

DRAFT Minutes

Joint NWWAC/NSAC Focus Group Skates & Rays

Virtual meeting via Teams

Thursday 04 March 2021

Participants

Paddy Walker (PW)	Dutch Elasmobranch Society (Chair)	NSAC
Irene Kingma (IK)	Dutch Elasmobranch Society	NSAC
Jasmine Vlietinck (JV)	Rederscentrale	NWWAC/NSAC
John Lynch (JL)	ISEFPO	NWWAG
Geert Meun (GM)	VisNed	NWWAC/NSAC
Anais Mourtada (AM)	CNPMEM	NWWAC/NSAC
Loeiza Lancelot (LL)	FROM Nord	NWWAC/NSAC
Amerik Schuitemaker (AS)	Nederlandse Vissersbond	NSAC
Martin Oliver (MO)	BIM	
Matthew McHugh (MMch)	BIM	
Laura Lemey (LaL)	ILVO	
Jurgen Batsleer (JB)	Wageningen Marine Research	
Mo Mathies (MM)	NWWAC Secretariat	
Matilde Vallerani (MV)	NWWAC Secretariat	

1 Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed all participants who all introduced themselves. Apologies were received prior to the meeting from Caroline Gamblin who is substituted today by Anais Mourtada. The agenda was adopted, and the Chair added the best practice table to the Next Steps agenda point.

IK: A call was held with the Dutch Ministry, as the Netherlands is the Chair of Scheveningen Group and will be asking for an update of this table.

MM: The minutes from the last meeting were updated by LL specifically on the Thornback Ray FIP. If there are no other changes, they will be taken as approved and published on website [here](#).

Action points from the last meeting

1	NWWAC Secretariat to forward ToR to NWWAC ExCom for approval. Approval request was sent on 09 February, no comments received, so full approval.
2	Secretariat to invite representatives from the various projects to provide overview at the next meeting. Focus Group representatives to provide Secretariat with relevant contact details. Done and on the agenda today.
3	Add topic of ICES request re. minimum landing size to the next meeting's agenda. Point 6 on the agenda
4	NWWAC Secretariat to circulate Doodle for next meeting date. Done

2 Raywatch - Laura Lemey, ILVO (laura.lemey@ilvo.vlaanderen.be)

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

Laura is the coordinator for this EMFF funded project.

In 2018, a temporal exemption based on preliminary discard and survival data for skates and rays was approved under Landing Obligation for which scientific evidence needed in support of avoiding choke situation. This is detailed in the roadmap for skates & rays.

The project's data collection focusses on seven ray species: thornback ray, small-eyed ray, blonde ray, spotted ray, sandy ray, cuckoo ray, undulate ray.

Knowledge gaps have been identified for these seven species: grey bars show which data is already being collected within the Belgian fisheries, blue bars show what data is going to be collected in the short term, shaded bars show what data is envisaged to be collected over a longer time span.

Preliminary results include data that is already available including some new results from the Raywatch project. These are shown for Thornback ray and blonde ray.

The RayScan project will support fishers with the accurate identification of rays and skates both at catch and auction. It is an automatic artificial intelligence identification App. Images will be gathered and placed in a database. The App will grow more accurate over time through usage as each observation and identification can be shared and images be included in the database which will allow for increasingly accurate scans.

JL: In Ireland, the Marine Institute carried out a lot of maturity work approx. 5 years ago on blonde ray in the Irish Sea. Is that data included in the maps?

LaL: No, that was not included but could possibly be included in the future.

JL: The maps looked very similar. The App would it help in the development of the app if fishermen could deliberately use it on species that can already identify and know which species this is?

LaL: Images are already being provided to the organisation which is putting this together and a prototype is being developed.

MO: How will industry be contacted for participating and using the App? Will this be spread further afield?

LaL: Currently it is being developed only in Dutch, but there is a lot of interest so it might be possible to share it and trial it in other countries as well.

JL: That would be great, and it would be excellent for skate species because once an individual comes aboard there is always a big discussion regarding the identification of it.

LaL: The project is currently focusing on the Belgian species that are being caught. The main misidentification is regarding spotted ray and blonde ray also at fish auction.

JB: Just an observation, in the project you want to improve stock assessment, but the Belgian fisheries is probably quite limited in catches, so this needs to be coordinated internationally to influence the advice process in ICES.

3 Trial update Ireland – Martin Oliver, Fisheries Development Officer BIM (martin.oliver@bim.ie)

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

This presentation is an overview of some vitality assessments that have been carried out in the past and what is planned for the future.

Trials were done on trawling with a raised fishing line, which seemed to reduce the catches of skates and rays. Next week a trial is starting in the Celtic Sea with artificial light on the raised fishing line itself to further reduce cod catches. This might also impact the catches of skates and rays and other flat fish.

A mobile 'survival unit' was designed so that the researchers could carry out post-release survival studies without having to use the laboratory, as this was not possible due to Covid-19 restrictions.

PW: This gear option seems to be very positive regarding cutting down on the unwanted catches of ray and skate species.

MO: Yes, this can be useful for the whitefish boats.

IK: Do you know for which gears a change will be mandatory, is it elective?

MMcH: This came in last year under the TCM: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32020R0123> Article 13 Remedial measures for cod and whiting in the Celtic Sea has info on the Raised fishing line's use.

JL: Yes, this came in as a conservation measure under Art 13 of the TCM and brought in for 01 July 2020. There does not seem to be anyone using it. The gear is good at letting cod escape and ground fish escape, would be an excellent gear if there was enough quota for anyone who is specifically targeting haddock, but most vessels depend on the mixed fisheries situation.

The report on post-capture conditions of cuckoo ray can be found [here](#).

4 Bridging Knowledge Gaps for sharks and rays in the North Sea - Jurgen Batsleer, Wageningen Marine Research (jurgen.batsleer@wur.nl)

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

ICES held a workshop on the use of surveys for stock assessment and Reference Points for Rays and Skates (WKS KATE) in 2020 for which the report will hopefully be available in April this year and will be used in the assessments. (Terms of Reference for this Workshop can be found in [this document](#)).

The main discussions regarding elasmobranchs are always regarding the impacts of fisheries. But in a broader context there is much more pressure, for example sand extraction, climate change, wind parks, and a lot of knowledge gaps remain. Reference points are unavailable for these species which leads to a precautionary approach for the ICES advice, leading to (potential) choke situations. There are further knowledge gaps regarding migration, spawning and nursery grounds. In order to address these, tope shark, starry smoothhound, stingrays and other ray species will be tagged with satellite and/or data-storage tags so that their movements can be reconstructed.

The project will use the same vitality scoring as in the BIM studies as well as ILVO, so there is a standardised approach.

The project is supported through a dedicated 4-year PhD student who will look specifically after the data tag analysis.

The project will also look at the population structure using genetic tools on blonde ray, Thornback Ray and spotted ray. Ifremer are also involved in genetic research using the same methodology on Thornback Ray in the Bay of Biscay.

The budget includes money for stakeholder meetings which will be important for combining information with other project information.

MO: Where are the data tags from?

JB: These are mini tags from Wildlife Computers.

MO: How confident are you getting the data tags back?

JB: We are really looking at the fisheries that are catching the rays to send the tags back if any are caught. The industry is involved already as this is a collaborative project. It is important that this is communicated to other fisheries as well, for example Belgian and French.

PW: In the past the Dutch Elasmobranch Society has organised stakeholder dialogue meetings.

I am very glad that we have had these presentations and it is good to keep in touch regarding what is happening with the science. Hopefully, we can get updates again in the future.

5 Discussion

As part of the previous points.

6 Updates

a. [COM reply](#) to undulate ray advice

PW: The reply stated that it is important for the FG to keep the dialogue with scientists going, but the Commission will not take any steps while the TCA discussions are ongoing.

JB: I am not sure if it was mentioned in the ICES presentation by Pascal, but undulate ray is up for benchmarking by ICES and will be looked at in 2022.

b. [COM reply](#) to prohibited species list request

PW: This has been an ongoing issue, but again the Commission will not act on this due to the EU-UK discussions.

Maybe this group should get back to the Commission on both of these requests?

IK: On the prohibited species issue, the Commission just does not want to touch this since this work was started about 4 years ago. I would suggest asking for a meeting with the Commission on this to talk through this and find out why they are so hesitant to look into this.

PW: Would anyone else support a meeting with the Commission on this or object? There do not seem to be any interventions.

MM: I think the meeting should be open to all members of this FG, or a small meeting involving just the Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretariats could be organised.

IK: I would rather not have a big group but just a small delegation and avoid having the Commission join the FG and state they need to confirm with whoever is looking after this topic.

PW: How urgent is this for the group? There seem to be two choices, either a meeting with a dedicated small group, or big group consisting of all FG members who are interested in participating.

ACTION: Secretariat to set up a Doodle regarding the two options for a Commission meeting to discuss the prohibited species list.

PW: We can then follow up once the vote is completed.

c. Draft ICES request

PW: What is the current status of this request?

JB: I have seen the draft and the points were discussed between the chairs who provided an opinion on this but I have no further information from ICES.

LL: I just know that this document was sent to Jurgen.

PW: It seems that it has fallen into some cracks somewhere. LL, is that something that could be chased up?

LL: We already discussed this document last October and the idea was to see if we wanted to send this document to the Commission, but we needed the answer from all members of the group. Caroline Gamblin stated in those discussions that the proposals were appropriate only for some parts of the fishing grounds

MM: The discussion is available in the minutes from that meeting [here](#).

PW: I would suggest we add our comments and draft the document the way the ACs would like it.

JB: The last thing that I know is that Pascal and I had feedback as we had some reservations and asked how to proceed. The recommendation was to bring this through the ACs to the Commission or directly to ICES from France. Feedback was given to SUMARiS. ICES is reluctant to take on special requests at the moment due to COVID and the general workload with assessments and benchmarks.

ACTION: Secretariat to follow up with SUMARiS regarding the ICES feedback on this to update the draft request and circulate to FG members for review and comment.

d. Thornback Ray FIP

LL: I will send the minutes from the stakeholder meeting held on 12th February

LL presented the structure and planning of the project and details of the Action Plan. Presentation to be shared only within the group and not online.

PW: Maybe we could make this update a permanent agenda point?

e. ICES WKSURVIVE: (<http://www.ices.dk/community/groups/Pages/WKSURVIVE.aspx>)

PW: I attended this meeting, and the report should be available soon. This was a very relevant meeting for elasmobranchs. Members of the group looked at the possibility of doing a case study on undulate ray as there is such a high discard rate, which may be presented at the ICES WGEF in June. The working group suggested that the next step is to include this issue in the benchmarking process, and everyone recognises the need to look into this in more detail.

7 Next steps

The best practice table needs to be looked at at the next meeting and possibly include points presented today. Deadline for submission for the Scheveningen Group is 01 May

ACTION: Secretariat to send out best practice table and instructions and ask for updates prior to next meeting

8 Summary of actions agreed and decisions adopted by the Chair

PW: Maybe we need to keep the update of research projects as a permanent point on the agenda? The Dutch project will be organising stakeholder communications later in the year.

Action points

1	Secretariat to set up a Doodle regarding the two options for a Commission meeting to discuss the prohibited species list.
2	Secretariat to follow up with SUMARiS regarding the ICES feedback on this to update the draft request and circulate to FG members for review and comment.
3	Secretariat to send out best practice table and instructions and ask for updates prior to next meeting.