

Minutes

Joint NWWAC/NSAC/MAC Focus Group Brown Crab

Virtual meeting via Zoom / 23 January 2024

Participants

Enda Conneely	IIMRO	NWWAC
Jonathan Loubry	CNPMEM	NWWAC/NSAC
John Lynch	IS&EFPO	NWWAC
Mo Mathies	Secretariat	NWWAC
Geert Meun	VisNed	NWWAC/NSAC
Patrick Murphy	IS&WFPO	NWWAC/MAC
Aodh O'Donnell	IFPO	NWWAC
Norah Parke (Chair)	KFO	NWWAC/MAC
Erwan Quemeneur	CDPMEM 29	NWWAC
Pedro Reis Santos	Secretariat	MAC
Kateryna Urbanovich	Secretariat	NSAC
Pim Visser	VisNed	MAC

1 Welcome and introductions

The Chair Norah Parke welcomed all participants. Apologies were received from David Jarrad and Mike Roach (SAGB). The agenda was adopted.

2 Review of COM response to joint advice

The Chair introduced the points for discussion.

- DG MARE is fully aware of the complexity of managing NQS

Mathies explained that the NWWAC and NSAC had been approached by the DG MARE C5 with the request to organise a workshop on non-quota species management in the first half of 2024. No indication has yet been received regarding the content, however, the structure is likely to be similar to the joint NWWAC/NSAC workshop on skates & rays management held in February 2023. Links will likely be made to the IK Fisheries Management Plans as well as to the Commission's pilot multi-year strategy for scallop which is still under development.

The Chair reiterated the complexity related to brown crab management especially since there are many different countries involved in the fishery with different management approaches.

- Crucial to improve the current knowledge and fill information / data gaps on brown crab stocks and fisheries, including through EU funded research projects

The Chair felt it would be helpful to discuss which gaps would need to be filled and what could be carried out on a joint basis to arrive at a common ground.

- Commission also encourages stakeholder initiatives to improve fisheries sustainability

The Chair commented it would be useful to understand what each MS is doing to improve the sustainability of the fishery. The FG could compile a list of measures.

- Commission supports proposals to evaluate and monitor the fishing effort and respective spatial-temporal distribution, as an approach to eventually limit the fishing effort through closures in the crab fishery

The Chair wondered what these closures might involve (where, when and how) and asked for members' opinions.

Patrick Murphy commented that an additional complexity is the inshore – offshore split. He referred to the current KW days at sea effort restriction off the South coast of Ireland for brown crab fishing. The effort for Irish crabbers is usually extended by "swapping" with other EU countries, such as France, which creates huge uncertainty for fishers and a large bureaucratic burden for the Member States involved. He felt that research should focus on spawning times which could then be aligned with potential closures. Ireland's inshore fishers depend on this fishery. They now need to fish longer and longer in order to make a living, so any cessation should be linked to compensation as well. He emphasises that measures must be developed in close cooperation with the stakeholders.

Enda Conneely reiterated that a careful approach and good scientific information are needed. Areas cannot be closed with fishers moving to different areas to avoid these closures. Fishing is occurring year-round, and the quality of landings has to be controlled. This can only be achieved via the processors and the market if it is ensured that there is no market for poor quality crab. Pushing primary producers into only landing top quality crab will have an effect on effort as well.

Erwan Quemeneur agreed with the previous speakers but felt cessation should be looked at very carefully. When the skates fishery was closed in France the later opening was disastrous. Closures may lead fishers to concentrate on other species. Management measures need to be adapted, and drastic measures need to be avoided.

John Lynch also agreed with previous speakers. He felt that closures have been proven over the last 20 years to not be the best management measures, e.g. whitefish. Having spoken to his members about proposals, they stated closures would be the least favourite and emphasised that measures which are already in place should be properly enforced, e.g. size restrictions, soft shell crab being landed when it should be returned to sea. East coast and South coast fisheries in Ireland crab fishing activity concentrates on September to December, after which they move to whelk. A lot of fishermen seem to be keen on limiting effort via pot numbers, however, he felt that enforcement of this would be difficult.

The Chair reiterated that following the existing rules on landing size and concentrating on quality of landings would be most important.

- Commission recognises the importance and usefulness of the harmonisation of some management measures, namely MCRS among Member States and ideally also with the UK

The Chair felt that this needed careful consideration. A minimum landing size could not be applied across the MS as there are geographical differences in the fisheries.

Murphy felt that the Commission's offer for funding for research should be taken advantage of and that information should be collected from all sea basins.

The Chair agreed that an overall analysis of size distribution is needed to establish if a common size range could be put in place.

- Reiterating my support to your initiatives aiming at improving the current information on this fishery and stock status

The Chair asked members what they felt would be the most important research topics.

Quemeneur stated that research is needed to understand why the reduction in stock has occurred especially in France, for example is it related to parasites or climate change. Research could be funded through INTERREG for example between the MS of the NWWAC.

Referring to the May workshop the Chair reminded participants of the research being carried out in the MS and felt that this would be an opportunity for funding allocation.

Conneely added that it would be useful to carry out some research regarding the impact on fishing communities if any measures were to be put in place, e.g. closures. Fishing communities are struggling at the moment, and a socio-economic analysis would be useful.

The Chair agreed that the socio-economic issues for all coastal communities are of great importance, and that an analysis is badly needed. This would also feed into the developments with the crab stocks.

Lynch commented that the socio-economic impacts of any measures need be evaluated, including the impact of any measures in other fisheries that have led to an increase of pressure on the crab stocks. Rules and regulations in other fisheries have become so onerous that fishermen have branched out into other fisheries where there may be less management measures. He added that when looking at size/weight of crab and volume of stock, a desktop study may help identify the varying aspects in the MS.

The Chair wondered if this could be produced as a map.

Lynch responded that a map would be useful and that based on this the measures could be balanced in accordance with the varying stocks.

Jonathan Loubry agreed with the previous speakers, especially the socio-economic aspects and to establish what the impact is today and regarding future rules, also in relation to lobster. He referred to the workshop in Paris where a presentation was made on the development of ORE and its impacts on brown crab stocks. He felt it was interesting to understand what the impact would be on brown crab including the economic dimension.

Murphy added that research should also analyse imports of other stocks that compete with the homegrown industry with specific research on autonomous tariff quotas (ATQs). Cheaper imports undermine local fishing effort which then has to increase to ensure continued profitability.

Geert Meun stressed that one of the main points regarding management measures is the harmonisation with the UK. For fishermen it is difficult to work with different systems and different measures across the two jurisdictions.

The Chair agreed that this will be included as a point to guide proposals. She asked members if they felt that there was a joint role for the ACs to go forward and if the past approach had been successful.

Murphy fully agreed that the previous approach was successful as the ACs had different remits which all addressed various items regarding the brown crab stock management. He commended the Chair and the Secretariat on their previous work and felt that this should be continued.

The Chair agreed that the work carried out by the ACs, and the Secretariats has led to the level of dialogue with the Commission currently in place which would not have been achieved otherwise.

Lynch felt that the suite of options that was included in the advice as a result of the workshop was very useful and that further work on these would be beneficial. In a widely distributed fishery, it is most useful to carry out joint workshops so that work is not duplicated.

The Chair enquired if members felt that individual MS could carry out any actions in support of this work.

Murphy commented that MS involvement is important and clear guidelines regarding monitoring are vital. He felt it would be useful to bring in representatives so that the ACs' intentions would not be misinterpreted. He also stated that MS have a role in supporting the AC.

Lynch added that an additional aspect would be for individual organisations to insist with their national scientific organisations on the prioritisation of the use of the data relating to the stocks.

The Chair stated that over the years as far back as the ACRUNET project, very good cooperation was seen between stakeholders and national research institutes. She felt that another workshop and an analysis of the ACRUNET outcomes could be useful.

Conneely commented that the information coming from the national agencies, e.g. in relation to pollack, has to be questioned and that the national agencies tend to insist that the information is perfect, therefore not listening to stakeholders on the ground. He felt the agencies needed to be more open to stakeholder involvement. He reiterated that national agencies need to move faster as the data changes and agencies work on older data provided.

The Chair agreed that it is vital that available data is reliable. She wondered if a system should be in place for the fishermen to contribute to data collection for this stock.

3 Next steps

Members agreed to continue work on Brown Crab fisheries via a trilateral Focus Group between the NWWAC, NSAC and MAC.

The Secretariat stated that new Terms of Reference would need to be drafted.

The question of a new Chair for this FG was raised as the current Chair has retired. NWWAC member Aodh O'Donnell representing the IFPO has indicated he would be interested in taking this over. O'Donnell is a long history in the brown crab industry in Ireland.

Quemeneur commented that he would also be interested in taking over the Chairmanship as brown crab is extremely important in France.

The Secretariat suggested that members can vote in the next meeting regarding Chairmanship. Members agreed with this approach.

ACTION: Secretariat to draft new Terms of Reference in preparation for the next meeting.

ACTION: NWWAC, NSAC and MAC Secretariat to discuss and agree facilitation of this joint FG.

ACTION: New Chair to be appointed at next meeting

Mathies advised that a lead Secretariat would need to be appointed. Pedro Reis Santos felt that as the focus of this work is on management measures, it would be more appropriate if the NWWAC or NSAC continued this work. Since the MAC led on the first iteration of the trilateral work and the NWWAC carried the second iteration, he suggested it should be the NSAC taking over this work. Mathies reminded participants that the NWWAC and NSAC have several joint FGs and work sharing might be best agreed between the Secretariats. Kateryna Urbanovich added that a trilateral meeting between the Secretariats might be the best platform.

4 AOB

Murphy wondered if the current Chair would leave this group and commended her on the years of work she carried out on this fishery. He thanked her for all the work she put into this topic.

The Chair felt the management of this stock is only as good as the collaboration between all stakeholders and thanked Murphy for his kind words.

Lynch supported the previous speakers comments, and thanked Parke for her work as Chair in various working and focus groups as well as her involvement in the ACRUNET project.

The Chair added that the results of today's discussion will form part of the new FG which can then decide on how to manage the information collected.

5 Summary of actions agreed and decisions adopted by the Chair

The Chair summarised the proceedings and thanked all participants for their active involvement in the meeting.

Action points

1	Secretariat to draft new Terms of Reference in preparation for the next meeting.
2	NWWAC, NSAC and MAC Secretariat to discuss and agree facilitation of this joint FG.
3	New Chair to be appointed at next meeting



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