

Isle of Man Scallop Management Board

Minutes of the meeting held in the DEFA Training Room and virtually via Microsoft Teams – 18th May 2022 at 10am

Present:

Peter Duncan	PD	Chair
David Beard	DB	MFPO/Industry Representative
Stuart Jenkins	IB	Bangor University
Carrie McMinn	CMcM	AFBI
Juan Canipa	JC	Manx fisherman
Geoffrey Chambers	GC	ANIFPO/NI Scallop Association
Craig Woodbridge	CW	Manx fisherman
Neil Milsom	NM	DEFA
Jack Emmerson	JE	DEFA
Rebecca Richardson	RR	DEFA (Minutes)

Apologies:

Brian Horne	BH	Manx Fisherman
Mark Roberts	MR	Welsh fisherman
Domhnall MacLachlainn	DMcL	Scottish fisherman
William Caley	WC	Isle of Man Seafood Products Ltd

Non-attendance

Scott Merrick	SM	AM Seafoods
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1. Introductions

Professor Stuart Jenkins of Bangor University was introduced by the chair as he was standing in for this meeting in the place of Dr Isobel Bloor.

It was expected that WC may be able to join the meeting in the afternoon.

2. Review of 2022 scallop surveys and Queen Scallop stock advice report

A pre-recorded video presentation by Dr Isobel Bloor titled 'QSC Survey Analysis 2022' was played. It covered the finding of Bangor's 2nd – 10th April queen scallop survey in Isle of Man waters, followed by the findings of the 10th – 19th April industry survey also within Manx waters.

Bangor's survey looked at fixed stations and involved 20min tows at 2.5 knots with four dredges and showed a good distribution of queen scallops, with two high density sites; 1) in the restricted area at Targets (station 6), which had 192 queen scallops per 100m², and 2) at Port of Ayre, which had 49 queen scallops per 100m². There had been a decrease in queens on the Chickens ground compared with the previous year. However, chickens had had the most landings recorded during 2021 with 483t removed. Within the high densities found at station 6 (Targets) there was very high recruitment and a higher proportion of post-recruits. East Douglas stations 21 & 23 showed signs of recruitment.

The scientific survey showed the highest post-recruits (over 55mm) since 2017, and using the CSA stock assessment model has shown there has been a four year, year on year, increase in the stock abundance, although stock remains below the medium biomass estimate of 568t.

Using the ICES category 3 Total Allowable Catch (TAC) calculation approach, the TAC could increase on 2021 season by 20%. However, there was need for the board to decide whether that increase should reflect the start of the 2021 season TAC, which was 661.7t, or the end of the 2021 season TAC that was 793t. It was stressed that the original TAC for the fishery, that has been adjusted each season, was not biomass linked.

The industry survey used standard and modified dredges with 10min tows at 2.5 knots at random stratified stations. It showed a very large peak in fishable sized queens at Targets, but not much in terms of recruitment. East Douglas, Point of Ayre and Bradda were low on fishable sized queens, while Chickens showed a small peak in fishable sized queens.

Overall, the scientific survey showed a territorial sea level increase in recruitment and post-recruitment, while the industry survey showed slight increase in recruitment and slight decrease in post-recruitment indices.

Bangor made recommendations for the management approach for 2022 queen scallop fishing season as follows:

- A precautionary management approach should be taken (given differences in findings of the scientific and industry surveys).
- Separate management for high-density hotspots should be considered (such as restricting access to high density areas at Targets).
- Regular monitoring and triggered reviews of all fishing areas throughout the fishing season.
- The implementation of temporary closed areas for queen scallops recruits (such as East Douglas stations 21 & 23).
- Opening of the East Douglas Experimental Research Area (EDG ERA); which closed in 2017 to assist natural recovery and which has been successful, although not sufficiently high to be a hotspot area.
- Discuss the dredge fishery and location of the dredge fishing box.

The recommendations in respect of the TAC for the fishery were as follows:

- Consider the original TAC was not biomass linked.
- The trawl TAC was increased within the 2021 season from 661.7t (start of season) to 793t end of season.
- The largest increase in the index based on this year's survey was for recruits, and not post-recruits.
- The highest density of post-recruits identified in 2022 survey were spatially restricted to the west coast.
- Median estimated biomass for 2022 based on the stock assessment is 3322.4t. A TAC of 794t or 952t would approximate to removing ~ 24 % or 29 % of the estimated biomass respectively (any dredge TAC would increase this). The figures are also higher than the assumption of what could sustainably be removed annually during the Marine Stewardship Council certification period.

Discussion followed the presentation and it was acknowledged there were discrepancies in the findings of the two surveys, factors for which may be the timings of the surveys or the ground conditions. DB stated there were strong tides at Port of Ayre during the industry survey.

In terms of the overall findings, DB stated he thought the fishery had been managed well and PD agreed that it was what could be expected and aligns with management of the fishery and was going in the right direction.

CW raised concern that a lot of recruitment comes from outside the Isle of Man territorial sea and until there was good management outside of the territorial sea we were limited on recruitment inside the territorial sea.

It was shared that a fisherman had seen queen scallop recruits outside the TS, and CMcM shared a figure from AFBI's June/July 2021 queen scallop survey that showed recruitment outside IOM territorial waters, off the southeast. It was mentioned that this year AFBI had begun to undertake genetics sampling of queen and king scallops.

3. Discussion about 2022 Queen Scallop Fishery

The harvest control strategy to increase the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) by 20% was discussed. DB queried the relevance of 20% for the queen scallop fishery and SJ agreed that 20% was unimportant in a short-lived species, but reminded that a cautious approach was advised by Bangor as any increase in TAC would be based on increase in under-sized trends rather than catchable sized queen scallops. DB stated the percentage of under-sized in the Targets Restricted Area was less than 10 per cent, the rest were all well above. JE stated the 20% approach was a logical response to the increase of recruits' index, but was whether it should be based on the TAC at the start/end of the 2021 season.

The end of 2021 season TAC of 793t was in part based on socio-economic factors, and DB stated the financial pressures faced by industry had not changed, and catches needed to be at a level to retain crew. Also the cost of fuel had now more than doubled.

In consideration of the financial conditions, it was agreed to have a 20% increase on the end of 2021 season TAC (to 952t), but have a reference point for review of 661.7t.

Further, it was agreed that the board have a sub-group that meet weekly to discuss the fishery as it progresses and industry market reports that cover product yield, to be supplied by the PO to the chair.

JE raised whether there should be the opportunity for exploratory fishing.

CMcM left at 12:30pm

There was discussion on exploratory fishing opportunities and whether this would be an efficient use of vessels. JE explained it would give fishermen opportunity to try catching on grounds other than hotspots, to see what catches may be achieved, and afforded chance for vessels that wished to test innovative gear on more challenging grounds. Point of Ayre was suggested as the potential ground to try.

It was agreed the territorial sea weekly catch limit be set at 4550 kg (130 bags at 35kg), with potential additional 2100kg (60 bags) at Point of Ayre. Further, it was agreed to recommend the following:

- To open the northern closed area at Targets.
- To allow one-day a week access to the Targets Restricted Area, but keep closed a section to the west.
- To open current closed and restricted areas at Chickens.
- The weekly catch limit may be adjusted in-season by +/-20% during the fishery by the board subgroup.
- To have a closure at East Douglas of stations 21 & 23, with the exact area to be defined – **SJ**
- To open the East Douglas Experimental Research Area, but explore options with Bangor to collect vessel access data, and to review access again for the king scallop season. *CMcM re-joined at 13:45*
- To trial a six-day week fishery (to include Sunday as well as the working week). This was recommended to enable local processors to have fresh product for Mondays.
- The fishery to start on Friday 1st July 2022.

It was requested that DB feedback to DEFA on the appetite for processors to receive product on 1st July – **DB**

PD raised an area with eelgrass at Bulgham Bay and asked whether this might be closed for the queen scallop season. It was requested to provide co-ordinates for the area so it can be discussed further – **PD**

DB stated that the survey had shown high numbers of juvenile king scallops at Bradda and there would need to be a decision on how this should be managed for the king scallop season.

The dredge fishery – It was stated that there was potential for five vessels to fish. The tonnage allocated in 2021 was 58.3t and the fishery was open 1st – 31st October 2021.

Bangor University had reported that Landings Per Unit Effort (LPUE) from dredge vessels within the dredge box had been declining annually since 2014 with the lowest value recorded in 2020, and only one of five licensed vessels fished in 2020 (~ 250kg) and no dredge fishing happened in 2021. This year's scientific survey data on the dredge box continued to indicate low densities except for one survey cell for post-recruits.

It was considered that the dredge fishery for 2022 should be set at no-more than 58.3t (11,660kg per vessel) and would be held 1st – 31st October 2022. It was noted that there had been a reduction in LPUE and vessels to the fishery; it was a small fishery whose future would be best dealt with in a long-term management plan.

It was recommended that on the first dredge of the 2022 season catch rates be considered, which may decide whether the fishery remains open (for the whole of October). Further, it was recommended that letters of comfort be issued to both trawl and dredge vessels that may target the queen scallop fishery.

4. Long Term Management Plan for queen scallop

There was discussion as to whether this should be an Irish-sea wide approach involving UK Devolved Administrations, or potentially require the Isle of Man to develop a memorandum of agreement. There was also the view that DEFA should consider its own fishery, and could proceed with its own management plan, but do so in co-ordination with other areas. JE suggested development of a LTMP for the Isle of Man could show the interconnection between Manx waters and those outside, and could include recommendations for devolved governments to consider.

It was decided a preliminary objective for the LTMP of queen scallops be provided to DEFA for comment – **DB**

5. Updates

- East Douglas Experimental Research Area
This had been discussed earlier.
- Research Funding Pilot Scheme and QSC Season Extension
The pilot scheme ran for around two-and-half months during the king scallop fishery and raised more than £5,000 towards the industry survey. DB requested if a similar scheme could run for the queen scallop fishery. It could be open to all vessels that land to Isle of Man processors.

It was recommended that the scheme be trialled for the queen scallop fishery for vessels landing into the Isle of Man, and would include payment for anything over 130 bags landed from the territorial sea and anything over the additional 60 bags landed from the Point of Ayre.

Monitoring of access to Point of Ayre for compliance purposes would need discussed and decided whether vessels that fish here may not fish the self-same day in the rest of the territorial sea for queens – **JE**

6. Any Other Business

SMB membership – DB raised the need for a review of membership. It was recommended that he and the chair meet to develop a review document for the board membership – **DB & PD**

Targets access – Monitoring of vessel access one-day per week to the Targets Restricted Area was raised. The view of processors should be asked and relayed to DEFA – **DB**

7. Date of next meeting

The 21st September 2022 was arranged as the provisional date for the next meeting of the board.

The meeting ended at 14:52

Summary of recommendations

- To set the TAC for 2022 at 952t (based on 20% increase on the end of 2021 season TAC) and to have as a reference point for review of the TAC when the catch rate reaches 661.7t.
- DEFA-MFPO sub-group meet weekly to discuss the fishery as it progresses and industry market reports that cover product yield, be supplied by the PO to the chair.
- The territorial sea weekly catch limit be set at 4550kg (130 bags at 35kg), with potential additional 2100kg (60 bags) at Point of Ayre.
- To open the northern closed area at Targets.
- To allow one-day a week access to the Targets Restricted Area, but keep closed a section to the west.
- To open the closed and restricted areas at Chickens.
- The decision to increase/decrease the bag limit may be made by the sub-group during the fishery.
- To have a closure of the East Douglas stations 21 & 23 (exact area to be defined).
- To open the East Douglas Experimental Research Area, but explore options with Bangor to collect vessel access data, and to review access again for the SCE season.
- To trial a six-day week fishery (to include Sunday as well as the working week).
- The queen scallop fishery to start on Friday 1st July 2022.
- Dredge TAC to be 58.3t (11,660kg per vessel) and to be open for the month of October 2022 (1st – 31st October 2022).
- The first dredge of the 2022 season catch rates to be considered to potentially decide whether the fishery remained open (for the whole month of October 2022).
- Letters of comfort to be issued to both trawl and dredge vessels that may target the queen scallop fishery.
- To trial the Research Funding Pilot Scheme for the queen scallop fishery for vessels landing into the Isle of Man; to include payment for anything over 130 bags landed from the territorial sea and anything over 60 bags landed from the Point of Ayre.

10. Action Points

Define exact closed area in East Douglas to cover stations 21 & 23	SJ
Feedback to DEFA on the appetite for processors to receive product on 1 st July	DB
Provide co-ordinates for potential eelgrass closure for further discussion	PD
Preliminary objective for the LTMP of queen scallops be provided to DEFA for comment	DB
Monitoring of access to Point of Ayre for compliance purposes would need discussed and decided whether vessels that fish PoA cannot fish the self-same day in the rest of the territorial sea for queens	JE
Chair and spokesperson to meet to develop a review document for the board membership	PD-DB
The view of processors on monitoring vessel access one-day per week to the Targets Restricted Area to be asked and relayed to DEFA	DB