

Isle of Man Scallop Management Board

Minutes of the meeting held at The Hub in Peel on 7th October 2019

Present: Peter Duncan (Acting 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), Domhnall MacLachlainn (DMcL – Scottish fisherman), 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: Jennifer Mouat (Chair), Geoffrey Chambers (ANIFPO/NI Scallop Association), Carrie McMinn (AFBI)

1. Introduction from the Minister

The Minister welcomed the Board and acknowledged Peter Duncan as Acting Chair in Jennifer Mouat's absence. The difficulties of the previous queen scallop season were recognised and the Minister emphasised the willingness of the Department to engage with the fishing industry to make the best decisions for the fisheries.

The Board asked the Minister about the development of long term strategies for the fisheries, rather than reactive ones, and the development of a joined up approach with the Devolved Administrations. The Minister confirmed that work has been progressing on long term strategies. Additionally both the SIGC working group and ICES scallop working group are looking to develop a wider Irish Sea strategy for scallops.

The Board expressed concerns regarding communication between the Chair and the Minister. There was a brief discussion between Board members of the possibility of nominating a Vice-Chair, to step-in if the Chair was absent or unavailable. It was emphasised that the holder of such a position would also need to be independent. The Board suggested instead that a Head of the Board position be established. DB was asked to put together a proposal – **DB**.

2. King scallop fishery 2018 review – IB

The assessment report was distributed prior to the meeting. IB gave a presentation on the king scallop stock advice 2019.

- Landings from ICES Rectangles 36E5, 37E5 and 38E5, which cover the main extent of the Isle of Man's territorial sea, showed a peak in 2016. Landings decreased in 2017 and 2018, partly due to the introduction of TACs within the Isle of Man's territorial sea, but also due to stock and fishery factors
- Landings from the previous season (2018-19) were the lowest in the time period presented (2010 – 2019), accounting for only ~72% of that season's 2562t TAC.
- The daily catch limit was not met by the majority of vessels that took part in the fishery, however there were fewer fishing days compared to the previous season, and other contributing factors were discussed. IB pointed out that all LPUE measures were reduced.
- The 2019 spring scallop survey was undertaken by the R.V. Prince Madog from 4th – 13th April.
- Positive increases between 2018 and 2019 surveys in total scallop density were identified at six of the ten historical survey stations.

3. Bangor University (Fisheries Science) Recommendations for the 2019/2020 season – IB

Territorial Sea Management

Two scenarios were presented for consideration:

1. Using the ICES methodology outlined for a Category 3 stock the provisional catch advice is calculated as **2049t** based on a 20% reduction in the previous year's TAC.
2. Given that only 72% of the 2018/2019 TAC was achieved, the TAC calculated in Scenario I is still above the total landings from last season of 1833.24t. If, instead of basing the proposed TAC on a reduction of last season's TAC, it is based on a reduction of 20% of actual landings, then a TAC of **1466t** is reached.

It was recommended that in setting a TAC for the forthcoming season the merits of Scenario 1 versus Scenario 2 be discussed.

Protection of areas surveyed in the April and June survey that recorded large proportions of pre-recruits should be considered ahead of the fishing season in order to protect stock for future years.

A review of the fishery be undertaken by the SMB following the first month of the season to review the fishery dependent data collected.

Industry Surveys

A robust funding source and process should be put into place to ensure that fine-scale industry scallop surveys are able to be undertaken each year.

Prior to the 2020 survey, knowledge from the survey skippers should be used to remove unsuitable habitats etc. from within the current survey extent. The fourth main fished ground at Point of Ayre should also be included in any future surveys.

Spatial Management and Assessment

Spatial management and assessment of king scallops should be developed and considered for future years.

3. King scallop management 2019 – All

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

It was raised that as recruitment has improved this year whether or not there was a need for further management measures. However in order to move to a long term management strategy the fishery cannot rely solely on recruits, and that stocks should be built up and maintained.

There was discussion around the recommendation to review the fishery after 4 weeks. It was noted that the king scallop season runs longer than the queen scallop season and that a review after 6/8 weeks might be more appropriate. Brexit, scheduled for 31 October, was highlighted as a volatile factor that could negatively impact the fishery.

WC arrived at 13:30

The two TAC options put forward by Bangor University were discussed. Factors that affected the number of landings in the previous season were highlighted and discussed. Poor weather was identified as a contributing factor, in addition to the small number of Western Waters days and a low bag limit that discouraged larger vessels from coming. Board members suggested that in normal circumstances the TAC would probably have been reached. It was argued that adopting Scenario 2 would move away from the principles of management via ICES methodology which had been previously agreed to by the Board. There were also concerns that basing the TAC on the total catch from the previous year could encourage dangerous fishing practices, due to fishers attempting to ensure that quotas were always met in order to avoid further reductions. It was also raised that a 20% reduction according to protocol is expected by industry and that a different approach would not be popular with industry members, and would be difficult to justify. Scenario 1 was therefore viewed as most appropriate.

Some discussion occurred about the prospect of setting of a TAC that was above what was actually landed the previous year. It was noted again, that the Board was confident that the reasons that the TAC was not met were due to a range of factors other than stock status, and was therefore comfortable with this recommendation.

Finally, in relation to TAC setting, it was pointed out that the ICES methodology did allow for additional TAC reductions up to a further 20%, but this could be less. This additional reduction could be considered in respect of longer-term stock recovery. However, there was no support for any further reduction, beyond the initial 20% as Protocol 3 additional precautionary reductions are typically considered when there is a sign of recruitment impairment.

A Board member broached that the TAC has been significantly reduced since its introduction, however the number of eligible vessels had remained the same. It was asked if there was an appetite to review the issue of vessel access to Manx scallop fisheries. It was recognised that this consideration may be based on some form of retrospective track record. The Board agreed to hold a separate meeting to discuss further – **ALL**.

A Board member suggested that letters of comfort could be issued to vessels not participating in the upcoming season. The Board discussed the advantages and disadvantages and it was decided that DEFA would not issue letters of comfort for the upcoming season.

There was a discussion on the survey methods and it was queried if an absolute biomass for scallop could be established. IB indicated that the methods used to establish stock levels are those that were previously agreed to by the Board, and that stock assessment models to establish overall biomass are currently in development. The Board requested future data presentations also include calculations excluding 2016 data (before the restrictions were introduced) as it was questioned if the indices from 2015 and 2016 are relevant to the management structure now in place. This was explained to be balanced in the current calculations by the geometric mean used to calculate the survey index down weighing down high density areas.

A question arose about why the Board was not privy to communications between the Chair and the Minister, and it was advised that this was desirable.

The Board moved to discussion on daily limits for the next season. The daily limit for the previous season was set at 700kg. The suggestion was made that in light of Brexit uncertainties and more favourable markets at the end of the year that the daily limit could be set at 600kg in November, potentially rising to 800kg in December based on review. The Board agreed that a reduction to the daily limit should reflect the reduction in TAC, therefore it would be recommended that it be set at 560kg, a 20% reduction, at the opening of the fishery. The Board concurred that the daily limit should be reviewed regularly in order to best manage the fishery and agreed to reconvene 4 weeks after the opening to review the fishery. This date was proposed as Monday 2 December. It was highlighted that at this review an increase to the daily limit for economic purposes may be recommended, subject to analysis of the performance of the fishery and the catch levels.

Management of Closed Areas was discussed; there are currently two closed areas at Chickens and Targets, in addition to the East Douglas Research Area. The area at Targets has been closed for 2 years, while the area at Chickens was closed at the start of the previous queen scallop season. It was acknowledged that the management mechanism for opening of closed areas was the most important consideration. It was proposed that the Chickens closed area may be easier to manage if opened due to its relatively short closure period, and that it had not been closed for scallop management. The idea of a phased opening was also raised. It was stated that a natural boundary exists at the 3 mile limit at Chickens, rather than the arbitrary straight line. The Board recommended that that part of the existing closed area between 0-3NM at Chickens be opened to this limit, and that the closed area be surveyed to determine the extent of queenies, scallops and their juveniles, with any commercial proceeds going towards the funding of the survey. The survey findings will then be used to inform whether, or how to manage the opening. It was agreed by the Board that the closed area at Targets should remain closed for the upcoming season, as this would help resolve its contribution to recruitment.

Funding of surveys was raised; these are currently funded by the MFPO and it was queried if an increase on the licence fee could be levied. However, the Department has no control on how budget from the licence fee is allocated, and there was no guarantee it would come back to fisheries. However, officers will investigate this further. It was also stressed that the Agriculture and Fisheries Grant Scheme was not an appropriate source of funding. Some potential funding mechanisms were discussed, including voluntary contributions and credit systems, and clarification on whether a Manx landing fee could work, It was proposed to put forward an 'in principle' recommendation that a proportion of the TAC (top-slicing) should be used to 'fund' future surveys, and that the delivery mechanism would be discussed and worked out in future which might include the use of individual licence variations.

BH, MR, DMcL & SM left at 15:10

The Christmas closure was discussed. It was agreed that upon confirmation from the other members of the Board the Christmas closure dates would be recommended to run from 6pm on 22nd December, opening at 6am on 3rd January.

4. Recommendations

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

- Total Allowable Catch be lowered by 20% in line with ICES Category 3 data limited approach as per protocol. Giving a TAC for the season of 2049t. Management of the TAC will be active and adaptive to reflect catch rates/ number of vessels and fishing days and comparison to the monthly 'soft' targets.
- The SMB will reconvene four weeks after the opening of the fishery (2nd December) to review.

- In line with the 20% reduction of TAC, the daily catch limit should be lowered to 560kg at the opening of the fishery. This will be reviewed after four weeks and may be increased in December to take advantage of more favourable markets.
- The Targets closed area to remain as is.
- That part of the Chickens closed area between 0-3NM to be opened to the 3 mile limit. A survey of the area will be carried out to inform potential opening strategies. Proceeds from the survey will be used for funding.
- The in principal proposal that a proportion of the TAC of both fisheries be used to fund industry surveys.
- Christmas closure from curfew on 22nd December 2019 until 3rd January 2020.

5. Any other Business

DB gave a brief update on SICG working group. Recommendations for a wider management system have been put to the SICG for approval before being presented to the Devolved Administrations.

The meeting ended at 15:40

6. Action Points

- Create a proposal on suggested Head of the Board position – **DB**
- Hold a meeting to discuss methods to reduce access/effort in the fishery, – **ALL**
- Communications between the Chair and the Minister to be copied to board members.