

DRAFT Minutes

Joint NWWAC/NSAC/MAC Focus Group Brown Crab

Virtual meeting, 27 March 2023 | 09:00 – 11:00 IE

Participants

Enda Conneely	IIMRO	NWWAC
Ciara Dower	Verifact	
Mike Fitzpatrick	Verifact	
Ian Lawler	BIM	
Martial Laurans	Ifremer	
Jonathan Loubry	CNPMEM	NWWAC/NSAC/MAC
John Lynch	IS&EFPO	NWWAC
Mo Mathies	NWWAC	
Geert Meun	VisNed	NWWAC/NSAC
Patrick Murphy	IS&WFPO	NWWAC/MAC
Aodh O'Donnell	IFPO	NWWAC
Norah Parke (Chair)	KFO	NWWAC/MAC
Pedro Reis Santos	MAC	
Marcel Rozemeijer	Wageningen Marine Research	
Erwan Quemeneur	CDPMEM 29	NWWAC
Paulo Vasconcelos	DG MARE	
Johnny Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary	NWWAC

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair Norah Parke welcomed all participants. Apologies were received from David Jarrad (XX), Adam Holland (ANIFPO) and Tamara Talevska (NSAC). The agenda was adopted. The minutes from the last meeting were agreed.

Action Points from the last meeting:

1	Include ORE topic in workshop agenda
	Done
2	Members are invited to provide contact details on suitable experts to the Secretariat
	None received
3	Secretariat to contact David Jarrad to see if a video contribution could be made from the UK.
	Done, no answer received yet
4	Jonathan Loubry to contact Martial Laurans to see if he is available for the next FG meeting
	Agenda item 2
5	Jonathan Loubry to confirm 16 May as workshop date internally with CNPMEM
	Confirmed
6	Secretariat to invite Marcel Rozemeijer to next FG meeting for update on Dutch industry.
	Agenda item 3

2. Overview of French Crab industry – Martial Laurans, IFREMER

The presentation can be found [here](#).

Martial Laurans introduced the management rules in the French brown crab fishery some of which have been in place for a long time. To ensure that the rules are followed, all pots are numbered. Parlour pots are generally forbidden for use but allowed in certain areas, for example around the Channel Islands. France has no separate rules for declawing and explained that gill netters are declawing at sea as brown crab are solely a bycatch. Two projects are underway, one on the index of brown and the other on disease. The main fishing areas are the Western Channel and the Bay of Biscay. Smaller lobster vessels target brown crab in autumn as well. Between 1985 and 2015 the fishing effort stayed stable. Since then, there has been a steady decrease in landings of brown crab since with eight boats having stopped their activities at the fishery was not profitable any longer. It is unclear what the exact problem regarding the stock decline is, e.g., larval mortality, disease etc. He concluded that:

- Brown crab stocks show a real decline.
- At the same time, the effort of the French fleet targeting brown crab stays the same.
- The trend is the same in all areas, coastal or offshore, Bay of Biscay or Western Channel.
- The size structure of offshore area seems to be similar.

Ifremer is collaborating with Cefas on a brown crab project regarding disease. Work commenced a year ago to identify what diseases and pathogens are present for brown crab. Fishermen are involved in this project and supply individual crabs for research having observed that even healthy-looking crab show high mortality on board at times which may be linked to low energy. Most recent results show up a multitude of issues, but it is not clear what exactly is the main cause the problem. Fishermen also observe more crab with the “pink disease”. Water samples are also being analysed and observed for larval activity.

He felt that the problem was bigger in the northern part of the Bay of Biscay than in the Western Channel, but again uncertainties exist. Regarding the Western Channel he stated that the management for this area was difficult to put in place due to the different numbers of pots deployed by different flag states which has led to varying fishing pressures in different areas.

The Chair thanked Laurans for his presentation and felt that a very worrying development was shown which importantly needs to be avoided for other areas. In her opinion the French industry has always been well managed so these changes are very worrying.

Patrick Murphy asked if the vessel numbers increased relating to the opening of the Chinese market and if there may have been a tipping point. He also wondered if any hatchery work was being undertaken. He also queried if pots were deployed closer to shore at certain times of the year. Finally, he commented that there was a problem with royal seabream in France and if any of these fish may predate on the small crab as well. Regarding the black spots on crab, he wondered if this was a new disease because when he fished in years passed he would have observed these and attributed these possibly to crab fighting.

Laurans stated that the number of boats did not increase. The offshore potting fleet 30 years ago had 17 boats using approx. 700 pots, and while the number of pots increased to 1000 for a while, the number of boats has decreased until today. Juvenile crab can be found along the shores with natural migration to offshore areas. Less than 5% of the catch is under the minimum legal size. Hatchery work is not envisaged as it is too costly. Regarding cuttlefish/octopus he stated that a big increase in numbers was seen in 2021 and a correlation could be made between increase and predation, however, this is not proven. He felt the main impacts was more on scallops and other molluscs and not crab. The French fleet is aligned with the tides with limited time at sea due to the environmental conditions, specifically currents, minimum one week at sea and maximum 10 days. He stated that there was no extra pressure from and no additional vessels in the fleet. "The fleet has always put in place measures to ensure that the market stays stable." The black spots are linked to bacteria and more prevalent in muddy/sandy mixed areas. Crab lack energy once they have infections, for example the crab with pink meat.

The Chair thanked Laurans and suggested that there might be scope for follow-up with agencies in Ireland regarding analysis of samples.

3. Building up knowledge to enable exploitation of crab and lobster in Offshore Wind Farms – Marcel Rozemeijer, Wageningen Marine Research

The presentation can be found [here](#).

Marcel Rozemeijer explained that the project is funded directly by the Ministry as well as other sources. Due to the Ukraine crisis the demand for ORE has increased and especially fisheries are losing exploitation areas. Various projects are in place/under discussion to understand how multi-use could be possible. Major concerns are anchor/line stability, CPUE, LPUE and population estimates.

He introduced the various projects underway in the Netherlands. In Borssele II wind park, multi-use is obligatory, however, in Borssele I special permission is needed for carrying out research. Work has been carried out near wrecks near Scheveningen. In the work programme in the Princess Amalia wind farm a risk reduction package is included. Negotiations took place with the wind farm operators regarding fishing techniques to be deployed in the area. It was found that marker buoys with flags led to higher displacement of strings. Risk of displacement was lowest when using cables. Despite low risk, insurance of 20 million Euros per boat is still required. The main threat to operating in these areas is the loss of material, i.e., when a line breaks loose. Research has been carried out on both lobster and crab and results have indicated that OWF can provide suitable habitats for these species, but a spill over effect has not been seen in all areas. Lobster releases have taken place for research using acoustic signals to observe lobster mobility.

Competition can be observed in the German Bight between Irish, British and NL fishermen as the demand for brown crab is growing. There is a high dependency on the Chinese market, and concerns around animal welfare are growing. There is an extra cost involved around fishing in wind farms. As these are further offshore, more time and fuel is needed for fishing in these areas. Safety rules state that strings have to be deployed parallel to the current which could place them perpendicular to the

infield electricity cables, e.g., in Borssele. This means the strings are shorter. In future, it might be better to have the infield electricity cables parallel so that the crab pot strings can also be parallel instead of perpendicular. More funding is currently sought for additional investigations into the stability of the strings. In the North of Holland, strings are perpendicular to current, but the velocity is also much lower.

All fisheries seem to be collapsing at the moment with fishermen dropping out of this fishery. The Government is still looking at technological investment though vessel numbers are reducing.

The Chair thanked the speaker for the presentation and suggested that participants submit written questions to the Secretariat for follow-up.

<https://www.wur.nl/nl/project/win-wind.htm>

ACTION: Members to submit questions on both presentations to the Secretariat for written follow-up with the speakers.

4. Draft Terms of Reference Workshop – update

- Date: 16 May, CNPMM Paris & Zoom
- Experts:
- Videos from vessels/processing facilities
- Agenda

The Secretariat reported that the room in CNPMM has been reserved, that a Save the Date invite had been sent to NWWAC, NSAC and MAC members, and experts. It has also been distributed to the members of ICESCRAB and ICES WGOWDF with a request for speakers. Expressions of interest have been received regarding participation but not regarding speakers. Rozemeijer offered to present on the OWF coexistence which was accepted by the Chair and members. The Secretariat added that requests had been received regarding French interpretation to be made available for the workshop which will be decided once registration has opened. Following a question from the Chair, the proposal was accepted that in-person attendance would be restricted to members of the Focus Group and expert speakers due to budget constraints and the size of the meeting room, and that no limit would be placed on online participation.

ACTION: Secretariat to circulate final Terms of Reference to members and interested parties.

ACTION: Secretariat to open online registration.

ACTION: Secretariat to finalise arrangements regarding interpretation following registration online.

5. AOB

none

6. Summary of actions agreed and decisions adopted by the Chair

1	Members to submit questions on both presentations to the Secretariat for written follow-up with the speakers
2	Secretariat to circulate final Terms of Reference to members and interested parties
3	Secretariat to open online registration.
4	Secretariat to finalise arrangements regarding interpretation following registration online.

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