management of whelks (long term)

3. Overview: Existing Data and information on whelk fisheries

3.1 Summary of discussions

3.1.1 Current landscape

- There is a need to map the current research and management landscape. The Blue Marine Foundation/MRAG report is a good starting point for English fisheries
- Welsh Government will soon be launching a consultation into a statutory instrument for catch limits (monthly cap) and permit conditions for data collection in whelk fisheries
- In light of M. Kaiser's work on whelk righting after capture, should the WMG create a whelk handling guide for fishers, particularly with some fisheries exploring the use of rotary riddles?

3.1.2 Stock boundaries

- Whelk have discrete stocks; knowing how to define whelk stock boundaries will be key to their successful management
- Stock boundaries potentially overlap, to map stock boundaries you need:
 - up to date and accurate sediment/habitat maps, to identify ecological niches which whelk could inhabit;
 - an assessment of the continuity of suitable habitats;
 - fishing effort data and on the ground knowledge from fishers, and;
 - information on size of maturity (LM50) for the population.

3.1.3 Stock assessment models

- Cefas are creating exploratory surplus production models using time series data (going back to 2006), with the hope of generating a short-term solution to stock assessment
- Focus is on building good time series data, but in the meantime the surplus production model is seen as a short-/medium-term solution;
- Iceland use a hierarchical Bayesian model with input data at a regional level – what lessons can we learn here?
- In order to collect data quickly, there is a need to establish dialogue with vessel operators directly; the WMG could potentially adopt a similar scheme to the scallop ‘red bag’ sampling procedure. This would allow scientists to request a sample from a specific fishery as required, giving a greater level of granulation than using ICES rectangles;
- There was broad agreement that industry would be willing to share data if: these were managed through an honest broker and where confidentiality is retained; outputs used aggregated data sets also accessible to whelk fishers; the long-term aims of a data collection exercise were properly communicated to operators; and as part of wider engagement with fishers there was a focus on ensuring participants see the results of their efforts and translated for non-scientific/technical audiences; and
- Discussion considered whether data sharing could/should be a prerequisite of WMG membership, or even a licensing condition.
- Acknowledgement that the group is starting from a low base but has a potentially data-rich future (CatchApp, inshore VMS) and as such should be preparing now
- Catch limits are a possibility for the future but require stock assessments. Discussion round whether or not catch limits could be set based on current catch levels in conjunction with permitting
- *Andrew Brown, MacDuff Shellfish, delivered a presentation on the data they already collect for whelks*
- *Lewis Tattersall, Seafish, provided overview of Seafish economic dataset on whelk-dependent vessels*

3.2 Actions

- Action 3: Create a Google Drive/Share-point which all members can access and add all whelk reports/documentation
- Action 4: Create a coherent work plan for the Whelk Management Group bringing together all key fisheries management actions
- Action 5: Review and map current management landscape and tools (inside and outside 6nm): how do we use them? What tools actually work? what is the level of enforcement/compliance?, are they appropriate, do they impact effort, what are the main issues with each tool? This item should involve consideration of risk of displacement, or other potential unintended consequences of management measures
- Action 6: Create a comprehensive list of whelk processors for Cefas to contact, to discuss the possibility of establishing an onshore sampling protocol
- Action 7: Review SICG model for data sharing; consider whether this type of agreement could be applicable to whelk fisheries and for use by the WMG
- Action 8: Prepare a short report summarising the economic data held for whelk fisheries and whelk-dependent UK vessels
- Action 9: Discussion to be held between academia and Cefas to define:
 - What data are required to sustainably manage the resource

- Developing a data collection protocol (sampling at sea and onshore)
- Mapping how data provided by industry will be used to sustainably manage the resource
- Action 10: Circulate:
 - MRAG/Blue Marine Foundation report on whelk management
 - Seafish economic dataset on whelk-dependent vessels
 - M. Kaiser's YouTube video
- Action 11: Review how new technology (e.g. CatchApp) could potentially become part of a data collection programme
- Action 12: Preliminary research around 'fleet flux' (as with scallops work), to assess movement into the fishery
- Action 13: Improve understanding around setting TACs using current knowledge, in the absence of full stock assessments
- Action 14: Share Welsh consultation document with the WMG (when published)
- Action 15: Create a whelk handling guide focused on improving survivability of whelks returned to the sea

4. Mechanics of the Whelk Management Group

4.1 Summary of discussions

- Discussion around logistics and administration of the group (with regard to organising, chairing, and scheduling of meetings)
- There was agreement that the WMG should have close links with the SICG and other shellfish groups
- After a request to do so, AM confirmed that Seafish will continue to organise and chair WMG meetings
- Some whelk fleets are nomadic (though not on the same scale as scallops) and specific skippers were mentioned as potential members of the WMG
- Discussion around possible need for international liaison regarding transboundary fisheries as required – specifically French, Dutch, Irish, and Norwegian fisheries – though this will depend on the boundaries of shared stocks
- Mention of inviting representative of Normandy FPO as a guest speaker to a WMG meeting in the future to discuss management of their fishers
- Consider the NAFC Marine Centre in Shetland: Shetland has a different management regime (presumably based on data from NAFC); this could also help with securing engagement from Scottish stakeholders
- Discussion around need for agreed media lines that WMG members can use; the creation of the group is a good news story and should be promoted as such

4.2 Actions

- Action 16: Seafish to continue organisation and chairing the Whelk Management Group, (members agreed to hold meetings quarterly). Circulate Doodle Poll to set date for the next four WMG meetings (May, August, November 2020)
- Action 17: Defra (with support from Seafish) to discuss involvement and invitation of representatives from the Devolved Administrations
- Action 18: Follow up with attendees who proposed specific stakeholders as potential members of the WMG
- Action 19: Circulate list of attendees/invitees to all members to review and identify obvious omissions
- Action 20: Preliminary high-level analysis of where whelk catches are taken in order to decide what international interests must be taken into account in the future
- Action 21: Minutes to be circulated to members within two weeks of WMG meeting
- Action 22: Establish a communications programme for the WMG. Including writing agreed media lines/messages for WMG after inaugural meeting

5. How will the group be funded?

5.1 Summary of discussions

- The SICG has provided a useful model of how group funding can be applied in practice – the group funds stock assessments only through a self-imposed levy on landings; this is a voluntary initiative with the long-term objective of implementing a mandatory levy
- Seafish agreed to contribute £25,000 to the start-up and first year running of the group
- Funding mechanism(s) will ultimately be dependent on the type of projects the group want to conduct however, the WMG may want to put in place a funding mechanism before vital work arises and to maintain group momentum
- Could a whelk permit have a condition of contributing to funding the WMG and data collection? Defra: unsure however, data collection and sharing could be a condition of a permit
- The Fisheries Bill has a provision for the MMO to collect funding for the provision of services however, the process would be slower (nearer 12 months away)
- Charging a fee for licenses is unlikely
- The New Zealand Commodity Levy Act provides a regulatory mechanism that gives industry groups a mandate to collect a levy from its members provided there is support from an agreed level of membership (around 75%) (the Government's science program is already funded by Defra and delivered through Cefas who carry out stock assessments. The WMG needs to define exactly what additional work it would like to fund (NB: Cefas stock assessment work is restricted to England; if there are gaps in other devolved administrations, then additional funding might need to be found)
- Could eNGOs contribute to the WMG in exchange for a seat at the table? Particularly, as whelk is a low impact fishery. Further to this point eNGOs could also be engaged by inviting expert speakers to present at specific WMG meetings.
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5.2 Actions

- Action 23: Review SICG model for funding

Table 1: Summary of fisheries management actions from the Whelk Management Group meeting, proposed timescale, and party responsible for the action

Actions – Fisheries management	Timeframe (S/M/L)	Responsible for delivery
Action 4: Create a coherent work plan for the Whelk Management Group bringing together all key fisheries management actions		
Action 5: Review and map current management tools (inside and outside 6nm): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do we use them? - What tools actually work? - What is the level of enforcement/compliance? - Are they appropriate, do they impact effort, and what are the main issues with each tool? <p>This item should involve consideration of risk of displacement, or other potential unintended consequences of management measures</p>	Short/medium	
Action 9: Discussion to be held between academia and Cefas to define: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What data are required to sustainably manage the resource? - Developing a data collection protocol (sampling at sea and onshore) - Mapping how data provided by industry will be used to sustainably manage the resource 		Cefas/Bangor University/Heriot-Watt University
Action 11: Review how new technology (e.g. CatchApp) could potentially become part of a data collection programme in the future		
Action 12: Preliminary research around ‘fleet flux’ (as with scallops work) to assess movement into the fishery		
Action 13: Improve understanding around setting TACs, using current knowledge, in the absence of full stock assessments	Medium	
Action 15: Create a whelk handling guide focused on improving survivability of whelks returned to the sea	Short/medium	
Action 20: Preliminary high-level analysis of where whelk catches are taken in order to decide what international interests must be taken into account in the future		

Table 2: Summary of administrative/data-sharing actions from the Whelk Management Group meeting, proposed timescale, and party responsible for the action

Actions – Administration & information sharing	Timeframe (S/M/L)	Responsible for delivery
Action 1: Review (and feedback at the meeting meeting) the SICG model in terms of membership, ToR, structure and funding model	Short	
Action 2: Create a mission statement and series of short-,	Short	

medium- and long-term goals for the WMG – broadly based on building an evidence base for sustainable management of whelks (long term)		
Action 3: Create a Google Drive/Share-point which all members can access and add all whelk reports/documentation	Immediate	
Action 6: Create a comprehensive list of whelk processors for Cefas to contact, to discuss the possibility of establishing an onshore sampling protocol	Immediate	Seafish
Action 8: Prepare a short report summarising the economic data held for whelk fisheries and whelk-dependent UK vessels	Short	Seafish
Action 10: Circulate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MRAG/Blue Marine Foundation report on whelk management - Seafish economic dataset on whelk-dependent vessels - Prof. M. Kaiser's YouTube video 	Achieved	Seafish
Action 14: Share Welsh consultation document with the WMG (when published)	Short	Seafish/Welsh Government
Action 16: Seafish to continue organisation and chairing the Whelk Management Group, (members agreed to hold meetings quarterly). Circulate Doodle Poll to set date for the next four WMG meetings (May, August, November 2020)	Immediate	Seafish
Action 17: Defra (with support from Seafish) to discuss involvement and invitation of representatives from the Devolved Administrations		Defra (Seafish)
Action 18: Circulate list of attendees/invitees to all members to review and identify obvious omissions	Achieved	Seafish
Action 19: Follow up with attendees who proposed specific stakeholders as potential members of the WMG	Immediate	Seafish
Action 21: Minutes to be circulated to members within two weeks of WMG meeting	Short	Seafish
Action 22: Establish a communications programme for the WMG. Including writing agreed media lines/messages for WMG after inaugural meeting	Short	Seafish
Action 23: Review SICG model for funding, is this model appropriate for funding the WMG?		