

Isle of Man Scallop Management Board
Minutes of the meeting held virtually via Microsoft Teams – 5th June 2020

Present:

| | | | |
|-------------------|------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Peter Duncan | PD | 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 | |
| Geoffrey Chambers | GC | ANIFPO/NI Scallop Association | |
| Carrie McMinn | CMcM | AFBI | |
| Scott Merrick | SM | AM Seafoods | (from 11:40 until 13.20) |
| Neil Milsom | NM | DEFA | |
| Mark Roberts | MR | Welsh fisherman | |
| Brian Horne | BH | Manx Fisherman | |
| Robyn Hughes | RH | DEFA | (Minutes) |

Apologies:

| | | |
|-----------------------|------|--------------------|
| Domhnall MacLachlainn | DMcL | Scottish Fisherman |
|-----------------------|------|--------------------|

1. Introduction from the Minister

The Minister welcomed the Board and thanked PD for continuing to act as interim chair while a permanent chair is sought. The challenges faced during the king scallop season were acknowledged and DB was thanked for his work organising the queen scallop industry survey.

The Minister commended the conservative management measures of the past seasons and the flexible management of East Douglas in the previous season. There are now four viable queen scallop fishing grounds and spatial management of the fishery is a possibility. The scientific advice and co-operation with industry was also praised by the Minister and it was assured that the Department will continue to work closely with the Board.

It was highlighted that if the queen scallop season is to open on 1st July the recommendations to the Minister will need to be made as soon as possible. DB agreed to draft these recommendations on behalf of the Board.

DB

2. Minutes and actions of the previous meetings (07/10/2019 & 24/11/2019)

The minutes were agreed by the Board to be an accurate record of proceedings. It was agreed by members that a revision of the actions was not required.

3. Review of the 2019 – 2020 king scallop fishery – IB

IB presented a review of the 2019-2020 king scallop fishery.

In total ≈58% of the TAC was landed during the king scallop season with the highest monthly landing totals in November and May. 64 unique vessels took part in the fishery and the average weight of landings was between 450 – 500kg. The weight of landings did not increase when the bag limit was increased during 5th – 22nd December. The 2019/2020 season recorded a large reduction in fished days as well as a decline in the number of unique vessels fishing (compared to both the 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 seasons). This can be in part attributed to the poor weather and impact of coronavirus.

The Board commented that the poor weather in December had contributed to the lack of increase in landing weight during the period of increased bag limit. It was also raised that smaller vessels may not have the capacity to reach the daily catch limit and that the percentage of the vessels achieving the catch limit remained steady throughout the rest of the season; reflecting the makeup of the fleet. IB indicated that weather and fleet make-up could be included in more detailed modelling analysis in future.

DB briefly discussed the work of the SICG working group which will be putting forward a management plan for consideration by the Devolved Administrations. There was concern that the situation of the UK scallop fishery may impact the Isle of Man with an increase in fishing effort.

4. Results of the Spring 2020 Industry Stock Status Survey – DB/IB

Bangor University was unable to carry out the April 2020 annual queen scallop survey due to coronavirus restrictions. This survey has been pushed back to September 2020. With no long-term time series available for April 2020 the management advice will be based largely on the short-term MFPO Industry survey. It is intended that both surveys continue to be run in parallel.

The MFPO Industry survey was first run as a trial in June 2019. It is currently completed on two industry fishing vessels and sampling is coordinated by the MFPO with scientific support from Bangor University. The 2020 survey included the three main fishing grounds surveyed in 2019 (East Douglas, Chickens and Targets) as well as Point of Ayre and Bradda. Survey cells were sampled randomly within each ground with each vessel towing two standardised survey dredge bars one optimised for queen scallops over minimum landings size (MLS) and the other for queen scallops under MLS. Additionally, a number of selected cells were surveyed on the basis of suitability for closed area or hotspot placement or exploratory fishing, these were excluded from the main analysis.

The overall data for the TS indicates that the survey index has increased for post-recruits (over MLS) and decreased for recruits (under MLS). The recruitment at Targets has remained relatively stable, however it has declined in the other surveyed areas and no new recruitment peak is evident in 2020.

The recommendations from Bangor University for the management of the 2020 queen scallop fishing season area as follows;

- An initial precautionary starting trawl TAC for 2020 of 557 t (i.e. a 0% change from 2019 trawl TAC).
- Scope to adjust the starting trawl TAC (+/-20%) based on fishery dependent data (i.e. at monthly or triggered reviews).
- A split of the TAC between the main four fishing grounds using "soft" TACs.
- Consideration of "soft" LPUE thresholds for each ground (based on previous seasons data).
- Monthly reviews of the TAC and fishery (i.e. end of July and end of August).
- Triggered immediate reviews in response to either "soft" TACs or "soft" LPUE thresholds for a specific fishing ground.
- A managed opening of the current CHI Closed Area (& discussion about closure for SCE season).
- A closure to protect high density of recruits in the western area of the Chickens fishing ground (muddy habitat).
- A managed opening of the northern section of the Targets Closed Area.
- A continued closure of the southern section of the Targets Closed Area (potentially spatially extended for SCE recruits).
- A continued closure of the East Douglas Experimental Research Area (EDGERA) to enable continued monitoring of the recovery of this area as well as scientific trials to better understand recruitment and habitat recovery in this fishery.
- Management of the transient queen scallop bed identified in the 2020 survey at Bradda offshore to be considered.
- Discussion on the Dredge TAC at Chickens.

5. Queen scallop Fishery management 2020 – All

It was agreed that data demonstrated good management of the East Douglas area last season but that any opening of Chickens would need to be managed carefully due to the smaller size of the area.

There was a brief discussion on the Point of Ayre and if the survey methods used were appropriate for this area. The possibility of introducing incentives to fish at Point of Ayre was raised.

CM lost connection at 11.40 for 15 minutes.

SM joined the meeting at 11.55.

The Board turned to the issue of setting the TAC for the new season. The results of the survey were viewed as positive and the need to protect the juveniles was emphasised. Concerns regarding the market situations were discussed. There has been a decrease in the price of scallop attributed to both the closure of markets during coronavirus and competition from other regions. It was estimated that this could equate to a 30-40% loss in profit. Quality of catch and fresh catch were seen as essential and while market positions need to be maintained

there was warning against flooding the market with product while there is no strong demand. The uncertainties surrounding Brexit were also discussed as a potential roadblock and the need to promote quality produce was again highlighted. The Board proposed that the economic impact of the decrease in scallop price would need to be balanced by the TAC and bag allowances for the fishery. An increase of the bag limit by 20% was suggested, to be matched by a 20% rise in TAC at the opening of the season, which could be prolonged if necessary by a further 20% increase.

The Chair stated that the Board was not limited to 20% incremental, however it was also stated by Bangor that the ICES method was selected by the Board as the management model and to move away from that would necessitate the implementation of a larger long term management plan.

The Board were in agreement that a long term strategy is needed but expressed concerns at the economic situation. It was reasoned that any increase in TAC would only be made if the catch rates supported this. This led into a brief discussion on the LPUE model and the factors that can impact this. It was raised that the LPUE model would need to be discussed in more detail at another time.

The Chair asked the Board if the TAC would need to be set higher at opening if price and quality were more immediately important. The TAC could be reviewed later in the season if the catch rates and market performance supported it. The Board agreed that regular reviews of the fishery is key however there were still concerns on the economic impact of the markets and it was reasoned that a higher bag limit would allow for an economically viable catch.

The Board agreed to a 20% increase in the daily catch limit at the start of the fishery (to 3,360kg).

It was raised that the increase in the daily catch limit could result in a shorter fishery. There was a discussion on how to manage this with an increase in TAC being favoured. It was suggested by a Board member that due to the fast moving nature of the fishery a smaller sub group might be advantageous in managing reviews. Weekly catch data is currently sent out by Bangor University. It was suggested a fortnightly subgroup be formed to analyse these alongside the management measures and report back to the Board so that recommendations to the Minister can be made where appropriate.

The Board agreed to the formation of a subgroup to meet at least fortnightly.

The Board turned back to the issue of the TAC. It was suggested that if the TAC is to remain at 557 tonnes then the cap of 20% could be removed so long as this was supported by review. It was noted that since the new survey methodology was inconsistent with the previously used ICES methodology (in that it had not been conducted for sufficient years), that the 20% maximum changes to previous year TAC was also not required. The relaxation of the 20% cap was supported however there was concern about moving to no restrictions.

The Board agreed that the Total Allowable Catch for the 2020 season be kept at 557 tonnes for the start of the season to be reviewed as the season progresses and that changes to the TAC will not be restricted to 20% but be no greater than 40%.

One Board member queried if comfort letters could be issued to vessels choosing not to attend the fishery in 2020.

The Board agreed to DEFA issuing letters of comfort to vessels not attending the 2020 fishery stating that this will not affect track records.

It was raised that soft TAC targets and LPUE targets for each area still needed to be set, however the data to do so is not yet available. Before SM left the meeting he agreed in principal to the shift to more flexible management measures using soft TAC and LPUE targets and to the principle of protection for areas with high densities of juvenile scallops. There was a discussion on the red listing of the Manx scallop fisheries which is detailed under AOB.

SM left the meeting at 13.20.

The meeting adjourned for lunch at 13.20. It resumed at 13.50.

Individual TAC and LPUE figures for each ground were again considered. These will be developed by Bangor University using historic and current data and brought to the SMB for approval. It was queried if reaching these targets would cause immediate closure of a ground; the intention is that a review would be triggered prior to any action being taken. The Chair asked if there were any suggestions for how the total TAC would be divided across these grounds. It was mentioned that smaller vessels would prefer to fish from Peel or Douglas and that incentives to fish Point of Ayre might be beneficial, however it was decided that incentives may be looked at later in the season and only if the TAC is raised and Point of Ayre is unfished. The Board agreed that more data is needed before setting targets for the individual grounds.

The Board agreed that management of the fishery will follow the principal of 'soft' TACs for the four main grounds (Chickens, Targets, East Douglas and Point of Ayre) lead by a flexible landings per effort (LPUE) approach. The soft TAC and appropriate LPUE for each ground will be informed by analysis of historical and current data by Bangor University, drafted and circulated to the Board for agreement before the start of the season and reviewed after 2 weeks of the season start.

The discussion turned to the suggestion of a voluntary measures to manage the closed areas coordinated by the MFPO. It was queried if Licence Conditions could be utilised to require vessels to consult with the MFPO. NM offered to look into this (NM) and it was highlighted that the Minister does not want to allow unregulated fishing in any closed areas that are reopened and that the Department would quickly intervene if necessary. The particulars of how to manage openings were discussed further and the issue of regulating vessels outside of the MFPO was raised.

The Board agreed to the principal that where closed areas are opened access for all licenced vessels to these areas will be regulated and co-ordinated by the MFPO on behalf of the SMB on a voluntary trail basis. The Board also agreed that the SMB will issue an advisory that its representatives will adhere to the rules of the trail.

The specifics of closed areas in each of the fishing grounds was discussed. It was suggested that the northern boxes of the Targets closed area be opened and the southern boxes be extended eastward to protect a density of king scallop juveniles, however there was concern that this might limit fishing in the area.

The Board agreed to retain the closure at Targets on the lower three rows for the queen scallop season and to undertake king scallop surveys and review the closure in advance of that season.

Chickens closed area was agreed to be opened and there was a discussion on if a new closed area should be put in place.

The Board agreed to open the closed area at Chickens and create a new closed area in the west.

No high density areas of juvenile scallops were identified in the East Douglas area, however the three year closure of the East Douglas Research Area has ended. Bangor University has prepared a report on the results of the closure and a meeting will be scheduled to discuss this.

The Board agreed to maintain the closure of the East Douglas Research Area pending review of the closure results.

Long term data has not been established for either Point of Ayre or Bradda. It was agreed Point of Ayre should remain open. An area of high density juveniles was identified as a potential area for closure at Bradda however it was felt this should be discussed first with the fishing industry.

The Board agreed that the MFPO will consult with fishing industry on the potential closure around high juvenile area at Bradda and report back.

The dredge fishery was discussed and it was stated that while the individual quota was a good idea in principal the smaller TAC in the previous season discouraged the majority of dredge vessels from attending. It was suggested that letters of comfort could be issued to dredge vessels and the TAC divided accordingly between those that indicate they will attend the fishery. Based on the data provided there was no wish to raise the total TAC of this fishery.

The Board agreed that the Dredge fishery TAC remain at 58.3 tonnes with management to be discussed closer to the opening of the fishery. It was also agreed that the start dates for both the trawl and dredge fishery would remain as 1st July and 1st October respectively.

6. Items for discussion to progress via additional meetings.

Industry survey funding options – DB will recirculate the paper to the Board and this will be discussed in a separate meeting to be held in 6 – 8 weeks. (DB)

Long term plan for the scallop fisheries – A meeting is planned for August/September to discuss strategic planning for long term management of the fisheries.

7. Recommendations

The Board agreed that the following recommendations be made to the Minister

- Total Allowable Catch (TAC) to be kept at 557 tonnes for the start of the season to be reviewed as the season progresses.
- Any changes to the TAC to not be restricted to 20% but be no greater than 40%.
- The weekly catch limit to be increased by 20%, to 3,360kg from the start of the season.
- DEFA to issue letters of comfort to vessels not attending the 2020 fishery stating that this will not affect track records.
- Management of the fishery to follow the principal of 'soft' TACs for the four main grounds (Chickens, Targets, East Douglas and Point of Ayre) lead by a flexible landings per effort (LPUE) approach.
- The soft TAC and appropriate LPUE for each ground to be informed by analysis of historical and current data by Bangor University. This will be drafted and circulated to the Board for agreement before the start of the season and reviewed after 2 weeks of the season start.
- The formation of an SMB subgroup to meet at least fortnightly to review management measures and market positions. Outputs from this group will be circulated to all Board members for review and inform advice to the DEFA Minister regarding adjustment of measures where appropriate.
- In principal agreement that where closed areas are opened access for all licenced vessels to these areas will be regulated and co-ordinated by the MFPO on behalf of the SMB on a voluntary trail basis. The SMB will issue an advisory that its representatives will adhere to the rules of the trail.
- Retain the closure at Targets on the lower three rows for the queen scallop season. Undertake king scallop surveys and review the closure in advance of that season.
- Open the closed area at Chickens and create a new closed area in the west.
- Manage both of these openings in accordance with the proposed trail.
- Retain the closure of the East Douglas Research Area pending review of the three year closure.
- The MFPO to consult with fishing industry on potential closure around high juvenile area at Bradda and report back to the Board.
- Dredge fishery TAC to remain at 58.3 tonnes with management to be discussed closer to the dredge season opening.
- Start dates for both the trawl and dredge fishery to remain as 1st July and 1st October respectively.
- Separate SMB meetings to be held to discuss future funding of industry surveys and for development of a long term strategic plan for the king and queen scallop fisheries.

8. Any other Business

The issue of Marine Conservation Society (MCS) red listing of the king and queen Manx scallop fisheries had been discussed earlier in the meeting. This has been raised with UK processors by media outlets and could do damage to the scallop market. PD has been in contact with MCS on behalf of the Department and will arrange a meeting with the manager for ratings. It was agreed by the Board a joint response to the MCS explaining the processes involved in the fisheries be issued by the SMB, DEFA and Bangor. **(ALL)**

The Board have been asked to provide up to date contact details to help the management of virtual meetings. **(ALL)**

NM mentioned that Isle of Man Licence Conditions are under review as coronavirus restrictions may render certain conditions unworkable.

The meeting ended at 15.25

9. Action Points

- Draft recommendations to the Minister on behalf of the Board – **DB**
- Look into the suggestion that Licence Conditions could be utilised to require vessels to consult with the MFPO – **NM**
- Recirculate the survey funding options paper to the Board - **DB**
- Put together a joint response to the MCS red listing of Manx scallop - **ALL**
- Ensure up to date contact details are provided to the Department - **ALL**