

Isle of Man Scallop Management Board

Minutes of the meeting held at DEFA's Training Room, St Johns, on 17th May 2017

Present: Walter Crozier (WC – Chairman), Karen McHarg (KMCH – DEFA), Melvyn Reid (MR – IOM fisherman), Billy Caley (BC – Isle of Man Seafood Products Ltd), Phil Comber (PC – IOM fisherman), Brian Horne (BH – Manx fisherman), Domhall MacLachlainn (DML – Scottish fisherman), Carrie McMinn (CM – AFBI), Geoffrey Chambers (GC – ANIFPO/NI Scallop Association), John King (JK - West Coast Sea Products Ltd), Isobel Bloor (IB – Bangor University), David Beard (DB – MFPO), Neil Milsom (NM – DEFA), Rebecca Richardson (RR – DEFA – Minutes)

Welcome and round table introductions

The meeting was opened by DEFA Minister, Geoffrey Boot MHK, who introduced chairman Walter Crozier. Round table introductions were made by those in attendance, before the Minister left the meeting.

Role and operation of the new Scallop Management Board – WC

Work was underway to develop a constitution for the board, which would be largely based on the Isle of Man Queen Scallop Management Board constitution, but with more clearly defined aims and objectives. WC explained that the board's role was to make recommendations that are conveyed through himself as the independent chairman to the Department minister, who makes the final decision.

Minutes of the last meeting (26/09/16)

Minutes of the previous meeting were signed off as a true record of proceedings. However, it was agreed to record for clarity that the queen scallop catch rate figures in the minutes of 26/09/16 did not include dredge figures.

2017 queen scallop stock assessment – IB

File reference: SF612

A stock assessment summary paper had been circulated prior to the meeting and a Powerpoint presentation was given on the findings. The main concern was a decline in biomass with fewer recruits and post recruits. The highest densities of queen scallops were in Ramsey Bay and at the Point of Ayre, while closed areas at Targets and East Douglas had the next highest densities.

Discussion on closed areas generating recruits, led the chairman to conclude that the SMB believed the closed areas were not optimal and needed to be more intelligent to deliver results.

The board was told that queen scallop landings outside the territorial sea decreased last year. The chairman suggested the board lobby the Pan Irish Sea Working Group to do more about fishing activities outside our waters.

Questions were asked about the fishing gear used for the queen scallop stock assessment. Bangor University will check whether new belly rings were fitted prior to the survey.

The scientific advice was that should there be a 2017 queen scallop fishery for socio-economic purposes a more precautionary approach be adopted, limiting biomass removal within the territorial sea to 20% or less of the estimated median biomass, which meant 660t or less.

The financial implications of a 660 tonne total allowable catch (TAC) were voiced. The chairman stated a need to balance socio-economic and conservation concerns.

The chairman proposed the adoption of an International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) framework to set the TAC, which takes account of biomass and the previous TAC (which last year was 1240t) and sets a 20% cap upwards or downwards depending on the trend. Applying this method meant the TAC for the Isle of Man queen scallop fishery this year would be 992t. Adopting this ICES' framework was felt by the member for the MFPO to be sensible.

To incentivise visiting vessels not to prosecute this year's fishery, it was suggested DEFA issued a letter of comfort that states vessels' track records would not be affected. Setting a deadline date and the need for a response to such a letter was discussed.

Relaxing management measures so as to not have a weekend fishing ban and to allow for catch returns to be submitted weekly, rather than daily, was discussed. DEFA was willing to relax the requirements, providing there was respectful cooperation from the industry.

It was stated that the Manx Government's aim was to grow the Manx economy and the preference therefore was that landings be made into the Isle of Man, however there was also recognition by DEFA that the industry had to be encouraged to spread fishing effort around the territorial sea, such as fishing Point of Ayre and other areas where exploitable stock had been identified in surveys.

DEFA would write to vessels eligible to prosecute the queen scallop fishery to choose their gear preference (net or dredge) – and would also state a relaxation of these management measures on the expectation there would be compliance, otherwise stringent enforcement would be pursued.

Discussion took place on whether there should be a queen scallop dredge fishery. One member voiced a desire to see individual quotas introduced. The SMB agreed to a dredge fishery for 2017-18.

Additional quota to fish Ramsey Bay was asked about; Bangor University explained the TAC had always been considered as a whole, but there was better data for the bay that could be looked at to estimate the biomass of this specific area.

It was agreed the following recommendations be made to the DEFA Minister:

- Open the QSC TRAWL season on 3 July 2017.
- TAC set at 992t.
- DEFA write to all QSC licence holders to nominate what gear (net or dredge). Default to TRAWL if letter not returned.
- Weekly quota for the TRAWL fishery – 96 bags (20% less than previous year).
- Open the DREDGE fishery on 2 October 2017.
- To be a pro-rata split of the TAC between the TRAWL and DREDGE fishery. To be defined by the number of vessels indicating gear type - 1/49th per vessel.
- Relax management measures, by not imposing a weekend ban and allowing for daily catch returns to be submitted weekly (although still to be completed daily) – and industry to be notified that compliance will be stringently enforced.
- Re-evaluate the fishery in August without a closure.
- Continuation of requirement to complete bycatch forms for the MFPO.
- Retain the principle of closed areas, but have IB draw up a proposal for closed areas in conjunction with members of the Scallop Management Board by 26 May 2017.

Bycatch gear trials for the queen scallop trawl fishery – DB

File reference: SF612

Papers on proposed bycatch gear trials for the queen scallop fishery were circulated prior to the meeting. The MFPO will undertake gear trials on queenie trawls in June 2017 to try to reduce the current level of bycatch in preparation for the Discard Ban. The trials are being carried out in conjunction with Bangor University scientists. Cost of the gear has initially been funded by the MFPO, aided by a grant from DEFA. While the MFPO was prepared to underwrite the cost of the purchase of new gear with the aid of the grant, there are additional costs to hire two trawlers with full crew for 10 days or more, plus part days changing over the gear.

The board was asked to agree an allocation of a proportion of the TAC for the 2017 queen scallop fishery for the retention of queen scallops caught during the trials, to allow recovery of costs for this research.

Discussion took place as to whether carrying out the trials in June, prior to the queen scallop fishery opening in July, was best. Trials are to be conducted at grounds at Targets and Chickens. The Department asked that Ramsey Bay be used, rather than Chickens. However, it was argued that both Targets and Ramsey Bay grounds are shallow, but Chickens was a better test as the sea level is deeper.

The board agreed to accept the MFPO's proposal to assist with funding of the trials.

Preliminary king scallop stock assessment – IB

A Powerpoint presentation was given on findings of the king scallop stock survey in 2016, which showed good densities of scallops at Targets and Chickens and showed a general upwards trend in recruits and post-recruits. The Isle of Man has one of the best historical data sets on king scallops.

JK and BC left the meeting at 1.45pm.

There is no unified agreed method as to how king scallop stock assessments should be done. For the preliminary king scallop stock assessment the Collie-Sissenwine Analysis method was used, which is the same method currently used for the Isle of Man queen scallop stock assessment. However, the stock assessment will be refined in line with the outputs of workshops, internships and working groups, which Bangor University's scientist will attend this year.

A clear position on measures for the king scallop season was needed well before the start of the season on 1 November 2017. Time would be needed to inform fishing authorities of any management measures. Assurance was given that scientific information would be available, but it would be evolving as the stock assessment method is refined. It was agreed a decision on the 2017-18 king scallop fishery be made at the board's next meeting.

Towbar restriction

A board member raised the need for a restricted maximum towbar length. Discussion took place on the wording of such a restriction. The board recommended the Department consider introducing a maximum towbar length.

Grandfather rights

The need for grandfather rights to be addressed was raised. It was agreed this would be an item on the agenda for the next meeting.

CMcM left the meeting at 2.05pm.

DEFA withdrawal from MSC certification – KMCh

An update was given that following independent advice the Department made the decision in December 2016 to withdraw from the MSC certification process. This was the advice based on declining stock and the lack of management measures outside Isle of Man territorial waters.

The Department would like to establish a fishery improvement plan (FIP) that would cover the whole of area 7A and it was suggested that the board consider this as an aspiration.

The positive impact of UNESCO recognition for the Isle of Man was highlighted by news that a major foreign buyer of scallops had shown interest in the Isle of Man's UNESCO Biosphere status.

Update on Pan Irish Sea queen scallop management – KMCh

Following consultation on management measures for areas 7A and 6A, it was agreed by the Pan Irish Sea Working Group to have a 3-month closure from April to June, to increase the minimum landing size to 50mm and to look at the restriction of fishing effort outside the territorial sea. Agreement was reached for a 3-month compulsory closure, but due to a delay on the part of Wales it had remained a voluntary closure – and would remain so due to the UK being in purdah because of its pending general election. The board was invited to review how it might best influence Pan Irish Sea affairs.

A board member raised concern about the availability of the number of days under the Western Water Days scheme leading to a concentrated fishing effort in Quarter 3. He suggested there be a maximum of 60 days per quarter.

Any Other Business

0-3NM Fisheries Management Zones

An updated was given on plans for Fisheries Management Zones in the Isle of Man's 0-3NM with the idea of enhancing the state of these areas. It was hoped the zones would be in place by 1 November 2017.

Date of next meeting

It was agreed to consider the tide timetable to assist board members' travel arrangements and to circulate a proposed meeting date in early August.

The meeting finished at 2.40pm.

ACTION POINTS

- WC to write the DEFA Minister outlining the agreed recommendations.
- KMCH and WC to revise wording for the constitution of the Scallop Management Board.
- IB to draw up proposals for closed areas in conjunction with members of the board by no later than 26 May 2017.
- IB to check were new belly rings used on gear for the queen scallop stock assessment.
- Portion of the TAC to be used to assist with funding of MFPO bycatch gear trials.
- DEFA to write to licence holders for gear preference, stating a relaxation of the weekend ban and requirement to submit catch returns from daily to weekly, with the expectation of compliance, otherwise stringent enforcement will be pursued.
- DEFA to include on the next agenda decision on the 2017-18 king scallop fishery, review progress of queen scallop fishery, and review of grandfather rights.
- DEFA to check the tide timetable before circulating a proposed meeting date for early August.



10/8/17