

Isle of Man Scallop Management Board
Minutes of the meeting held at DEFA in St John's on 21st May 2019

Present: Jennifer Mouat (JM – Chair), David Beard (DB – MFPO), Isobel Bloor (IB – Bangor University), William Caley (WC – Isle of Man Seafood Products Ltd), Juan Canipa (JC - Manx fisherman), Phil Comber (PC – Manx fisherman), Geoffrey Chambers (GC – ANIFPO/NI Scallop Association), 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)

1. Minutes of the previous meeting (11/09/2018)

The minutes were agreed by the Board to be an accurate record of proceedings.

2. Actions and matters arising

The majority of actions had been completed.

DB reported that the initial surveys to inform a 0-3nm Fisheries Management Plan had been completed. The results are currently being analysed and will be sent to the board when complete.

All matters arising were covered in the agenda.

The Chair asked if there were any topics to be covered under Any Other Business at the end of the meeting. Matters put forward were the requirement from Marine Scotland that fishing vessels be equipped with cameras and wider Irish Sea management.

3. Queen scallop fishery 2018 review – IB

- Of 41 eligible trawl vessels 30 took part in the fishery.
- 659.39t of the available 697t TAC was landed, the max weekly landing was 74t (Week 4).
- Minimal fishing took place in the separate Inshore Targets quota zone.
- There was a fairly even split of landings from offshore Targets, Douglas and the Point of Ayre.
- LPUE (standardised to 35 kg bags per hour fished per 10 fathoms of net) varied between a maximum of 13.3 and a minimum of 0.9. The LPUE was highest in the limited Ramsey Bay permit only fishery.
- Chickens was the only ground to not show depletion of LPUE across the season.
- LPUE had also decreased in the dredge fishery compared to previous seasons.
- 97t of dredge quota was split between 6 eligible dredge vessels. Of these 6 vessels only 4 took part in the fishery.
- Total landings from dredge vessels equalled 62.63t.

4. Queen scallop stock assessment 2019 – IB

WC arrived at 10:44.

An executive summary was distributed prior to the meeting and IB gave a presentation on the queen scallop stock assessment 2019.

- R.V. Prince Madog surveyed 52 stations with dredges between 4 – 13th April 2019.
- Each tow duration was 20 minutes at 2.6 knots. Dredge video cameras were used to validate tows.
- There have been more decreases in density at survey sites than increases.
- A recruitment pulse was observed at one of the survey sites within the Chickens fishing ground.
- The mean commercial LPUE was lower during the 2018 fishing season than during the 2017 season. LPUE has been on a decreasing trend since 2011 but the value of scallops has increased.
- Landings from outside the Territorial Sea also decreased from 2095t in 2017 to 1072t in 2018 (from ICES Rectangles 36E5, 37E5 and 38E5).
- In 2018 a statutory closure in the Irish Sea for the months of April, May and June continued the 2017 voluntary closure.
- The trend from the model output indicates that there were five years of increasing biomass from 2006-2010, decreasing in the subsequent nine years (2011-2019).
- Biomass is now estimated to be at the lowest levels since data collection began in 1993.

The estimated biomass is down from 2018 and as such there is no scientific evidence that the stock could support the TAC set in 2018. Although the Board agreed to ICES Category 3 approach (Annual +/- 20 % TAC) in 2017 this method would equate to removal of ~ 53% of the estimated stock biomass. Queen scallop stocks have been exploited beyond the recommended independent scientific advice. In order to promote stock recovery it is recommended that no fishing occurs within the stock assessment unit. Should fishing occur for socio-economic reasons a precautionary approach should be adopted with fishing limited to <20% of estimated biomass (i.e. 0-242 t).

A Pan-Irish Sea management plan is urgently needed to develop and implement measures to substantially reduce fishing mortality in the wider stock unit.

5. Queen scallop management 2019 – All

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

It was argued that while a drop in queen scallop stock had been expected by some, the data gathered by Bangor University did not match up with anecdotal reports from the fishing industry which has reported a good number of 40-45mm scallops this season in the king scallop dredge fishery. The limitations of the Isle of Man to prevent the decline of the wider queen scallop stocks was also raised. IB acknowledged this explaining that it was for this reason that the scientific advice strongly urged a wider Pan-Irish management plan be developed.

It was queried by the Board if the methods used in the survey were sufficient to make an accurate estimate of juvenile scallops. IB highlighted that the survey results were supported by commercial data, however the survey is only able to forecast a year ahead and that a more long term plan would be beneficial. It was acknowledged by all present that continuing to plan year on year was not viable and that there was a need for more long term planning.

There was discussion of survey methods and the feasibility of a second survey to assess the number of juvenile scallops. The suitability of R.V. Prince Madog in terms of limitations of methods and days available was discussed and it was proposed that an Industry led survey could be more bespoke. The suggestion that the Industry could undertake a self-sampling survey was also touched upon. Bangor University's current contract with DEFA will expire in 2020 and it was raised that Industry vessels shadow the Prince Madog as a contingency measure. It was stressed by the Department and Bangor that if another survey were to take place it would not change the advice put forward for the current season. DB stated that the MFPO would be able to conduct a survey in June if funding could be sourced. NM agreed to look into this – **NM**

The Chair recognised the benefit for Industry of further data to assist long term planning but reminded the Board that a decision for the next season needed to be made and put forward to the Minister based on the data currently available. The Chair talked through the following options:

- **No fishing in the 2019 season.**
- **Fish 20% of the estimated biomass equating to 242t.**
- **Follow the ICES Category 3 approach and remove 20% of the current TAC and also use the emergency provision to remove a further 20%.**

Option 1 was dismissed by the Chair as unviable and option 2 was considered by the Board to be unsustainable for businesses. Option 3 was discussed in further detail and it was queried if the emergency 20% buffer could be removed if a June survey showed positive findings. However the majority of the Board were against the extra reduction. It was argued that Isle of Man quota restrictions make diversification difficult and that there is a danger of both processors and fishing vessels going bankrupt if the TAC were to be reduced so greatly. It was agreed that diversification and quota acquisition needs to be considered as part of a long term management strategy.

The option of doing nothing and fishing to the same TAC as the previous season was floated by a Board member, arguing that the ICES reduction of 20% is damaging to industry and that if the fishery were to collapse it would be sounder to have another fishing year to prepare. However Board members were reminded by NM that DEFA has a statutory responsibility to protect the marine environment, and therefore fishing stocks, against collapse. NM also reminded the Board of their responsibilities under its constitution.

There was concern from the Board that a reduction in TAC would have negative economic effects on the Processors and staff. It was stated that had a Business Model been developed in the past the Industry could

have foreseen the stock depletion and prepared for a fallow year. Additionally, that the price of queen scallop had been artificially raised in order to support the fishing industry; with the entry of similar products to the market, the current prices would be unsustainable.

It was asked if letters of comfort could be issued to scallop boats as an incentive for non-Manx boats to avoid the fishery for the season as it was argued that many non-Manx vessels come to the Isle of Man in order to maintain a track record. It was suggested that letters of comfort to queen scallop fishing vessels could be linked to a track record in the king scallop fishery, however this was seen by Board members as open to challenge by Marine Scotland. It was agreed that letters of comfort would be issued to those choosing not to take part in the queen scallop fishery only.

Conditions for the dredge fishery were discussed. There has not been sufficient evidence gathered to justify the removal of the dredge fishery and the Board suggested that dredge and trawl vessels should be subject to the same catch limitations. There was a suggestion that the dredge fishery could be moved to the Point of Ayre, however this has been raised in the past and turned down by those vessels due to reporting requirements. It was explained to the Board that while the bag limit on dredge vessels was a licence condition and thus more flexible, the area of the fishery has been written into legislation. It was agreed to put forward the suggestion that the dredge and trawl fishery be drawn into alignment while acknowledging that this may not be possible for the next season. NM agreed to look at the legislation and report back to the Board – **NM**

The weekend ban on fishing was also raised. The Board were generally opposed to the weekend ban, but acknowledged that there may be enforcement concerns. It was agreed that a review of the weekend ban be put forward as a recommendation.

From 1st January 2020 Marine Scotland will require all scallop vessels fishing in Scottish waters to have camera equipment installed. The Board agreed that this adopting this requirement should be considered as a management measure.

6. Recommendations

The Board was asked by the Chair what recommendations were to be put forward to the DEFA Minister. It was agreed that the following recommendations be made (-**JM**)

- Total Allowable Catch be lowered by 20% in line with ICES Category 3 data limited approach and be reviewed following an Industry led survey.
- An Industry Survey to assess the number of juveniles in the fishery be scheduled for June.
- The Board to reconvene after Month 1 of the fishery to review the set TAC based on commercial catch data.
- Management of the fishery should begin to be considered in the long term and a strategy should be developed which considered business planning, diversification, and quota acquisition to assist diversification.
- Consider the use of cameras on scallop fishing vessels following Marine Scotland.
- Review the weekend ban.
- Consider moving the location of the dredge fishery or have it in complete alignment with the trawl fishery.
- The Board will make a recommendation on the placement of closed areas after analysis of data (section 8).

The meeting adjourned for lunch at 13:00. It resumed at 13:30

7. King scallop fishery 2018/19 review

At present about 60% of the TAC has been taken with 2 weeks remaining of the fishery. Catch rates are down on last year and around 15 fishing days per vessel had been lost compared to fishing days last year. It was reported by a Board member that a number of boats have been tied up this season due to crewing issues.

The stock assessment shows a reduction in biomass last year and there has been an increase in the number of vessels not reaching the Daily Catch Limit. LPUE decreased across the season and spatial distribution of landings were fairly even.

As in the queen scallop fishery a long term plan for management is required, however it was noted that the king scallop fishery has a good record of data. Management of the fishery will be discussed fully in the September meeting.

One member asked if there the effect of the lunar nodal cycle on stock levels had been examined. IB agreed to look at this – **IB**

8. Experimental Research Area

The East of Douglas Experimental Research Area (EDG ERA) was introduced as a closed area to fishing for king and queen scallops in July 2017. The location was recommended by the SMB and encompassed a region where scallop densities had declined considerably. The purpose is to investigate whether closure of an area for recovery increase scallop densities and whether artificial spat receptors can provide additional increases.

Baseline surveys have established that scallop density in the area has increased since 2017 without intervention. These surveys have also identified 3 main habitat types were identified: gravelly sand; mixed sand; and clean sand. There is a correlation between the distribution of sediment types and scallop densities, with gravelly areas containing the highest mean densities of scallops, the effect of sediment type was not statistically significant.

For the next stage, two X-shaped Spat receptors will be deployed within each of the two treatment areas within the EDG ERA in June. An additional two x-shaped receptors will be placed in Ramsey Bay as a control. These will be monitored for up to 12 months.

The Chair noted the need for a long term strategy for closed areas in general and asked if Chickens would benefit from closure to allow development of stocks. There was discussion from Board members of the positive impact of the long term closure of what is now the Port Erin Marine Nature Reserve. There was also brief discussion of the closed area of off Targets. It was stated that the June survey will look at gathering data from these areas, and that closures of areas containing a high density of juvenile scallops are sensible.

An in principle agreement was made by all to look at closures as a management method and to consider the controlled opening of these areas. Data from the June survey will analysed and suggestions of closed area placements will be put to DEFA and the SMB.

9. Plaice survivability trail – update

Bangor University is working with the MFPO to trail the survivability of plaice. If a high survivability can be demonstrated, an exemption to the Landings Obligation may be granted. The trail is currently awaiting ethics approval from Bangor University and licence approval from DEFA. The survey aims to establish what the survivability of plaice is and, if survivability is not high enough to secure an exemption, what methods can be taken to improve it.

DMcL, CM and GC left the meeting at 14:30

10. Any other Business

The Manx Fishing Industry Conference will take place on 24th June; all members of the Board are invited to attend.

The requirement from Marine Scotland that scallop vessels fishing in its waters be fitted with camera equipment had been discussed earlier in the meeting.

Management measures in the wider Pan-Irish Sea; DB gave a brief overview of steps being taken to manage the Pan-Irish Sea fisheries. Working groups have been set up and efforts are being made to involve the devolved governments in management strategies. A data call out has been sent in order to begin work on a stock assessment of the northern Irish Sea.

11. Action Points

- Look into funding options to support the June Industry survey – NM
- Report back to the Board what legislation is in place for the dredge fishery - NM
- Look at what effect lunar nodal cycles may have on scallop stock - IB