



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

MINUTES

FOCUS GROUP ON BROWN CRAB (FGCrab)

CNPMEM, Paris
Tuesday 28th of February 2017
09:00 – 13:00

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair of the Focus Group, Norah Parke, welcomed the members and attendees to the meeting. The full list of participants is included as an annex to these minutes.

The agenda¹ was adopted as drafted. It was noted that the action points from the last meeting in Dublin (15th September 2016) had been completed:

That a mailing list would be established and the Focus Group will suggest to the Executive Committee that the next meeting be attached to the next NWWAC meeting.

2. Terms of Reference (ToRs)

The Chair presented the ToRs for the FGCrab that had been finalised by the Chair and Secretariat and based on the discussions at the previous meeting. The aim was to develop an agreed strategy for the management of brown crab fisheries in the NWWAC region, which recognised the different management regimes, which exist in producer countries.

There was general agreement with the ToRs, and the group agreed that there was no need for Spanish in the language regime of the meeting.

Regarding item 2 (i.e. Adoption of management measures) of the ToRs it was suggested (Lucile Toulhoat) that one of the first measures to be highlighted should be that management plans should also serve to generate a balance between the markets and the stock of brown crab. Additionally, the French industry considered that MSC certification requirements could be used as guidelines rather than a specific objective. The Chair agreed and added that MSC had only been used as an example of possible certification bodies.

Alan Coghill recommended that the work of FGCrab should be shared with those with an interest in

¹ All relevant documents to the meeting can be found on the NWWAC website: [link](#)

brown crab fisheries in the North Sea. The Chair indicated that information had been shared with other ACs at the end of the ACRUNET project. Barrie Deas, as Chair of the NSAC Demersal WG indicated that although a crustacean fishery was not on their agenda, he would inform the NSAC of the progress of FGCrab at their next meeting.

ACTION: The NSAC Demersal WG and NSAC Secretariat will be informed of the progress of FGCrab by Barrie Deas who will report back to the group, as necessary.

3. Overview of fisheries management and markets in NWW producer countries

The Chair presented an overview of the current management and market situation in the UK, Ireland and France. The fisheries have inshore (<12 m day boats, seasonal) and offshore (15-25 m vivier vessels, nomadic, all year round) components with the catches mainly being taken in creels or pots and occasionally recorded as bycatch in trawls.

It was noted that although the species is not under an EU TAC, management measures in EU waters consist of: a Minimum Landing Size (MLS, 115mm to 140mm carapace width), effort restrictions for vessels > 10m in the 'Biologically Sensitive Area' (BSA) off the west and south coasts of Ireland and a restriction to land no more than 1% in crab claws.

National management schemes in the UK were based on 10 regional inshore fisheries and conservation authorities, which are looking at increasing the MLS and possibly reducing the latent capacity in Shellfish Entitlements (SE). A consultation process on the Crab and Lobster, Stock Specific, Management Approach (CLSSFMA) was ongoing in England, but in general the industry considered that a regional toolbox approach was needed. In Scotland a different approach is applied, based on Fisheries Improvement Projects (FIPs) and accreditation programs.

In France, brown crab fisheries are concentrated on the north western coast, and national management for large crustaceans is arranged through a licencing scheme, with quota for the regional Comités des Pêches. It was noted that 12 offshore potters accounted for 50% of landings. Lucile Toulhoat noted that trawlers are excluded from the licencing regime and that the number of licences and landings had remained stable. Licences are reallocated annually. If the regional quota are fully taken up, new fishermen can only enter a fishery if an existing licence is surrendered. It was also noted that certain measures implemented by the regional committees are more restrictive than the national framework (i.e. limiting the maximum number of pots per vessel and number of crew, local restrictions and banning the 'cassier parloit' (Parlour Pot) without escape panels).

Ken Kawahara noted that although an EU rule existed, which allowed landings of 1% of crab claws, that this activity should be banned for ethical reasons. The Chair agreed with this point and had noted similar views in Ireland and the UK, stressing the need to educate fishermen on making the most efficient use of their catches, and to develop an alternative to the use of crab bodies for whelk bait.

The Irish brown crab fishery is managed by a potting or polyvalent licence scheme with a substantial amount of latent effort (i.e. Approximately 100 of the c. 1800 licenced vessels declared crab landings in recent years). Landings data are not exactly known for <10m vessels that do not have logbook requirements. The Irish industry suggested that management could be improved by increasing the MLS and forming FIPs for crab, but feared that improving prices could encourage migration into the fishery, creating a cycle of over-supply and price collapse.

The ACRUNET project (2012-2015) concluded that the main brown crab markets in the EU were stable or declining, and emerging markets in the far-east were opening direct and secondary market opportunities.

Information from live and processed markets indicated a minor decrease in exports of fresh brown crab. The project concluded that the brown crab industry needed long-term management strategies to reach its potential. The members of FGCrab were urged to explore regional, transnational options, while recognising that management for this species begins with the fishermen who haul the pots and grade the catch.

Mr Coghill commented that the approach between Scotland and England is rather different. On the Shetland Islands, vessel numbers were strictly regulated, while on the Orkneys an inshore committee was active, which in addition to licencing provisions incorporates scientific programmes on the stocks. Two inshore committees, on the East and West of Scotland, have recently been reconstituted to contribute to the management of stocks in these areas.

The Chair commented that the secret to the success of management around islands relied on their stand-alone status, enabling management measures that cannot be implemented in all areas but noted that successful approaches should be considered in more areas.

4. Status of Brown crab

The Chair introduced Dr Oliver Tully and Yves Reecht (Marine Institute, Galway), as experts invited to present an overview of the status of brown crab stocks based on the conclusions of the ICES Working Group on the Biology and Life History of Crabs ([WGCRAB](#)). Mr Tully informed the meeting that WGCRAB collated information on brown crab from different institutes and ran trial assessments, but ICES was not yet in a position to provide specific management advice. It was important to start a discussion between scientists, managers and stakeholders, before advice can be produced that will answer relevant questions.

The WGCRAB noted that brown crab was generally a data limited stock (DLS), or data available were not compatible with conventional assessment methods. There was a need to compile national data as well as progress the development of methods for DLS assessments and the evaluation of stock status in the ICES process regarding MSY.

Preliminary stock boundaries for brown crab were determined on the basis of tag-returns, oceanography (plankton dispersal), and distribution of catches. The scale of stocks is most likely regional, both in- and offshore, although stocks around Scotland were assessed on a much smaller scale compared to lobster stocks. Compilation of national data would be needed to improve the assessment of stock boundaries and status. Additional information on fleet structure and fishing patterns would also be relevant to determine appropriate management tools (i.e local or regional).

In response to certification assessments, scientists were asked to report on the state of a stock in relation to MSY, for which proxy reference points needed to be established. Dr Tully stressed that management systems developed to address certification needs should be able to respond to quick stock changes. Current management through MLS (i.e. between 115 mm and 160 mm) was considered to be a safe starting point, since the MLS is well above the size at maturity (i.e. between 50 mm and 117 mm for females).

Different institutes had presented their assessment method trials (e.g. Scotland used length based assessments). This used length measurements of landings, and had shown high fishing mortality for some areas. Considering length data are influenced by spatial variation and grading on board, these may not be representative for the stock. In Ireland and France, trends in fisheries data (i.e. landings, discards, effort, from voluntary reference fleets) were assessed, which may be representative of trends in stock abundance. An overview of the preliminary stock status assessments was presented.

Mr Reece informed the AC that in order to improve stock assessments, the following data provisions should be prioritised:

- a) Catch data especially for vessels under 10m, as well as by-catch volumes for fisheries not targeting brown crab;
- b) Catch data references on where catches took place, gear type, soak time, etc.;
- c) Size composition of the catch or landings;
- d) Biological traits such as growth rates and maturity information.

It was suggested that data from all countries should be aggregated in order to be able to assess brown crab stocks. Decisions on the most appropriate assessment methods were needed in order to be able to use integrated data-sets from all countries.

Dr Tully informed the meeting that additional data and knowledge from stakeholders was welcome in order to improve stock assessments. For example, reporting of the catch per unit effort for vessels using pots, is now only done by a reference fleet. In order for data to be representative of the stock, they should cover all areas and seasons, so data should preferably be submitted by all potters and include spatial references. Sales note information from under 10m vessels were insufficient. Good information on the size distribution in the catches would improve stock assessment options. Landings data alone would not be suitable because of differences in grading practices. Electronic reporting would be a very important tool to simplify reporting.

Lucile Toulhoat reported that French landings data from vessels <10m were available, and that Ifremer used information on the strategies of fleets to produce a good assessment.

Johnny Woodlock suggested that the practice of discarding unused bait from pots should be discouraged, to avoid seals following potting vessels and breaking into pots. The Chair agreed that this was a good suggestion and that more data needed to be collected on this issue.

ACTION: The Chair to collate data on the topic of the interaction between seals and pot fisheries.

The Chair asked Dr Tully about the information from the Irish reference fleet. The reference fleet was funded under the DCF DCmap program, and involves around 70 to 80 vessels that submit catch, discard and size data. The geographic coverage of this fleet was currently insufficient and a larger fleet was needed. In France, 50% of the landings are covered by 12 vessels that have a logbook requirement. Barrie Deas reported that a high level strategy group on English shellfish fisheries had been set up by the industry and the UK administration, which will discuss the data limited situation of the stocks. It was noted that Brexit would influence the management of this stock, but the need for cooperation between stakeholders, scientists and governments would remain, even if the forum for this cooperation changed.

Hugo Boyle commented that crab recapture would be an issue for this stock due to high discards and survival. Dr Tully indicated that depending on the assessment method, catch data was more dependable than landings data, but the assessment should not be compromised by repeated capture of individuals.

Tony Delahunty commented that currently, both management and scientific research was too disjointed, which is why a high level group was set up. A consistent dataset would be more relevant.

The Chair concluded that the need to continue cooperation between stakeholders and scientists remained. Both quality and quantity of data could be improved, and suggested that the ICES WGCRAb could play a role in this. Dr Tully agreed and suggested that standardisation between logbook schemes would improve the consistency of data between countries.

The Chair proposed that the Focus Group could ask scientists to develop guidelines on the collection of catch and discard data, including the detailed information (e.g. gear type, soak time, temperature) needed to improve the assessments.

ACTION: The Secretariat to draft a letter to the EC to ask scientists to develop guidelines on harmonising data collection for brown crab to the assessments. This letter should aim to support the ICES WGCRAb in the development of advice on brown crab.

5. Potential management measures to be investigated by FGCrab

The Chair introduced Finian O'Luasa (Bord Bia) who discussed responsible seafood trends and the marketing perspective. The meeting was informed that in recent years, consumer priorities had shifted from price awareness to a demand for sustainably harvested fish. Examples were presented of the marketing approaches of major retailers advertising sustainable resources, as well as new requirements for corporate reporting on sustainability for large companies.

The influence of NGO actions (e.g. information cards on the status of fish stocks; good or bad ('top or flop')) had generated a significant reaction amongst retailers, many of whom had indicated their intention to switch to certified fish in the near future. For the crab market, this would require long-term views and partnerships to improve traceability, reputation management (e.g. the consideration of animal welfare), and to investigate appropriate certification schemes. It was considered that fisheries improvement plans (FIPs) might provide an appropriate starting point, in this context.

Mr O'Luasa explained that the multitude of certification schemes was creating confusion, both for consumers and fisheries. In 2015, FAO launched the global sustainable seafood initiative (GSSI) as a unified label, which benchmarked existing schemes, like MSC, against the FAO code of conduct. A unified label could reduce the administrative burden associated with many fishery certification schemes and improve recognition by consumers.

Ken Kawahara considered that it was a good idea for large scale fisheries to improve their sustainability credentials but pointed out that artisanal fisheries may not have sufficient means to fund the certification process. Generic schemes, such as the GSSI could be too general and should not replace more restrictive schemes that may be more relevant to local, sustainable fisheries. Mr O'Luasa agreed that MSC labelling was by no means the most important label, as many have achieved certification because of the huge growth in demand for sustainable seafood. Artisanal fisheries could also benefit if they could comply with a label produced by a FIP, for instance, that could be benchmarked by the GSSI.

The Chair commented that she had been very cynical about commercially-orientated certification schemes initially, but had changed her opinion based on the Irish situation, where the management system was not fit for purpose for a small industry like brown crab fisheries. Updating this system would take too long, which would result in fishermen going out of business. FIPs can be tailored to specific fisheries and can serve to bring the industry together, organise management from the bottom up and achieve collective benefits in marketing and accreditation.

Barrie Deas noted that corporate groups had to be sensitive to public perception, but at the same time large groups can dictate their terms of trade to small scale producers. It was very important to get the balance right and small scale fishermen should stay in charge, even when venturing outside small scale markets. Mr O'Luasa mentioned some examples of collective branding for small producers, where a common identity helped forego fragmentation.

Enda Conneely questioned the rationale for certification schemes as fishermen already comply with the CFP, which should be sustainable in itself. Mr O’Luasa agreed that fisheries were already highly regulated but consumers needed reassurance because of the reputation of non-compliance. Johnny Woodlock commented that the reputation of certification schemes was not unblemished either and the validity and honesty of these labels should be protected.

Ms. Toulhoat commented that the French industry was not opposed to certification, but noted that it is an expensive process and that the industry in all countries should be involved in fishery certifications, in order to avoid competition. Problems, such as latent effort, might not be solved by certification processes. The Chair indicated that certification would not resolve all problems, but the developing a FIP can define management beyond national measures, which can resolve these typical problems, and that certification could be part of the FIP. Mr Deas questioned the use of a FIP as a vehicle for change. Examples for ‘easy’ single species fisheries could be found, but for mixed fisheries certification might not be attainable. He agreed with the chair that a FIP needed to be effective and controlled, driven and understood by the participants in them and not managed from above.

The use of GSSI benchmarking was discussed, specifically considering the use of benchmarking a FIP in order to avoid expensive certification processes. Alan Coghill’s experience with labelling did not encourage the use of MSC processes. Perhaps GSSI or other options could be explored, but he encouraged the industry to lead rather than follow the process.

The Chair concluded that it would be a good idea if members and Member States could share their experience with certification schemes with the FGCrab in the near future.

ACTION: Members and Member States to share their experiences with certification schemes (not only MSC) for brown crab fisheries, including relevant technical conservation measures.

- Appropriate scale of management measures

Dr Tully commented on the stock boundaries. Although preliminary for now, it was clear that based on biology and oceanography, the stocks are distributed on a regional scale rather than at a local level. Management measures should, therefore, recognise the characteristics of the different stocks.

The Chair concluded that the action point to ask for harmonised data collection, which had been agreed earlier in the meeting, supported this approach.

- Learning from positive experiences

The meeting was reminded that different management options had been presented at ACRUNET meetings, such as effort limitations at local fleet level (not at stock level) in France, a regulation order in the Shetlands and the EU wide Minimum Landing Size (MLS) rules.

The Chair proposed that FGCrab could try to evaluate the biological and socio-economic effects of existing management measures.

Mr Deas commented that it was important to evaluate current measures such as MLS, but alternative measures should also be considered. He stressed that the fundamental problem in most countries was fleet overcapacity and it would be relevant to deal with this rather than concentrate on more intrusive output management. Mr Delahunty stressed that the problems encountered with output management in whitefish, such as discarding and ‘use it or lose it’ fisheries, should be avoided for brown crab. Mr Coghill added that in the past, the reduction of the number of licences was not considered feasible, but this option was now under discussion.

Dr Tully commented that MLS management may be feasible from an MSY perspective, but if a high MLS were required, this would increase the cost to each vessel. Effort control would have fewer economic consequences. Ms Toulhoat indicated that Ifremer should be involved and suggested to evaluate the overview of local rules applicable in other countries, which was not currently available.

6. Coordination and prioritisation of management options

The Chair summarised the main action points from the meeting and asked the group for input on additional points and prioritisation. The Chair stressed that it was important for members to continue progress between meetings, by communicating with local stakeholders and distributing feedback and other information to the FGCrab members.

Ms Toulhoat stated that ultimately, the problem was the latent effort this fishery, which the different member states would have to deal with.

Dr Tully noted that at the end of the ACRUNET project it was concluded that the main problem was overproduction, which had reduced the market price. While effort restrictions could prevent overproduction, price mechanisms could lead to improved catch efficiency, which would negate the solution. He suggested that the management options that have worked so far, such as effort management in France and licencing provisions in Scotland, be evaluated. Teasing out the drivers of the problems could help to determine the appropriate management tools and refine the objective of FGCRAB. The effects of market changes (e.g. booming Chinese market), and the effects of transition changes could also be taken into account in this process.

ACTION: FGCrab members will collate and share data on the effectiveness of current management schemes in order to determine the most appropriate tools in the different regions.

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

1	The NSAC Demersal WG and NSAC Secretariat will be informed of the progress of FGCrab by Barrie Deas who will report back to the group, as necessary.
2	The Chair to collate data on the topic of the interaction between seals and pot fisheries.
3	The Secretariat to draft a letter to the EC to ask scientists to develop guidelines on harmonising data collection for brown crab to the assessments. This letter should aim to support the ICES WGCRAb in the development of advice on brown crab.
4	Members and Member States to share their experiences with certification schemes (not only MSC) for brown crab fisheries, including relevant technical conservation measures.
5	FGCrab members will collate and share data on the effectiveness of current management schemes in order to determine the most appropriate tools in the different regions.

The next meeting would be scheduled around the NWWAC meetings scheduled for the 14th and 15th of September 2017.

NWWAC Document
 Chair: Norah Parke
 Rapporteur: Barbara Schoute
 Review and editing: Conor P. Nolan

Annex 1 – List of Participants

NWWAC members		
Norah	Parke	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
Despina	Symons	European Bureau for Conservation and Development
Javier	López	Oceana
Marina	Le Gurun	Blue Fish
Erwan	Quemeneur	CDPMEM du Finistère, Comité Départemental des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins 29
Ken	Kawahara	Plateforme de la Petite Pêche Artisanale Française
Manuel	Evrard	Copeport Maree OPBN
Enda	Conneely	Irish Islands Marine Resource Organisation
Francis	O'Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisation
Hugo	Boyle	Irish South and East Fish Producers Organisation
John	Lynch	Irish Fishermen's Organisation
John	Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary
Alan	Coghill	Orkney Fish Producers Organisation
Barrie	Deas	National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations
David	Beard	Manx Fish Producers Organisation
Kenny	Coull	Scottish Fishermen's Federation
Peter	Smith	Scottish Fishermen's Organisation
Observers		
Lucile	Toulhoat	CNPMEM, Comité National des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins
Yannick	Calvez	CNPMEM, Comité National des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins
Anna	O'Sullivan	Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, Ireland
Finnian	O'Luasa	Bord Bia, Paris
Oliver	Tully	Marine Institute, Galway
Paul	Duane	Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority
Yves	Reecht	Marine Institute, Galway
Emily	Baxter	North West Wildlife Trusts
Michael	McLeod	Scottish Government
NWWAC Secretariat		
Conor	Nolan	Executive Secretary
Barbara	Schoute	Deputy Executive Secretary
Sara	Vandamme	Project Development and Communications Manager