CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES SEPTENTRIONALES | NORTH WESTERN WATERS ADVISORY COUNCIL | CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA LAS AGUAS NOROCCIDENTALES

MINUTES

WORKING GROUP 3 (ENGLISH CHANNEL)

14 October 2025

Online via Zoom

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair Manu Kelberine welcomed all participants to the meeting. Apologies were received from Pauline Stephan (CNPMEM) and John Lynch (ISEFPO). The agenda was adopted.

Action points from the last meeting (02 July 2025, Vigo)

1	Members to send written queries for Joanne Morgan following her presentation to the Secretariat
	Email request sent to members 04 July, no responses received
2	Members to send feedback on the fishing opportunities advice to the Secretariat.
	Email request sent to members 04 July, no responses received
3	Secretariat to initiate restart of the FG sea bass to develop advice on the ICES advice for 2026.
	Meeting held 05 September, advice in development. Agenda item 3.
4	Secretariat to initiate the reestablishment of the FG Whelk
	The first meeting will be held on 23 October.
5	WG to follow up on MSG work on lemon sole and red mullet.
	Waiting for the next Member States Technical Group meeting.

2. Presentation of Polux Project – Arthur Yon, FROM NORD

The Chair welcomed Arthur Yon, From NORD, who presented the project POLUX which was launched by FROM Nord in partnership with ILVO. It explores the use of light in low-impact pot fishing to improve gear selectivity, attract new species, and support the diversification and sustainability of fisheries in the eastern English Channel.

A. Yon explained that the Polux project is a study on the impact of light on species caught in fishing traps (pots and traps). Launched in February 2024, it is a collaborative effort with Belgian colleagues from ILVO.

The project was motivated by the decline in flatfish populations (like sole), which led many local fishers to diversify into trap fishing for non-quota species like crab, lobster, and cuttlefish. The goal was to innovate on this passive gear, drawing inspiration from British experiments where scallops—which are light-sensitive—were found in lit traps.

A. Yon outlined that the Polux project aimed to repeat and expand these findings in the more turbid waters of the Strait of Dover to determine if light remains effective on crustaceans, if it also attracts scallops in the local area, if light can provide selectivity (e.g., avoiding unwanted spider crabs), and if it can promote the capture of new species, like squid, for economic resilience. The project involved both controlled laboratory tank tests at ILVO and at-sea trials with volunteer fishers.

1. Brown Crab (Tank and Sea Tests)

Traps were tested in tanks and light had a significant attractive effect. Captures were doubled in the light-equipped section compared to the control (unlit) section. The hypothesis is that the light either intrigues the crab or illuminates the trap as a potential shelter.

2. General Crustacean Traps (At-Sea Tests)

Traps were tested with an unlit control and a constant white light. Light did not significantly change the capture rate of commercially valuable crustacean species. Light was not selective in the desired way. The lit traps caught an average of two more spider crabs per trap, aligning with prior British findings. Despite the turbid water, a small number of scallops were caught in the lit traps in areas where scallops are present, suggesting the light is still attractive to them. There was an increase in the quantity of fish found in the lit traps.

3. Shrimp (Tank and Sea Tests)

Initial tank tests with white, blue, green, and red light showed a behaviour of light avoidance, the shrimp went to the unlit side or stayed in the centre. Near-UV light (violet) was then tested and showed a clear attractive effect. At-Sea tests (white light) confirmed the tank results, showing a decline in capture of shrimp when the trap was lit with white light. Preliminary At-Sea Tests (near-UV light) with a different UV lamp model showed no significant difference in capture compared to the control. Further investigation is needed to determine the benefits of this light in a real-world setting.

4. Cuttlefish (At-Sea Tests)

Traps were tested with a control (unlit), white light, and green light (based on literature suggesting cephalopods can differentiate these colours). There was a significant attractive effect of light on cuttlefish, with an average of one more cuttlefish per trap when lit. The colour of the light, i.e. white vs. green, had no significant impact on capture rates.

5. Squid (At-Sea Tests)

Tests using modified traps with a finer mesh using white, green, and control light were largely a failure. The traps had design flaws, e.g. they rusted quickly, and allowed squid to enter, lay eggs, and exit again without being caught. The design of the squid trap needs to be completely re-worked.

A. Yon concluded that the Polux project has supported the finding that light can improve

capture efficiency for crab and cuttlefish but not necessarily selectivity due to increased spider crab catches. It also confirmed that even in turbid waters, light can attract scallops. He added that the project will continue testing on shrimp to better understand the role of near-UV light. It will also explore new methods for improving selectivity, such as acoustic deterrent devices or 3D-printed predator shapes to deter unwanted species like spider crabs. Finally, it will look at improving the design of the squid traps.

The full analysis and final report are expected to be available in January 2026.

The Chair thanked A. Yon for the feedback on the project, noting it is interesting in some areas but not effective everywhere as an initial assessment.

Franck Le Barzic asked if the energy and environmental costs of the lights have been assessed against the recovered yields. He acknowledged that innovation is important for progress. Regarding the low scallop yields he cautioned against overstating the results, citing a previous study that found while scallops are attracted to light, the yields are too low to replace existing commercial methods like dredging. He stressed that the new method is not a replacement for traditional scallop fishing.

Gérald Hussenot Desenonges supported the initiative, finding new fishing gear interesting for diversifying activities and future potential, despite not seeing an immediate use for his specific region. He suggested that FROM Nord enter the project into the Green Ribbon Competition.

Performance Study: A. Yon confirmed that the project has not yet evaluated performance (energy cost/yield) because the initial study was highly experimental to simply determine if the technique works. A cost study is planned for any follow-up phase. He agreed with F. Le Barzic that the pot system cannot replace dredging, noting the catches are very small and the product is valued differently (e.g., sold to restaurants). He explained the project was partially motivated by closures of certain zones to bottom trawling but noted that now some zones are also banning static gear such as pots, potentially reducing the long-term viability of the system.

The Chair suggested the idea of trawling slowly with lights to reduce impact.

Le Barzic reminds participants that FROM Nord had worked on similar lighting systems before ("Summerlux" for trawls).

A. Yon clarified that the new lights are different and noted that current regulations in Normandy forbid the use of any light in pot fishing, meaning that any widespread adoption would require a discussion at the national level.

3. **Discussion on the NWWAC Draft Advice on Seabass** – Chair

The Chair recapped that the FG Seabass met on 05 September and agreed to prepare advice on the management measures for seabass in the Northern Zone for 2026. The draft advice has been circulated to FG members as part of the first approval phase and is now under the WG3 procedure for the second phase, which closes on 15 October. The purpose of the meeting was

to discuss the draft advice within WG3, identify any points requiring further consideration, and agree on the final text to move forward.

Following this introduction, the Chair explained that the Ifremer study on the northern stock, which was expected to provide results and multi-year management proposals, has been delayed and will not be ready until the end of October. He added that French industry did receive a presentation on a similar study for the Bay of Biscay which showed very interesting results. This study, with only a few minor adjustments remaining especially on recruitment levels, will allow for the creation of interesting management proposals which aim for stability and a strategy to reach the FMSY without rushing.

The Chair proposed that as soon as the northern coast study results are received, Ifremer could be invited to a meeting of the FG Seabass to present their findings. This would be anticipated to take place in early or mid-November.

He then proceeded to review details of the draft advice on screen and opened the floor to members for discussion.

F. Le Barzic commented that it is hard to define the limitation for each metier as the Ifremer scenarios are not yet available. So, a first advice could be made without limitations. He wondered if the minority opinion paragraph was inserted in the correct place. He felt that both organisations agreed with the measures being proposed and asked for clarification.

The Secretariat clarified the Rules of Procedure in relation to the inclusion of a minority position in the text of NWWAC advice.

David Curtis stated that he was not clear on the purpose of the Ifremer paper as he had missed the previous FG meeting and asked for additional information. He stated that EAA and IFSUA do not agree with the majority opinion.

The Chair explained that the main question for the Ifremer study related to multi-annual management proposals.

D. Curtis commented that there are some problems with the MSY approach as there is no explicit biomass target. Also, no attention is paid to the time it would take the stock to reach the target biomass level which makes work difficult to fisheries managers as they do not know where the current biomass is relative to the target level that would actually deliver MSY. It could already be at the target or still have "some way to go." He felt that there is a biomass level associated with FMSY but Cefas has been reluctant to share that figure as there seems to be a lot of volatility associated with that number. He felt it would be helpful if ICES could share what the biomass level is. He welcomed Ifremer's modelling work and a potential move to multi-year modelling. He added that the UK's government position is that following the ICES advice is sustainable and is not interested in what the biomass target is and when it might be reached.

The Chair suggested to keep the idea of presenting the Ifremer at the beginning of November to the Focus Group. He added that as a result of this work the minority opinion might change.

D. Curtis commented that the UK government will not use the seabass allocation tool for determining fishing opportunities. He felt it was unlikely that the tool would be ready even for the setting of fishing opportunities next year. In his opinion the real question is why this tool cannot be delivered with proper process management and an estimated end date.

The Chair agreed that it was unclear what the process would lead to and what the outcome would be. He added that the French administration has informed the industry that the tool would be used. He agreed that it would need to be reviewed beforehand so that the CC could provide feedback.

F. Le Barzic agreed with previous speakers that the tool would not be available for use this year and that it would not be beneficial to us it if it is not working fully. He added that the Commission does want to go continue using it and this could lead to distortions during the negotiations as the available information between EU and UK would be different. He lamented the fact the there was no Commission representative available to join this meeting and provide their opinion on this.

Members agreed that the tool would need to be fully reviewed and updated before use.

Continuing with the review of the draft NWWAC advice on seabass the Chair mentioned the uncertainty around data related to recreational fishing.

D. Curtis requested clarification regarding claims that recreational fishing data is inaccurate or unreliable. He noted that a recent benchmark was carried out which updated the recreational data sources. He added that in the UK, Cefas advises that fishery managers should regard the recreational data as reliable. He referred to the CatchWise Survey which has demonstrated that data from the UK Sea Angling Diary is of good quality. He wondered what scientific evidence or studies underpin the comments that recreational data is incorrect.

The Chair confirmed that, at ICES level, recreational data is considered the most robust possible, but that ICES still acknowledge a large margin of uncertainty. He added that commercial fishing data is considered solid because it has a long history of mandatory declarations. Recreational data is currently based on surveys taken only in specific years. He argued that surveys from a few years cannot be equated with years of mandatory declaration data from the commercial sector but believes the data might become robust starting in January 2026 with the start of the new control regulation.

F. Le Barzic supported the Chairs statement explaining that in the latest ICES advice on seabass in the North Sea, a paragraph is included which says that the recreational fishing data are given with considerable uncertainty and that, indeed, in this sense, they necessarily need to be improved.

D. Curtis did not agree with the scepticism about surveys, stating that if the hope is that the upcoming EU control system will result in high-quality recreational data, they will likely have to wait several years to judge its success. He felt that well-conducted surveys are a good way of generating data and that they may have to agree to disagree if there is a strong belief that surveys are inherently incapable of providing good data. On a separate but related note, D.

Curtis highlighted a critical failure in the UK's collection of commercial data for the under-10 fishing fleet which is the main fleet for sea bass). The UK developed the Under 10 Catch App in response to infringement proceedings by the EU for failing to collect reliable data from this fleet. Despite the new app, the Marine Management Organisation is still not using the Catch App data for its reporting. Instead, it relies on the older, unreliable registered buyers and sellers data. Scientists previously estimated that the actual landings were likely three times higher than the data being recorded by the old system. He concluded the UK currently has very unreliable data from a key fishing fleet, and there seems to be a lack of urgency from the government to resolve the problem.

F. Le Barzic disagreed slightly with the idea that simple mandatory declaration (for recreational fishing starting in 2026) will necessarily provide much more robust data than current methods. He argued that the data will be interesting but must be cross-referenced with survey data because declaration data alone will likely be only partial in the first few years, even if mandatory. In addition, he pointed out that professional data is robust because it is already cross-referenced: declarations from fishermen are compared with declarations from sales notes.

The Chair proceeded to review the draft advice and a question arose in relation to the vessel numbers included in the minority position. It was agreed that this would be followed up by the Secretariat.

D. Curtis commented that at the start of 2025 a call for evidence was put to commercial shore-netter in Wales which may lead to a voluntary recording system instead of a compulsory system.

4. AOB

- Updates on the next step of the King Scallop Multi-Year Strategy (MYSt) Group – Chair

The Secretariat provided an update, reminding that the king scallop MYSt is a joint UK-EU approach being developed under the Specialised Committee on Fisheries (SCF), according to articles in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA). Both parties have committed to developing MYSts for the conservation and management of shared non-quota stocks (NQS) and agreed that the first MYSt should concentrate on king scallops. This work is being supported by joint scientific collaboration to inform the drafting of the MYSt and to ensure sustainable and evidence-based management of the stocks. This will involve scientists from UK and EU institutions (Cefas, Ifremer, Marine Institute) collaborating to produce a scientific report on the king scallop fisheries to inform the decisions made by UK and EU policy officials when drafting the MYSt.

TIMELINE

- September 2024: MYSt Workshop in Brussels
- March 2025: MYSt Technical Group Formed
- May 2025: MYSt Workshop Report Published
- May 2025: Terms of Reference Agreed for Scientific Expert Group
- June 2025: Scientific Expert Group Formed
- July 2025: MYSt Stakeholder Engagement Planning and Update
- September 2025: Technical Group to receive first part of Expert Report
- Late 2025: Technical Group to receive full Expert Report

The Commission informed the AC that, at the moment, there are no new developments to report regarding this dossier. The scientists from both sides are continuing their discussions, and we are currently awaiting the publication of the scientific report, which will form the basis for future exchanges with the UK.

Once the scientific report is available, the Commission plans to organise a meeting with stakeholders to gather input ahead of discussions with the UK and the drafting of the MYSt. The Commission will keep the AC informed as soon as there are concrete updates.

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

1	WG to follow up on topics of red mullet and lemon sole once more information is available from the NWW Member States Group
2	Secretariat to organise a FG Seabass meeting as soon as new information is available from Ifremer
3	WG to follow up of the Multi Year Strategy implementation on scallop
4	Secretariat to organise a meeting of the FG Scallop.

N.B. The ExCom members have agreed during the meeting held on 16 October to change the action point number 4 as such: "Secretariat to organise a Focus Group Scallop meeting to discuss progress and potential additional meetings in 2026."

Participants

NWWAC members	
Emiel Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
David Curtis	EAA
Gérald Hussenot Desenonges	Blue Fish
Franck Le Barzic	COBRENORD
Llibori Martinez	IFSUA
Geert Meun	VisNed
Corentine Piton	France Peche Durable et Responsable
Dominique Thomas	OPCMEMMN
Durk van Tuinen	Nederlandse Vissersbond
Arthur Yon	FROM Nord
NWWAC observers	
Alexandra Philippe	EBCD
NWWAC Secretariat	
Ilaria Bellomo	Fisheries Strategy & Administration Officer
Mo Mathies	Executive Secretary