

Note on Common Language Group (CLG) meeting held at Fishmongers' Hall, Monday 22 July 2013.

For all CLG minutes and meeting presentations see:

<http://www.seafish.org/retailers/responsible-sourcing/the-common-language-group>

Welcome, introductions and apologies

Andrew Dewar-Durie welcomed everyone to a specially-convened meeting of the Common Language Group, to which the group had invited Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall. He explained that the meeting would be conducted under Chatham House Rules. Notes will be taken on the meeting but the comments will not be attributed (but comments made could be quoted afterwards but must not be attributed). It was agreed that Keo Productions would film the introductions but the cameras would then leave the room.

Attendees

Andrew Dewar-Durie	Chair
Barrie Deas	NFFO
Bertie Armstrong	SFF
Catherine Pazderka	BRC
Charlotte Bury	Tesco
Chris Leftwich	Fishmongers' Company
John Atkinson	Co-op
Francisco Aldon	IFFO
Giles Bartlett	WWF
Hannah MacIntyre	M&S
Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall	Fish Fight, River Cottage
Huw Thomas	Morrisons
Iain Shone	Lyons Seafoods
James Stephen	Skipper, Harvest Hope, Chair SWFPA Whitefish Committee
Jerry Percy	NUTFA
Jim Evans	Welsh Fishermans Association
Jim Masters	MCS
Karen Galloway	Seafish (Minutes)
Karen Green	Seafish (Minutes)
Lewis Colam	Interfish
Mark Duffy	Natural England
Matt Francis	Tesco
Melanie Siggs	ISU
Melissa Pritchard	ClientEarth
Mike Berthet	M&J Seafoods
Michel Kaiser	Bangor University (Presenter)
Mike Park	SWFPA (Presenter)
Mike Short	FDF
Nigel Edwards	Seachill (Presenter)
Paul Williams	Seafish
Peter Bruce	Skipper (<i>Budding Rose</i>)
Peter Hajjipieris	Birds Eye Iglo
Peter Stagg	Le Lien Ltd
Phil MacMullen	Seafish

Rob Bruce Seafish
Tim Maddams Fish Fight chef
Tom Pickerell Seafish

Keo production team

Adam Scott
Callum Webster
Geoff Price
Mike Carling

Background to CLG. Paul Williams, Chief Executive, Seafish.

The group was initiated in 2007 in Hull when it was recognised that effective communication between NGOs, the supply chain and scientists was a basic problem in industry. The Common Language Group formed around this premise and has grown year on year. It provides a safe forum for sections of industry to talk to each other; and to talk to NGOs, government and scientists, with the aim to try and reach agreement or at least understand the position of others.

Two spin-off groups have also been formed: the Discard Action Group in 2008 to look at issues surrounding discards, and in 2009 the Aquaculture Common Issues Group (ACIG). The ACIG is similar to the CLG but recognises that the aquaculture sector does have specific issues of its own.

Introduction by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall.

It is a privilege and an opportunity to be at the heart of the CLG meeting today, and in the company of so many people who are deeply and professionally involved in the business of fisheries, at a very intense and exciting time. We represent many different interests and at times it feels like the interests of some of us conflict with the interest of others. But at the heart I think we can all agree on a lot and we should emphasise the positives and remind ourselves what we agree about. That is something we can all sign up to.

- Fish is a fantastic and healthy food that can and should make a massive contribution to feeding the population, both here in the UK and all over the world. We believe in harvesting wild fish from our seas.
- Things don't always go right. There are some significant problems with the way we fish, and if we don't always agree about the state of our fish stocks we can certainly agree they could be better. I think we can agree that it's worth trying to find solutions to those problems and to have a shared common purpose.
- We can feel better where it comes from. If we can fix some of these problems and make our fisheries more sustainable, we could actually be harvesting more fantastic seafood, not less.
- I think we can agree, at times and in places our oceans deserve levels of protection, which could vary from area to area. Not all forms of fishing in all of the sea are appropriate. This is a discussion we are ready to engage on.
- Engaging the fish eating public with the mainstream issues is important. For too long the public bought fish without really knowing where it came from. We need clarity and to bring issues out into the open to allow public to share, because informed consumers will make better choices and reward our efforts to be more sustainable. Some of the changes we'll discuss today are now being driven by public awareness, as well as by your professional expertise.
- I think that we can agree that we owe it to the fish buying public to be clear and honest about the fish supply chain, about where our fish is coming from and how it is produced. And there is room for improvement with the way fish is labelled and the way the public is informed. We need to be honest over where fish comes from.
- When it gets to nitty gritty – hot words have been said and the situation has become very controversial and very heated. There have been a lot of words in the press and

in the online media. But I think today is a good chance to clear the air and reflect on our common interests. On how things have changed and what we can still do to make things better.

- There is much common ground. We all want healthy seas and thriving fisheries and to be able to enjoy this for years to come. That's the spirit that makes me feel welcome.

The cameras left the room.

1. Moving towards discard-free fisheries. Mike Park, Discard Action Group Chairman, Seafish Board member, Chief Executive, Scottish White Fish Producers Association Limited.

http://www.seafish.org/media/915207/clg_22july_discards.pdf

To achieve discard-free fisheries implementation must run in sequence otherwise there is the danger that the fleet will be brought to its knees financially. A number of key issues must be addressed: technical conservation measures must be simplified; catch composition rules must be reviewed; TACs need to be reviewed to address problems associated with choke species (once fishermen have reached their ceiling of opportunity for particular species they will have to stop fishing). There is a 5% de minimis exemption but this is unlikely to be used in the UK, however it is likely we will use the 9% transfer of target species and the inter-annual flexibility of 10%. We also need to look at what other instruments we can use.

Hake was provided as an example of a choke species. The hake stock is booming and has expanded into the North Sea. Historic relative stability for this stock was put in place 30 years ago and the stock continues to be managed as four separate units. The North Sea component only receives 3.5% of the quota, and of that 3.5% the UK allocation is 18%. So the UK only gets a very small share of the overall TAC (0.6%). There has been a regime shift. It could be that in March/April a significant part of the fleet will be forced to shut down as a result of the landings obligation. It is important to get the timing (sequence of events) right to make sure business survives. The landings obligation must be based on better science – every vessel is a research platform, or could be. It is important to establish better long-term management plans (but these may not be in place by 2016). Fishing may be traditional, full of culture. But it's a business. There is the distinct possibility that the industry will run out of cash first. The danger is that you save the stocks but there's no one to fish it.

Discussion

- The turning point was around 2000 when there was a dramatic reduction in fishing mortality, across all the main species groups and across the whole North East Atlantic.
- As a result of the 'gadoid outburst' – largely unexplained – which increased fish abundance, the EU gave new vessel grants to harvest this fish but as the fleet was ramping up, stocks were coming down. Adjustments started around 2000 (precautionary principle). But now we are in a different position. We are not in the same position we were in 20 years ago.
- We could be on the cusp of a great change. Regulations have worked against the fishermen's ability to innovate. Often fishermen have had to use their own ingenuity to work within the regulations.
- It is very difficult working in a mixed fishery with up to 12-14 species in one haul. The reality is that we need quota for all these species.
- [HFW] A discard ban without the right checks and balances is a blunt instrument. Fishermen need to be incentivised to use the most selective gear. The obligation to land fish where no market exists makes selectivity more crucial. Fishermen can be creative and need to be. The ultimate objective is to reduce overall mortality especially of unwanted catch. I fully agree that the practice of discarding is not simply

about landing unwanted dead fish rather than throwing them away at sea. It is really important that there is a constructive solution at market. There is much anxiety about discard ban as a blunt instrument but other countries have found innovative solutions at market ie evidence where fish is sold to other vessels that have quota. Do you see sophisticated communications technology having a role to play to find outlets for prime white fish?

- At the end of the day you won't be able to land fish over the minimum landing size (MLS). The quota has to be in place. If a vessel runs out of quota, then the vessel has to stop fishing, so that issue doesn't arise. Regulation is there to stop you fishing if you don't have quota. The regulation clearly states that. The fisherman is responsible for what he removes from the sea. Above MLS, but no quota, and fishing stops.
- The top-down approach was a disaster and has created the current situation. The new rules in 2016 have the potential to finish us. Industry needs to be involved. Top down doesn't work.
- There is a big gap between political will and the actuality of doing it, and that gap will take some closing. HFW can help or can hinder. This is a specially-convened CLG for you. We all understand the problem and we need help. What we don't need are plausible headlines which make it feel like it is solved. We hope you will choose to play a constructive part.
- The production of food focusses all of us. Wasting perfectly good food is abhorrent and is a waste. Need to be clear to consumers about what is going to happen. There will be wider ecosystem effects and there could be short-term issues such as a likely reduction in the number of sea birds.

2. Collaborations between fisheries and science on marine conservation. Professor Michel J. Kaiser D.Sc; Chairman of the Common Language Group, Seafish Board Member, Committee Member of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and Chair in Marine Conservation Ecology, School of Ocean Sciences, Bangor University.

http://www.seafish.org/media/915210/clg_22july_mpasandmczs.pdf

Total MPA coverage from existing and proposed MPAs for the UK would achieve a coverage of 22.4%. It is important to highlight that marine protected areas come in many shapes and forms and it is a myth to say that all areas of the sea are fished. We also have permanent or seasonal/gear related closures such as the mackerel box, plaice box, Norway pout box and Shetland box.

It is important to understand fully the effects of spatial closures if they result in displacement of activities (such as fishing) to other areas. The unforeseen consequences associated with the plaice box are a prime example. The plaice box proved to be good for conservation (with an increased abundance and biomass of crabs and other invertebrates within the plaice box), however plaice prefer to eat polychaete worms that became more prevalent in the areas into which fishing was displaced, which led to the fish 'following the fishery' and there was no beneficial reduction in discards. There have been some successes – with wide range of industry initiatives: such as the inshore potting agreement, and the MPAs that have underpinned the Isle of Man scallop fishery. 'Strike the Balance' is also a very positive initiative that indicates how the fishing industry understands the need to work in parallel with conservation needs.

Discussion

- It was disingenuous to talk about 0.01% of the oceans being protected globally when in reality there are very significant levels of protection in particular areas. In Europe these will grow under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive, as well as the Marine Acts in the UK. In terms of messaging it is not just about a blanket ban on fishing. There are

big differences between small and large vessels. Hand lining has very little impact. You can't be dogmatic.

- [HFW] There has been a lot of reaction but in the programme we did not say that we wanted MPAs to exclude all forms of fishing. We looked at Lyme Bay and how effective the closures can be for the industry themselves. They can be of benefit for some, such as scallopers.
- This is a very emotive issue and the messages were repeated in the broadsheets. Part of the issue was the inference that the claim 'there wasn't sufficient science' was seen as a fishing industry excuse for not doing anything. The reality is that introducing MPAs without sufficient scientific background can have unintended consequences. The aim is not to block conservation but the Minister's view was we need more science to better understand.
- The beach stunt and the film of the scallop dredge were nuanced. It was very clear what message the viewing public was expected to take away. Whilst your statistics may have been correct how you presented the technique will impact on the consumer. It is a matter of trust. The question is where do we go from here and can we move forward? We want balance – we need to address the bad bits but emphasise the good bits.
- [HFW] I am very happy to accept that campaigning brings attention to anxieties and problems that were simply not known before. Many were unaware of the impact of dredging and how this has shaped the seabed across many years. Scalping has impacted the seabed. There are issues of historic scalping that are powerful – I have never suggested we reverse that. I have wanted to raise models such as Lyme Bay. The economics are up for discussion. Do we need more static gear fishing?
- The answer is no. On a recent train journey through Fife I could see a diesel engine, the teeth of a plough and a ploughed field and yet nobody comments on this. Are you prepared to accept that there are areas of the seabed that can be dredged?
- [HFW] I am on record as saying there are areas where it is appropriate, others where it is not. I have tried to show the positives. On the *Budding Rose*, when Peter asked me the question, about talking positively about British cod. I said I would highlight the good news on stock recovery, and if consumers are going to choose British cod they should try and get it from boats that are part of schemes like the catch quota trials. I Where we see positive stories, and the evidence is there, I will promote it.
- The consumer needs clarity on what MPAs are. Perhaps you could explain that there are different types of protection, it is growing and Government is building evidence. You also need to include Special Protected Areas (SPAs) for birds. These are not 'paper parks', there are good things happening. Article 6 of the Habitats Directive is part of that process.
- [HFW] We share industry frustration that there has been a lack of clarity from Government on what MPAs mean and that this has created the issue. We need a better definition and a description of the toolbox, and a commitment to a timescale. We have created a degree of hyper anxiety. Is there information missing from the debate? We are asking the government to fill this.
- Defra has stepped away to seek more evidence – as a scientist that is important. These decisions might put someone out of business. The quality of evidence needs to be as good as it can be and I applaud that approach. Defra is investing in this area but public money is not plentiful.
- [HFW] It is difficult to have a constructive conversation. A lot of areas which are heavily dredged could provide a static gear fishery.
- It is not my job to defend government but we do need more clarity on MPAs. In my view the effect of displaced fishing has not received due coverage. We need to look at the effects, such as the impact of the change in fishing methods in Lyme Bay. Modelling is very important.

- What does more productive mean? This is about food production – there might be an area that becomes more productive with lobster and crab, but in reality, in terms of flesh on the plate, scallops would be more productive.
- [HFW] I totally agree. There can be marine environments (monocultures) that are favourable to scallops. The lobster fishery in Maine is worth more than the cod fishery ever was – was the collapse of the stock a good thing? We need an ecological balance.
- The lobster fishery in Maine is a system on the edge. We need to be clear about the jargon we all use. We need biodiversity for healthy seas. But to produce what we need, systems will have to change and possibly become more like land production. Anything is sustainable if properly managed.
- There are large areas in Wales where scalloping is banned. You're not listening to what you are being told. You are not covering progress that is being made.

3. Transparency and integrity of the seafood supply chain. Nigel Edwards, Technical Director, Seachill (Division of Icelandic Group UK Ltd).

http://www.seafish.org/media/915213/clg_22july_seafoodintegrity.pdf

This is a framework for discussion. We are on a journey of engagement in supply chain sustainability that started at least 20 years ago, with the MSC and farming standards cited as early examples of our progress. What drives consumers to purchase fish is quality and value but they do so from retailers and brands that they trust. The supply chain takes its responsibilities very seriously - citing partnerships with NGO's, Fishery Improvement Projects in Russia/Sri Lanka/Vietnam, robust standards and the Sustainable Seafood Coalition as practical examples. 80% of the biosphere is ocean, and we have badly damaged the land based resources, so we need to ensure it is more productive. Oceans and their resources belong to society, this is unique in food production with much of the harvest being hunted. We need to be able to sell sustainable and affordable food.

Discussion

- There are two conversations running in parallel. Some of the micro issues have been raised by Fish Fight but on a more strategic level what do you expect the public to do? What change is needed? What do we want the fishing industry to look like? We need to recognise the work of the retailers and the suppliers. There is power there to create change. How do we create political value around fisheries? Currently fishing does not look like an attractive career choice.
- A lot of people in this room are working together. Would you consider meeting with us on a regular basis? Constant dialogue is better.
- [HFW] I would certainly consider that.
- The people in the room have a desire to be responsible – but we need to move away from black and white images. We need a transition. In the world market, we are small. But these things take time – it takes time to make things happen. We are getting there – you should be welcoming this.
- My association employs 1,300 men, 1/3rd from non-EU countries. There are problems recruiting into the sector. If you are looking for good news stories, need to promote the moves towards certifying stocks. But it's a good news story.
- [HFW] Absolutely. We have just filmed on the *Budding Rose* and this is entirely in line with what we want to do - to let people know there are positive stories. We want positive stories.
- You may mention good news stories but overall the programmes have not been balanced. Would be good to get some of the balance back in, although I know sensationalism sells.
- [HFW] Yes, I do admit that it's more difficult to sell good news. But it is important to realise that the campaign was initially about the problems in the ocean, noticeably waste. We have been careful not to get into the detail of the solutions but focusing on the waste of prime fish. We have needed to address this issue for decades. We want

to show more balance if there is more balance. We have noted that the industry is much more solution focused than it was 20 years ago and we want to highlight that.

- You have called for the industry to be more open and transparent but the focus has been on the minutiae. We need to talk about improving relationship with the media.
- Reflecting back, the real issues have been improving shelf life of fish and shellfish and reducing waste. The supply chain has invested a lot of money but the challenges still remain. It can be a tough call on the consumer. Do not catastrophise the industry. How do you capture the positives?
- [HFW] The Sustainable Seafood Coalition has strength and depth. This is a huge issue. We are living in a world where consumers look for the distinction of a label so when a pack does not have a label does it mean that it is not sustainable?
- You run the risk of scaring consumers. There is a screen and filter process that retailers go through. The UK is extremely progressive in comparison with other nations, but this is a global market and there are supply level concerns.
- Please don't forget the Foodservice sector. We have a very important role to play in educating chefs and the public.

LUNCH BREAK

Discussion

Reflection and context setting, Phil MacMullen, Head of Environment, Seafish.

There are a lot of positives and the UK has a lot to be proud of. The way the UK supply chain and the catching sector works is followed by a number of Member States. The example of the Common Language Group has also been followed in North America and Australia. Within UK agriculture a lot is taken as a given - agriculture has trashed entire ecosystems but is viewed in an entirely different way. It is not just the DAG and ACIG groups that have evolved from the CLG, we have also run a Skates and Rays group and a Scallop group, which has looked at acceptable footprints, as well as other areas. These groups have recognised that there are some areas that need addressing but that it is not all bad. Looking ahead the reform of the CFP is a very positive step and the DAG in particular is involved in the process of sensible transition to turn political ambition into realistic actions.

There is the loose use of words such as overfishing and the difficulty of agreed definitions but there is movement for change and the CLG will be used as a key part of the process. There are a whole host of issues on the horizon: under the reform of the CFP total catch monitoring is going to be a real game changer. This will allow greater species identification, and reversing the burden of proof will provide an opportunity for the fishing industry to really demonstrate that it is doing what it said it was going to do and acting responsibly; we will have detailed inshore and offshore management plans; we will be able to map more effectively temperature changes and how they affect fish stock distribution; we are also looking at carbon emissions and environmental footprints

Reflection. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall.

What a great step this has been to get in a room and have a frank discussion about those issues and some of the issues you have with the way we have presented ourselves. I really have taken that on board today – I want to assure you that personally Fish Fight has never been anti-fishing. I am passionate about fish as a food and keen as anyone to see a healthy and productive fishing industry. We all share that. For the legacy of the Fish Fight campaign I want to make sure that comes across. If it came across that we are blaming fishermen, that was never the intention.

Phil's summing up brings everything together – of course there are anxieties with CFP and discard ban, but we are facing a future where we will have one version or another of a fully

documented fishery. But there is a sense of opportunity of a future that ushers in an era when the fleet becomes the primary tool for research where scientists and fishermen come together. We need to start finding a language for creative solutions and this is perhaps what CLG is all about. I take that as a huge positive. We need to find a way of capturing that and building a constructive legacy. I would be more than delighted to come back to CLG again.

There is no real clear indication where the campaign is going. There could be more shows in the future, but maybe not called Fish Fight and they might not involve me but I have taken messages away from today. We have a large following and we do not take that lightly. We have an online campaign. We will continue to work closely with a number of collaborators in dialogue with the industry to make sure we get our messages right and accurate. I want to make it clear we support the British fishing industry. The motivation of the campaign was to highlight and applaud important initiatives and to highlight the issues that might have caused problems.

I do hope it will be clear from the follow up show that we have developed the themes and the conversations that we have had today. This sets the tone for a fresh start and a period of constructive campaigning.

Discussion

- It always surprises and amuses me that hostile press about fishing seems to increase fish consumption. The real danger is when a media storm traps politicians into making poor decisions. There are particular concerns about the displacement issue and how this will impact on the discard ban. There is a political imperative but the real concern is how we adapt.
- The real issue is about balance. Some will agree and some will disagree with your closing remarks. We need responsible reporting.
- There has been a lot of change in the last 20 years. The fishing industry has matured and is much more solutions-focused. There is now lots more synergy between the fishing industry and science. The UK fishing industry is pretty responsible but not all other Member States are as advanced. The big question is how we bring pressure to bear elsewhere in Europe.
- It is important to understand that it is not only fishing that impacts on stock levels and the marine environment there are other factors as well.
- There are changes ahead. ICES is moving from a single stock approach to an ecosystem approach and this may influence how consumers decide what the best choice is.
- It is important to differentiate between the different types of marine protected area, some are created for marine conservation and some are specifically aimed at restricting fishing activity, and this question needs to be raised with the Minister. Displacement also needs to be included in the consideration, and any discussions should include the catching sector, aquaculture operations and the supply chain.
- The supply chain has taken it upon themselves to become involved in Fishery Improvement Projects. It would be great if some of those could be featured. This would help to make consumers aware that these initiatives are in place.
- It is important to keep the messages simple - the real challenge is how to sensationalise good news. This would be of 'political value' by helping to provide a framework and platform from which to make positive changes.

Next steps

Andrew Dewar-Durie posed the question – Where do we go now? What could be the output from this meeting?

[HFW] My door is open. I am very happy to engage with all those in this room. I have a lot to digest and a film to finish and appreciate the diverse interests in this room.

Discussion

- Suggestions could be put forward about where the industry would value support with clear outcomes on the issues that have been raised.
- It would be useful, to avoid any ding-dong in the press after programmes, to maybe share and interact more in advance.
- The name itself - Fish Fight - has been the cause of some anxiety itself with the mixed messages that this has conveyed.
- [HFW] It has always meant the fight about the future of fish. Most of that has focussed on how politicians have not served the fishing industry very well in the past. The most visible fight has always been about waste – hence our focus on discards.

Andrew concluded that minutes of the meeting would be produced and thanked everyone for taking part. He commented that coming back to the CLG, six years after leaving the Seafish Board, he was very pleased to see what a vibrant group it was and how buoyant the industry was.