

Isle of Man Scallop Management Board
Minutes of the meeting held at DEFA in St John's on 11th September 2018

Present: Jennifer Mouat (JM – Chair), Karen McHarg (KMCh – DEFA), David Beard (DB – MFPO), Geoffrey Boot MHK (GB – Minister), Isobel Bloor (IB – Bangor University), William Caley (WC – Isle of Man Seafood Products Ltd), Juan Canipa (JC - Manx fisherman), Phil Comber (PC – Manx fisherman), Domhnall MacLachlainn (DMcL – Scottish fisherman), Carrie McMinn (CM – AFBI), Scott Merrick (SM - A M Seafoods), Neil Milsom (NM – DEFA), Mark Roberts (MR – Welsh fisherman), Brian Horne (BH – Manx Fisherman), Robyn Hughes (RH – DEFA, Minutes)

Apologies

Geoffrey Chambers (GC – ANIFPO/NI Scallop Association)

1. Welcome and introductions

JM was welcomed as the new chair of the board and round table introductions were made.

2. Scallop stock assessment 2018

An executive summary was distributed prior to the meeting and IB gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Scallop Stock Assessment 2018.

- Landings of king scallops have continued to increase within ICES Rectangles 36, 37 and 38E5 (and within the wider Irish Sea – ICES Area VIIa) and are now at an unprecedented level with the highest landings on record for both areas in 2016.
- The Spring Scallop survey showed declines in king scallops at the majority of stations around the Isle of Man
- In 2016, landings and effort from within the Isle of Man's territorial sea were focused in a small area off the west coast which had high densities of scallops and from which removal of a large quantity of scallops (and indirect impact on the seabed) occurred. This has led to significant declines in scallop abundance within this specific area.
- The ICES Category 3 method for TAC calculation has been adopted by the SMB and was used for the first time last year to set a TAC (3203 t) for the 2017/2018 fishing season. This method compares information from the survey abundance index (length based data from queen scallop dredges) for the average of the 2 most recent years against the average for the three years prior. The change in this ratio is then used to adjust the previous year's TAC up or down, with a cap of a 20% change in either direction. The change in the ratio was 0.44 and so a full 20% downward revision is required. This provides a TAC for 2018/2019 of 2562 t.
- The same calculation was performed using an age based stock assessment method and a biomass index. This produces a ratio change of 0.64, as such using this index a full 20% downward revision is also required again providing a TAC for 2018/2019 of 2562 t.
- Due to poor recruitment values in both 2017 and 2018 the SMB was informed that a precautionary buffer (an additional 20% reduction in the TAC) could also be considered.

3. Scallop season 2018/19 management discussion

The board discussed the stock assessment and the recommendations for the next year's fishery.

It was agreed that applying a TAC on the previous season had been beneficial and that the fishery had been well managed. One board member stated that a 20% reduction in TAC for the next year had been anticipated by industry and that a greater than 20% reduction could be economically damaging. There was discussion around the use of monthly soft targets and there was support for this as a management tool.

One member voiced their apprehensions about adding the additional 20% buffer and queried the reasons for the decreasing biomass considering the good management of the fishery. It was agreed that the aim of management is to ensure that the fishery remains both economic and sustainable. The question was raised if a set closure point for disaster management had been set. Pin pointing the exact cause of decreasing biomass was stated to be difficult and it was considered that it is most likely a combination of multiple factors. It was highlighted that before the TAC was set last season there had been no consistent management of the fishery, which is still in recovery from 2016, highlighted by both the presentation and by members of the board as a particularly destructive season. It was noted that the TAC set for the previous season was not set using the ICES method and was instead based on an average of landings. It is hoped that by implementing the ICES method

the correct TAC figure will be reached in time.

The board was asked if a compromise between the two figures could be reached. One member stated that a reduction larger than 20% would be difficult to sell to fishermen and that it could be viewed as being discriminatory to non-Manx vessels. The 20% reduction was seen by members of the board as being both credible and manageable. It was stated that implementing a TAC has already had a good impact; bag limits prevent overfishing and the reduction in exploratory fishing reduces seabed damage.

The board were also asked that if the same decline in stock was seen next year would they then be open to a greater than 20% reduction. There was a brief discussion of management options in this case, but it was maintained that faith should be placed in the management of the fishery and that a catastrophic decline in stock would be cause for a separate discussion. One member expressed doubts that decline was caused by problems with recruitment but instead by illegal fishing and that stricter than current management would penalise all for the behaviour of the few. The Department's licence suspension policy was seen by many as a good deterrent, however others criticised it as not working well enough to prevent the fishing of juvenile scallops, especially south of the island. It was asked if enforcement could be focused on areas known to have a high density of juvenile scallops, and it was emphasised by some board members that this offence could only be caught by boarding boats at sea. The chair reminded the board that their remit does not cover enforcement, but that these concerns and comments would be noted and fed back to the Minister.

The chair summarised the points that had arisen so far; the TAC should be set at 2562t and that the positive management would be noted, as well as enforcement concerns.

Consideration was given to bag limits. The daily bag limit of the previous season had initially been set at 30 bags and later reduced to 20 bags. Inside the 0-3nm a voluntary daily limit of 15 bags had been adopted by the majority of vessels. It was recommended that the 700kg (20 bag) limit be set from the start of the season, which would be reconsidered on a monthly basis. There was support for this suggestion from the board and it was mentioned the implementation of a bag limit had led to a good catch rate maintaining through until May. It was agreed by the board to put this forward as a recommendation.

There was discussion on the management inside the 0-3nm limit and if the voluntary 15 bag limit could be enforced by a licence condition. The Department was of the opinion that while it could be done it would split enforcement effort. It was decided that this would remain voluntary and that a Fisheries Management Plan would be put in place for the 0-3nm area – **DB**.

The issue of Western Waters Days was also raised and it was stressed that if a deal with the French was not made over 15 metre vessels would be hard hit by the forthcoming reduction in their Western Water Days and a lower catch limit. It was decided by the board that if the Western Waters Days deal did not go through that over 15m vessels would be allowed a catch limit of 30 bags in Q4, with the proviso that this could be lowered if the Minister requested that a lower TAC be set.

The board discussed closure of the fishery over the Christmas period. There was a suggestion that the closure be extended beyond the two weeks that occurred the previous season. This was debated by the board however it was settled that the Fishery should close from 1800hrs Friday 21st December until 0600hrs Thursday 3rd January.

One member queried if bag sizes could be set, and stated that common sized bags would help with catch limit enforcement. It was suggested that a 25kg bag would be an appropriate size to be weighed at sea and would comply with Health and Safety recommendations for lifting. There was general support that this suggestion be put forward however it was warned that this measure may be challenged by the UK FAs.

4. Recommendations to the Department

It was agreed that the following recommendations be made to the DEFA Minister (- **JM**):

- Total Allowable Catch set at 2562t.
- The positive management of the Fishery in the past year be noted.
- Concerns about enforcement and fishing behaviour be noted.
- A 700kg daily catch limit be set at the start of the season to be monitored monthly.
- If no Western Waters deal is reached a 30 bag limit for >15m vessels be set for Q4.

- A Christmas closure of the Fishery from 1800hrs 21st December to 0600hrs 3rd January.
- A set bag size of 25kg be considered.

The meeting adjourned for a short break at 15:00 during which GB joined. It resumed at 15:08.

Before the review of the queen scallop fishery the Minister wished to welcome JM as the new chair of the Scallop Management Board. The Minister also praised the work of the previous chair and the board as a whole. The board was advised to follow the science and assured that their work was valuable to both the Minister and the Department, and that recommendations and advice put forward were looked at seriously.

5. Review of 2018 queen scallop fishery to date

IB gave a PowerPoint presentation summarising the queen scallop fishery to 7th September. The Ramsey Bay quota zone, only accessible to MFPO members under permit, was opened this week. The quota for the Territorial Sea, excluding the inshore Targets zone, has been 90.6% fished; 79% of the entire quota. The separate TAC at Targets had yet to be fished significantly. Catch rates have been steady with the exception of week 7, when high tides affected fishing effort. It was noted that this is the first year that the most landings have come from the Point of Ayre, and also the first year that the landings have been relatively evenly split between Point of Ayre, Targets and East Douglas.

GB left the meeting at 15:23.

It was stated that the fishery is coming close to its end and that fishing at Ramsey Bay will finish at the end of the week. It was queried if the unused TAC at Targets could be redistributed to other areas of the Territorial Sea and there was a brief debate on what decision had been agreed. Three options were presented to the board:

- Close the entire fishery including Targets when the TAC of the Territorial Sea is fished.
- Redistribute the TAC from Targets.
- Close the wider Territorial Sea but leave Targets open for the remaining 64t TAC to be fished.

It was emphasised that the third option is counter-productive in terms of sustainability and protection as this would force vessels into one area. However if there would be a move to area by area approaches in the future a redistribution of the Targets quota would seem inconsistent. There was a brief discussion on catch rates in the wider Territorial Sea and it was argued that although in some areas catch rates have been maintained throughout the season they may drop suddenly.

One member stated that the priority should be to reach the end of the fishing season as long as the overall TAC was not breached. There was a suggestion that instead of an overall TAC in certain areas a maximum limit could instead be used. There was brief discussion of basing a limit on Landings per Effort, however this was seen as being too variable to base a cut-off point on.

KMcH presented to the board the recommendation letter written to the Minister on 26th June. The letter stated that there should be no downward adjustment of the TAC, but did not state that the zoned TAC at Targets could not be reallocated.

The Chair highlighted the two points that needed to be considered; what needed to be done for this season and what should be done in the future.

Setting a maximum limit was seen as a sensible suggestion for future management. One member queried why Ramsey Bay could not be opened. This was explained as a long term strategy to maintain the high density of this area while the TAC placed on Targets is intended to protect a low density area. It was suggested that the catch limit could be lowered to extend the fishery to the end of the month. One member asked if the weekend ban could be lifted; this was seen as something that should be discussed at the start of the next season, but it would be noted in communications with the Minister.

It was decided by the board to recommend that the TAC from Targets be redistributed to the wider Territorial Sea. The Department will continue weekly monitoring and will lower catch limits if necessary. An item will be placed on the agenda for the next meeting to discuss TAC areas and the proposal to set maximum limits.

6. Queen scallop dredge fishery

There had been plans to hold a consultation on removal of the dredge fishery, however after reviewing the available data it had been decided that there is currently insufficient evidence to support this. It was noted that the time, location and gear type of the next season's dredge fishery could be changed and it was agreed to include this as an agenda item in the next meeting – **JM**.

One member asked if it was too late to split the dredge TAC by boat. Currently the dredge TAC is set at 97t available to 6 dredge vessels with a bag limit of 300 per week. The Department indicated that it would be happy to either stay with the current system or divide the TAC by boat.

DB left the meeting at 16:14.

It was asked that if the TAC were divided by boat could the allowance be held over to a different date. Currently the dredge fishery is closed in October when the TAC is finished. One member suggested that this would offer more flexibility to vessels with Western Waters Days. There was a suggestion that an end date of the dredge fishery could be included as a licence condition. The Department will speak to legal and enforcement teams to gain clarity on this matter – **NM**.

The Board agreed to recommend that the dredge TAC of 97t would be split equally between the 6 eligible vessels (16 tonnes each) which could be fished up until the end of March 2019.

A member asked if the Department would issue a letter of comfort for the scallop fishery. It was agreed to take this forward as a recommendation to the Minister – **JM**.

7. AFBI queen scallop survey

A PowerPoint presentation was delivered by CM on the AFBI Queen Scallop Survey. There has been a decrease in the estimated biomass of queen scallops in the Irish Sea and recruitment this year compared to previous years is low. The length frequency results show that growth is coming through but the amount of smalls is low.

It was asked how DAERA plan to use the data collected by the surveys: the data is intended to be a basis for a management plan and the UK Scallop Board have asked that a scientific management board for all waters be established.

8. Minutes of last meeting 23rd May and matters arising

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed by the board.

Action points from the meeting of 23rd May were reviewed and updates given.

- Funding of surveys through the Fisheries Grant scheme – the previous chair had been sent the information. The current grant budget of £40,000 can be accessed to fund industry surveys. The Minister is also looking into other options however due to Brexit matters this is currently stalled.

9. Any Other Business

It was asked that before recommendations be sent to the Minister the letter be circulated to the board for review. It was agreed that this had been standard practice in the past and that the Chair would continue to consult with the board in this way.

10. Date of next meeting

To be confirmed.

The meeting ended at 16:57

Action Points

- Chair to write to the Minister outlining agreed recommendations for the scallop fishery – **JM.**
- A Fisheries Management Plan for the 0-3nm scallop fishery would be put in place – **DB.**
- Management of the 2019 queen scallop dredge fishery be included as an agenda item in the next meeting – **JM.**
- The Department will speak to legal and enforcement teams to gain clarity on the suggestion that dredge TAC be divided by boat – **NM.**
- Request the Minister to consider whether a letter of comfort for the scallop fishery be issued – **JM.**