



NWWAC FOCUS GROUP ON SCALLOP

MINUTES

Virtual meeting via Zoom

25 November 2024, 14:00 – 15:30 CET

1. Welcome and introduction by the Chair

The Chair Mathieu Vimard welcomed all participants to the meeting. Apologies were received from Arthur Yon (FROM Nord) in advance of the meeting. The agenda was adopted as drafted.

2. Second round of Irish trials

2.1. Presentation by Daragh Browne (BIM)

Daragh Browne provided a detailed overview of a trial conducted in November 2024 to assess the impact of increasing scallop dredge ring sizes in Irish fisheries. This trial built upon a similar study carried out in 2023 by BIM (Bord Iascaigh Mhara) and the Irish scallop fishing industry in the Western English Channel. The purpose was to evaluate how different ring sizes affect scallop size selectivity under conditions representative of Irish fishing practices and gear.

The trial took place in Division 7d aboard a 24-meter vessel from County Wexford, which had also been used in the 2023 study. The gear consisted of New Haven-style dredges with metal rings, which differ from French vessels that incorporate mesh. The 2024 study targeted King Scallops and compared the performance of standard 85 mm rings with test rings measuring 92 mm and 97 mm.

Over 20 valid hauls were conducted, each lasting over an hour, with a towing speed of 2.5 knots and at a depth of 36 meters. Observations showed significant reductions in scallops below the minimum conservation reference size of 110 mm for the larger ring sizes, with no loss of scallops above the reference size. While there was a slight decrease in the bulk catch for the 92 mm and 97 mm rings, this amounted to just 4–6%.

Browne emphasized that these results align with findings from the 2023 trial, which indicated that a 92 mm ring size also optimized selectivity in the Western English Channel, where the minimum conservation reference size is 100 mm. He acknowledged concerns among Irish fishers about ring wear and its potential impact on performance. Measures to reduce ring wear, such as raising belly rings off the seabed, have been suggested but require further testing in an Irish context.

The trial benefited from collaboration with the vessel's owners and crew, as well as the Irish South and East Fishermen's Producers Organization. Funding and support were provided by the Irish Government and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. Browne noted feedback from the fishers that conditions in 2024—at the start of the fishing season—were notably better than those in 2023, which might have influenced the results.

In closing, Browne highlighted the importance of consulting fishers like Ciaran Whelan, the trial

skipper, to gain further insight into the operational implications of these findings. He invited questions and expressed openness to discussions about the trial's outcomes.

2.2. Questions and answers

The Chair and Xavier Tetard asked for clarification on the results, particularly regarding the weight of scallops caught and the potential impact of ring wear on the fishing gear. Browne confirmed that there was a slight decrease in the bulk catch of scallops with the 92 and 97 mm ring sizes, but no significant commercial loss.

Kieran Whelan reported that the trial went well, with the best fishing seen in the East Channel in many years. However, there was a significant loss of scallops above 100mm in both areas, which could impact the balance of fishing in the two regions. John Lynch suggested that the vessels would need to change gear as they move from one area to another, which would be expensive. Dimitri Rogoff emphasized that the scallops do not move, so the issue is not about losing them, but about the efficiency of the fishing gear. He also suggested that the trial showed that using larger rings could be beneficial in the long term.

Lynch expressed concerns about the need for vessels to change gear when fishing in different areas, particularly in the Irish Sea. He committed to discussing the issue with his members and making a proposal, emphasizing the need for a balance in gear sizes to accommodate different fishing areas.

Rogoff emphasized the need for a more selective and sustainable fishing approach, and suggested that the French fishing system, which has shown success in increasing fish biomass, should be adopted. He proposed a balanced approach to fishing in both areas, with the French and Irish trials providing evidence for this approach.

Lynch proposed a step-by-step approach to any changes, emphasizing the need to keep Irish vessels viable.

Olivier Lepretre suggested a united front with the Irish against UK regulations, which he sees as unfairly imposed on French and Irish fishers.

3. Follow up on DG MARE workshop – management measures to consider

The Chair asked participants to consider the potential for increasing the minimum size of fishing nets, which could lead to better selectivity and adaptability.

Rogoff added that in Normandy they are considering implementing more flexible opening and closing dates for fishing zones and are concerned about the impact of foreign fleets on French fishing efforts. He emphasized the need for common rules and better resource management to ensure a fair distribution of the resource.

The Chair proposed the idea of temporarily closing a fishing zone to allow for the growth of small scallops, which could potentially increase the overall catch. Lynch clarified that the zone in question is already closed from May to October and asked whether the proposal was to add more months or to close it during weekends during the open period. The Chair suggested that both options could be



considered, depending on the circumstances and the state of the resource in 2024. Lynch expressed his concern regarding changes in closures and timings, suggesting a need for a medium-term objective. He also mentioned discussing the ring size and closure item with Irish fishers first, as the results of the BIM trials were fairly recent. The Chair agreed with Lynch's point and suggested that the group should not proceed further without the Irish proposal.

Rogoff explained that their approach to managing scallop fisheries is different and aims to maintain a large spawning stock. He proposed measures such as temporary area closures, reduced fishing effort and a fallow system to gradually increase the exploitable biomass. He stressed the economic importance of this fishery for the local fleet and the need to move forward with joint management with the other countries concerned, while preserving their sustainable management model.

4. Summary of decisions adopted by the Chair:

1	John Lynch will come back to the FG with a proposal on ring size once results of the second BIM trial have been discussed by Irish fishers.
2	Dimitri Rogoff will share with the FG the proposal by CRPMEM Normandie on management measures, especially regarding closures.

5. Participants

Name	Organisation
Daragh Browne	BIM
Giraud Coline	CRPMEM Normandie
Alannah Gourlaouen	CRPMEM Normandie
Olivier Lepretre	CRPMEM Hauts de France
John Lynch	ISEFPO
Mo Mathies	NWWAC Secretariat
Sander Meyns	Rederscentrale
Solène Prévalet	FROM Nord
Dimitri Rogoff	CRPMEM Normandie
Pauline Stephan	CNPMEM
Xavier Tetard	CRPMEM Normandie
Dominique Thomas	OP CME Manche Mer du Nord
Matilde Vallerani	NWWAC Secretariat
Mathieu Vimard	OPN
Cìaran Whelan	ISEFPO