

Whelk Management Group (WMG) Meeting

15th October 2020

Remote meeting via Zoom

Attendees

Aoife Martin , Seafish (Chair)	Helen Hunter, DEFRA
Andrew Brown, Macduff Shellfish	Jim Evans, Welsh Fishermen's Association
Andy Lawler, CEFAS	Jim Portus, SWFPO
Anne Freeman, DEFRA	Joanna Messini, DEFRA
Bill Brock, Brighton & Newhaven Fish Sales	Julian Bray, Welsh Gov.
Charlie Abbott, Lynn Shellfish	Lydia Osborne, Defra
Charlie Brock, Brighton & Newhaven Fish Sales	Martyn Youell, Waterdance
Chloe North, Western Fish Producer's Organisation	Matthew Johnson, Defra
Gary Hodgson, Venture Seafoods	Michel Kaiser, Heriot-Watt University
	Monty Gould, Defra
	Natalie Hold, Bangor University

Apologies:

Iain Spear, Coombe Fisheries
 Les Lawrence, Shellfish Assoc. of Great Britain
 Scott Merrick, AM Seafoods

1. WMG update

The minutes of the previous WMG Meeting (21 July 2020) were agreed as correct.

The meeting was opened to all members to raise issues or concerns that should be taken into account by the WMG. The following points were raised:

- The Welsh Government consultation on new proposed whelk management measures had been temporarily re-opened to allow stakeholders impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, and who had previously been unable to respond, to feed into the consultation. The consultation will now run until 1st November 2020. The WMG response to this consultation was submitted in July 2020.
- Members requested that materials circulated before each WMG meeting for discussion were sent earlier to allow more time for review. An administrative action was taken by Seafish to circulate documentation at least a week in advance of future SIAG meetings.

No further issues were raised.

The WMG reviewed the live actions document to assess progress against the actions taken from the previous meeting. Detailed updates were given on actions as follows:

Action 2.1 – Assess effectiveness and appropriateness of existing management tools (Joanna Messini, Defra)

- The aim of this action is to build upon the baseline information prepared by Defra on management tools by including information on effectiveness and appropriateness. This research will be used to inform future discussions on management of whelk stocks;
- Expanding the existing document involves thought around how to measure success, how to assess the unintended consequences of management action, and how to assess obstacles the industry may face in complying with multiple layers of regulation;
- Defra is developing an assessment tool to review management measures and this will be presented to the group for comment at the next WMG;

- To date, eight of ten IFCA's have responded to Defra's request for additional information (it was noted that this work does not only focus on management within IFCA jurisdiction, but to whelk management in the entire EEZ. Defra is engaging with devolved administrations on this action);
- An update will be presented at the next meeting of the WMG on the ongoing progress of this work.

Members were asked to comment on the progress of action 2.1:

- In addition to regulator opinions on effectiveness it is important to gauge industry opinions on effectiveness of management measures;
- In addition to looking at unintended consequences of management measures within the jurisdiction of the regulator, this work should consider looking at unintended consequences of management measures in neighboring areas due to displacement of activity.
- Some IFCA's have discussed alignment of management measures with neighboring IFCA's but no respondents have specifically discussed displacement as a result of regulation.

Action 2.6 – Improved economic analyses: limitations and data requirements (Lewis Tattersall, Seafish, presented on behalf of Marta Moran-Quintana, Economics Project Manager at Seafish)

The aim of this action was to explore opportunities around:

- Updating Seafish economic analysis of whelk-dependent vessels using trip level data to provide more information on distinctions between fishing activity inside and outside 6nm, and;
- To explore the influence of legislative changes on economic performance of the whelk-dependent fleet.

Provisional research, and previous experience, by the Seafish economics team revealed two key issues with the proposed analyses:

- Trip-level data held by the MMO is at ICES rectangle resolution (i.e. approx. 30x30 nautical miles) making it impossible to distinguish between activity inside and outside 6nm, and;
- Effort data (in terms of numbers of pots used) by the whelk-dependent fleet, is not available making it impossible to assess the impact of changes in effort.

A brief summary of similar work carried out for the Scallop Industry Consultation Group (SICG) was presented. This work was made possible by collection of additional data from a sample of scallop fishing vessels (via the SICG): vessels provided information on the numbers of dredges used and this was scaled up to fleet level.

In order to progress this work, in a similar way to the economic analysis carried out for the SICG, the following information must be collected:

1. Effort data, financial information, and supplementary anecdotal information to contextualize the data from industry, and;
2. Detailed timelines of legislative changes through engagement with regulators.

Longer term it is hoped that the development and adoption of new technologies (e.g. Catch App) will provide more data, though this will take time to build a suitably robust time series of information to work with.

Members were asked to comment on the progress of action 2.6:

- Seafish economic analyses carried out for the SICG have been valuable, and will continue to be so in the future, particularly in light of current events (e.g. the Covid-19 pandemic) and their impact on economic performance of the fleet;
- Members questioned the need to distinguish between inshore and offshore operations, and if the group should instead be focusing on work to determine stock boundaries;
- Given the difficulties in back-casting data, the WMG should give more consideration to establishing a robust baseline of performance which would have more value in the future;

- By looking at trends in UK whelk fishing activity it may be possible to identify critical areas where landings suggest significant declines, and these areas should be explored further;
- Seafish was encouraged to explore alternate sources of data, for example from IFCA permitting schemes and through producer’s organisations.

There was support from industry members, both fleet and processing, for supplying additional data. There was agreement that Seafish and the WMG should further explore opportunities for enhanced economic analyses and that Seafish should draft a data collection work programme to facilitate additional analyses.

Action 2.2 – Collection of anecdotal information from industry (Natalie Hold, Bangor University; Andy Lawler, Cefas; and Michel Kaiser, Heriot-Watt University)

Spatial variation in biology and ecology of whelk stocks is an issue for whelks and is a key priority for designing future surveys. To inform survey design and targeted sampling, the sub-group (NH, AL, MK) have developed a questionnaire to collect anecdotal information from fishers on local whelk stocks.

Fishers are asked to indicate on an ICES rectangle map where they fish, if necessary the sub-group will follow up with a finer scale map to collect more detailed spatial information.

The sub-group are in the process of creating an online version of the questionnaire. This may be hosted via one of the universities which may mean the questionnaire being assessed by a university ethics committee which could slow the process of going live. Options for hosting are to be explored to expedite the launch of the questionnaire.

It was noted Cefas only have funding for this first phase of the work, not for subsequent biological survey work that may be required.

The sub-group hope to collect this information over the next two to three months.

To date the group have only received a small number of questionnaire responses, all WMG members are asked to commit to supporting this work by raising awareness with stakeholders and by encouraging active whelk fishers to complete the questionnaire. Seafish will lead on promotion of the questionnaire through media channels and direct engagement with seafood associations and producers organisations.

2. WMG priorities

Draft priority areas and actions were presented to the WMG. This prioritisation of actions will be used to create a draft work programme for the group for the short-term (12-36 months). All WMG members are asked to review the draft and answer the following questions:

1. Are the proposed priority areas and actions suitable for the short-term (12-36 months) work programme of the WMG?
2. What does success against each of these actions look like?
3. How should the WMG fund the delivery of these actions?

Table 1: Draft priorities presented to the WMG on 15th October 2020.

Priority area	Actions
1. Establish baseline	Improved understanding of whelk fisheries as they currently are, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fishing activity and economic performance of the whelk-dependent fleet, and; • Available biological information on stock status, life cycle, and stock boundaries.
	Improved understanding of the range of tools currently used to manage whelk fisheries including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriateness: are the tools currently applied appropriate to the biological traits of

	<p>the stock and activity of the fishery?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectiveness: do they deliver the intended fisheries management objectives? • Unintended consequences (positive and negative) of management measures. • Establishing the most appropriate tools for future management
2. Data and research	<p>Review existing science available for whelk fisheries to identify gaps in knowledge base.</p> <p>Develop and implement a collaborative data collection and research plan to improve knowledge and understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stock status, stock boundaries, and life cycle of economically important whelk stocks; • Fishing effort and CPUE.
3. Managing effort	<p>Work collectively to establish a means of reliably assessing catch per unit effort (CPUE) in the whelk fishery.</p> <p>Agree on a programme of management to ensure fishing effort is aligned with likely/actual stock status.</p> <p>Improve understanding of how the whelk fishery interacts with other fisheries, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions with non-target species (inc. bait species); • Mortality of whelks from other fishing activity; • Displacement of fishing activity between sectors; • Gear conflict and spatial considerations between sectors.

2.1 Next steps: comparing existing literature (Poseidon vs. MRAG reports)

In discussing next steps for the WMG the Group compared and contrasted the following reports:

- Management recommendations for English non-quota fisheries: Common whelk, Blue Marine Foundation (submitted by MRAG), July 2018, and;
- The UK scallop fishery: current trends future management options and recommendations, Scallop Industry Consultation Group (Poseidon Aquatic Resource Management), October 2018.

The aim of this discussion was to determine if a piece of work similar to the Poseidon report for the SICG would be beneficial to the whelk sector.

It was acknowledged that the WMG do not currently have a fundamental report to refer back to in terms of their ongoing work programme (like the SICG), however that the relative lack of data compared to scallops was the key barrier in preparing this type of report for whelks.

It was agreed that the work being proposed by the WMG is sufficient at this stage in the Group's development and that if possible work should be carried out "in house" by WMG rather than contracting a third party. It was noted that the work of the WMG may identify specific areas of interest where input from a sub-contractor is required.

Additional work is required from the WMG to collate all available data sources and explore opportunities to make the most of the available data.

In the short-term it would be very useful to have better insight into the size distribution at broad geographic scales. This type of research was carried out in Wales and proved very useful in understanding economic impacts of management measures around MLS. This type of work can be driven by industry. Developing a protocol for industry to achieve this, with addition of methodology to collect robust length to weight ratios, would be beneficial. This will include sampling of entire catches (not just landings) and details on the type of pots being used.

In the medium- to long-term it is likely that technological advances (e.g. Catch App) will provide more data to support this type of work. A representative from the MMO should be invited to the next meeting of the WMG to provide an update on Catch App data and how it can be accessed.

Natalie Hold (Bangor University) reminded all WMG members that they can propose MSc student projects for summer 2021.

3. Communications strategy

3.1 Links to other work

An update was presented on the SIAG; the SIAG is currently developing a draft National Shellfish Fisheries Plan.

The WMG is a species-specific management group that sits under the SIAG as shown in table 2.

3.2 Joint press release

A draft joint press release for the SIAG, WMG and CMG was shared and discussed. The aim of this document is to raise awareness about the groups.

Feedback was taken from the meeting, with members invited to submit any additional comments by email after the meeting.

3.3 Microsoft Teams

Following this meeting all WMG resources will be stored in a Microsoft Teams folder allowing easier access to work outputs, previous meeting minutes and agendas, and background reading. A simple “used guide” will be created to help members navigate teams and access resources.

Table 2: Schematic structure of shellfish management groups

Level	Overview	Description	Ownership
Level 1	Strategic Objectives	Issues that are relevant to all shellfish fisheries, linked to Fisheries Bill Objectives e.g. collaborative science, international issues, allocation & access, trade & marketing, overarching environmental issues e.g. ghost gear/plastic waste, governance, sustainability/viability of the sector.	SIAG
Level 2	Species Specific Management (Species Chapters)	Stock research and management measures including Harvest Control Rules, managing effort, addressing environmental impacts of fishing e.g. benthic habitats, ETP species.	Species Management Groups e.g. WMG, SICG
Level 3	Regional fisheries management initiatives/ measures (if required)	Addressing stock specific management/accounting for local needs and issues. MSC certification. E.g. minimum landing size, seasonal closed areas.	Ideally regional groups would cover multiple stocks and provide a point of engagement/ oversight on local issues for a range of shellfish species. <i>(No expectation that such groups would be formally established depends very much on local needs and interests).</i>

4. Actions

Action no.	Action	Responsibility
3.1	Seafish to circulate all relevant documentation and resources at least a week in advance of future WMG meetings	Lewis Tattersall, Seafish

3.2	Inclusion of specific items on agenda for the next WMG: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress of the Welsh Government consultation; • Update on the Defra assessment tool for management measures 	Lewis Tattersall, Seafish
3.3.	Seafish to explore what other data sources are available and draft data collection work programme for collection of additional information required to undertake improved economic analyses.	Marta Moran-Quintana, Seafish
3.4	Action 2.2 (anecdotal information gathering) sub-group to explore options for hosting an online questionnaire and expediting launch.	Natalie Hold, Bangor University Andy Lawler, Cefas Michel Kaiser, Heriot-Watt University
3.5	All WMG members to encourage active whelk fishermen to complete the questionnaire to collect anecdotal information on whelk stocks.	All WMG members
3.6	WMG members to provide feedback on draft priority areas and actions	All WMG members
3.7	Carry out a data inventory – what data is available and how it can be accessed	
3.8	Develop protocol for industry data gathering around size distribution and length to weight ratios for whelks	Michel Kaiser, Heriot-Watt University
3.9	Build a historical fleet activity profile for whelk-dependent vessels	Seafish economics
	Invite a representative from the MMO to the next WMG meeting to present on Catch App data.	Lewis Tattersall, Seafish
3.10	Members with ideas for MSc student projects should contact Natalie Hold directly	All WMG members
3.11	Add WMG members to Microsoft Teams to access resources (complete with user guide)	Lewis Tattersall, Seafish