

A UK Perspective

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NWWAC Skates and Rays Focus Group

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Issues

Commercial fishing and fisheries – news story Area VI and VII skates and rays fishery closed to some vessels

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From 12 October 2014 the skates and rays fishery in areas VI and VII (SRX/6' to all fishing vessels administered by the MMO.

- **Precautionary TAC**
 - Positive signs on several stocks and others are prohibited.
 - Stability for industry and need for data collection.
- **Prohibited species – due process and consultation.**
- **Regional management for some stocks.**
- **Landing obligation and chokes potential.**

Western Morning News @WMNNews · Jan 29
You've let us down, angry fishermen tell Cornish MP George Eustice over new catch rules [ow.ly/XFQZn](https://www.wmn.co.uk/news/local-news/youve-let-us-down-angry-fishermen-tell-cornish-mp-george-eustice-over-new-catch-rules)



CFPO @Cornishpo · 11h
Bass, spurdog, small eyed ray, common skate, porbeagle all caught in mixed fisheries in SW. All discarded because of @DefraGovUK @EU_MARE

CFPO @Cornishpo · 11h
George Eustice @DefraGovUK @The_MMO now telling UK fishermen to increase discards. Bass and small eyes Ray from tomorrow. Good deal George??

Aligning Spurdog Management with the Landing Obligation

Problem: Where a certain level of by-catch is inevitable, or completely unpredictable, a zero TAC/ prohibition can only mean discards.



Background - The current level of dead discards of spurdog (*Squalus acanthias*), a zero Total Allowable Catch (TAC) species, reported by the fishing industry is neither in-line with the principles of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy or Defra's broader objectives for the marine environment.



Aim - The aim of this project is to engage a wide range of stakeholders (scientists, fishermen, government policy makers and NGOs) at a regional, national and European level to develop an innovative pilot project intended to reduce discards of dead spurdog, whilst meeting the requirements of the reformed CFP.



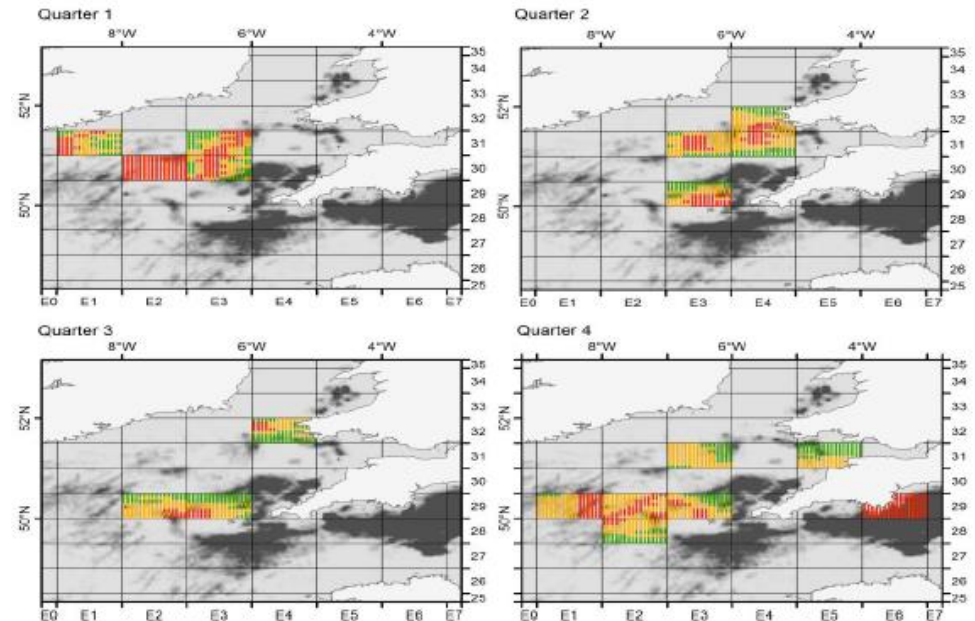
Outline approach – The project will explore bespoke fishery specific management measures together with a bycatch allowance for dead spurdog bycatch, that does not incentivise targeting of the stock. This will be underpinned by biological research, fishermen's knowledge and the analysis of existing and new commercial bycatch and discard data.

Options for spatial and temporal avoidance measures, (e.g. using electronic tag data, and bycatch mitigation), will also be considered. The proposal will take into account: i) current ICES advice; ii) the conservation status of spurdog; iii) Defra policy of opposing wasteful discards; iv) zero-TAC resulting in high levels of discards; and v) dead discarding not being in line with the CFP.



Finding a Viable Alternative

- **Proposal:**
 - Report any spurdog catches within pre-defined reporting grids.
 - Generate up-to-date information on spurdog movements and allow skippers to make informed decisions about potential interactions.
 - In exchange define a viable by-catch quota consistent with stock recovery.
- Currently being implemented (2016) following agreement at Council. CFPO, 6 vessels.
- A workable catch allowance would be consistent with stock recovery.



National Evaluation of Populations of Threatened and Uncertain Elasmobranchs (Neptune)

- Update the inventory of the elasmobranchs and holocephalans (chimaeras or rabbitfish) fishes occurring around the British Isles, prioritising species of interest and identifying data gaps.
- Studies on the elasmobranch bycatch taken by gillnetters. Data on the seasonal bycatch of spurdog, porbeagle and common skate complex. 'Code of conduct' to promote the safe and effective release of live fish.
- Updated biological data were collected for various elasmobranch species.

Shark By-watch 2

- Aim: Improve knowledge of shark, skate and ray by-catch and dead-discarding
- Understanding discard survival of commercially important elasmobranchs of conservation interest for input into Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) reform.
- The use of innovative solutions for reducing by-catch and dead discards of threatened sharks, skates and rays.
- Evaluate fisheries management strategies to achieve a sustainable thornback ray fishery in the Thames Estuary, free of regulatory discards, in line with the aims of CFP reform.

Shark By-Watch UK 2

Research priorities: innovative solutions for reducing by-catch and dead-discards of threatened* sharks, skates & rays



Electra (2015-2018)

- **Assessing fishing pressure on elasmobranch stocks:** Data collation, industry collaboration, targeted observer and ongoing by-catch monitoring, spatial and temporal analysis to delineate stock units, fishery dependent surveys.
- **Assessing sustainability of elasmobranch fisheries:** improvement of assessments and testing of data poor assessments, develop a quantitative assessment for starry smooth-hound.
- **Improving management of elasmobranchs in mixed fisheries under the reformed CFP:** Evaluation of discard plans and potential derogations, evidence to underpin the development for regional management and management strategy evaluation and work underpinning targets and indicator development associated with MSFD.

Other Work

- Scientific trawl surveys around British Isles, with biological data collection and ad hoc tag and release.
- ASSIST project is examining discard survival of various species, and have some data for skates/rays..
- CEFAS completed a review of 'discard survival studies' on elasmobranchs.
- CEFAS working with colleagues on mapping distribution of nursery grounds etc.
- Applied funds for further work on starry smooth-hound (electronic tagging etc.)
- UK scientists prominent in WGEF, contributed to WKSHARK2, will contribute to WKSHARK3, have successfully arranged for a dedicated WKLIFE meeting for elasmobranchs
- CEFAS one of the leading fisheries labs in terms of published outputs on elasmobranchs