

Minutes

NWWAC FOCUS GROUP SCALLOP

Virtual meeting via Zoom
04 December 2025

1. Welcome and introduction by the Chair

The Focus Group Chair welcomed participants to the meeting. Apologies have been received by Dominique Thomas, Aodh O'Donnell, Laura Peschard and Arthur Yon. The agenda has been adopted.

Action points from the last meeting (FG meeting on 12 May 2025 and WG3/ExCom meeting on 14/16 October 2025)

FG Scallop meeting – 12 May 2025:

- FG members agreed that a follow-up meeting between Irish and French fishermen and their representatives would discuss the most effective way to determine a path forward and work towards a common position.

NWWAC October meetings:

- In light of the new developments discussed during the NWWAC October meetings, the action points regarding organisation of a meeting for fishermen has changed.
- Secretariat to organise a Focus Group Scallop meeting to discuss progress and potential additional meetings in 2026

2. Discussion on the need to update the Focus Group Terms of Reference and appointment of the Focus Group Vice Chair

The Chair introduced the next agenda item, noting that the Focus Group Terms of Reference (ToR) required updating, as they dated back to 2023. The Secretariat had already circulated to members, days before the meeting, the draft of the new ToR. During the meeting, several members suggested extending the scope of the Focus Group to cover the entire Channel, rather than just the Eastern Channel. Accordingly, the Terms of Reference were reviewed and updated.

A discussion was held regarding the participation of UK observers in the meetings. It was agreed that UK observers may be invited to participate on a case-by-case basis, with the agreement of all members. At the same time, the Secretariat will wait for further communication and updates from the Commission on the involvement of UK observers in AC meetings.

Regarding the number of members in the Focus Group, the Secretariat reminded participants that, according to the NWWAC's Rules of Procedure, a Focus Group must have a minimum of five and a maximum of twelve members (RoP #67). Currently, this Focus Group exceeds the maximum number by seven members, as several organisations have multiple representatives attending meetings. The Secretariat proposed adjusting the number of representatives to comply

with the Rules of Procedure.

It was suggested that each member organisation nominate the main representative for the Focus Group, who would report back to their organisation. Each representative should also appoint a substitute to attend meetings on their behalf when they are unable to participate. After discussion, the Focus Group members present agreed to this proposal but emphasised the importance of also involving representatives from the sector and fishing operators in relevant discussions. It was agreed that the appropriate forum for engaging these stakeholders is the workshop.

Finally, members discussed the appointment of a Vice Chair, as the Focus Group currently had none. John Lynch was proposed and then appointed as Vice Chair, and his appointment was approved by consensus of all members present at the meeting.

3. Updates on the next step of the EU-UK Multi-Year Strategy Group for King Scallop – Secretariat

Ilaria Bellomo reported that there are currently new developments on this dossier in respect to what was presented during the WG3 Meeting in October. Scientists from both sides continue their discussions, and the publication of the scientific report, which will guide future exchanges with the UK, is now expected at the beginning of 2026. Once the report becomes available, a stakeholder meeting will be organised to gather input. Importantly, the Secretariat has offered the Commission its support in organising the meeting to help ensure strong participation from members. Updates will be provided by the Commission as soon as concrete information is available.

Manu Kelberine highlighted the importance of being involved in the future stakeholder meeting and to arrive there with a common position

Xavier Tétard highlighted that previous debates had taken place, notably during a workshop held in Brussels in September, where an analysis of management measures and stock status across different units had been presented. He expressed the view that, from the perspective of British scientists, the situation appeared somewhat different, and he hoped that the forthcoming document would provide clarity once and for all. X. Tétard emphasised that such a report could help avoid recurring debates about what had been done on the French and British sides and allow the group to move forward. He noted that the next steps would involve working on selectivity measures, but that this should not prevent the Focus Group from reflecting and reaching agreement on its positions. He also mentioned that the British side might raise discussions regarding the timing and necessity of certain fishing activities.

The Chair contributed by stressing the importance of establishing clear objectives and positions for the stakeholder workshop. He explained that, during consultations, there had been some resistance from both fishers and processors regarding proposed closures, and the extension of consultations had been necessary to review available scientific evidence and management measures. The aim was to ensure that positions were informed and justified.

X. Tétard then reiterated that the Focus Group needed to define its positions clearly and suggested that even if a formal recommendation was not possible at this stage, the group could at least present a coordinated stance during the workshop. The Chair supported this approach. He proposed that discussions be structured to allow the Focus Group's positions to be

communicated effectively, for example, by identifying key timings and outcomes in advance.

The discussion concluded with an agreement on the need for clarity and coordination within the Focus Group, while recognising that further scientific input and stakeholder consultation would guide future decisions and actions.

As a way forward, Mo Mathies suggested that the Secretariat contact the European Commission to request a timeline, and also reach out to Juliette Hatchman to obtain further clarification on developments on the UK side. Based on the feedback received from these two sources, she indicated that it might be possible to organise a joint workshop with the UK, ideally in March.

She added that, if necessary, an additional Focus Group meeting could be held online in advance of the workshop. Given that the proposed workshop would take place in person, she underlined the need for sufficient lead time to ensure proper organisation.

This proposed timeline would allow the Focus Group to better assess how the workshop should be structured, which topics should be addressed, who should be invited, and what presentations would be needed. By March the Commission MYS's report could also be available, including information from UK scientists, placing the group in a stronger position to move forward.

4. French-Irish Bilateral: exchanges between French and Irish members on management of scallop and on recent developments

Presentation of recent developments from the Irish side – John Lynch, ISEFPO & Daragh Browne, BIM

Daragh Browne from BIM introduced a trial carried out in collaboration with John Lynch, the Irish South and East Fishermen's Producer Organisation and the scallop fishing industry. The work built on previous BIM trials (2023–2024) examining different ring sizes in the Western and Eastern Channel. Industry feedback highlighted that ring diameter increases over time due to seabed contact, affecting selectivity. To address this, the trial tested the Low Impact Scallop Innovation Gear (also referred to as "skids"), originally developed by Heriot-Watt University and partners, which lifts the dredge belly off the seabed and reduces ring wear but may affect ring size selectivity.

The trial aimed to assess the cost, practicality and effect on selectivity of fitting Irish scallop dredges with skid gear, using three ring sizes: 75 mm, 85 mm and 92 mm (with 75 mm and 85 mm being standard in the Irish fleet). The trial was conducted in September 2025 in ICES Divisions 7A (Irish Sea, south of 52°30') and 7G (Celtic Sea), where the minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) is 100 mm. Sixteen hauls were completed, each lasting 1.5–2 hours at depths of 70–90 metres, using 12 dredges mounted per side of the vessel.

The custom-made skid gear cost approximately €400 per dredge. While the main frame is expected to be long-lasting, the skids themselves would likely need regular replacement. Over the short trial period, little wear was observed. Dredge bellies cost between approximately €492 (92 mm) and €640 (75 mm), with replacement typically occurring after around six months, depending on ground hardness.

In terms of practicality, the skipper noted that the skids raised the dredge too high (about 130 mm) and could be lowered, repositioned further back and made lighter. Longer-term testing would be required to evaluate durability and ring wear.

With regard to selectivity, there was little difference in catches of scallops above the MCRS between the 75 mm and 85 mm ring sizes, with or without skids. However, the 92 mm rings with and without skids showed large losses of legal-sized scallops. This differs with previous findings, but bulk catches were much lower during this trial which may have influenced scallop selectivity.

In conclusion, industry feedback suggests that further refinement of the skid design is needed. The findings indicate no negative impact of the skids on selectivity and confirm that the 85 mm ring size performed well. BIM plans to conduct further work in the Irish scallop fishery in 2026, subject to industry engagement.

Following the presentation, the Chair asked whether other gear types intended to reduce seabed impact had also been assessed, specifically referring to the N-viro dredge, which is designed to limit bottom contact. D. Browne confirmed that this gear had been tested in Ireland and that, while it does reduce bottom impact, it also allows vessels to access fishing grounds that would not normally be reachable with standard tooth dredges. However, it was found to be more suitable for smaller vessels. On larger vessels carrying a greater number of dredges, the spring tyne mechanism that replaces the teeth was reported to wear too quickly, increasing maintenance requirements. Although the manufacturer has since indicated that the metallurgy and tempering of the spring have been improved, this updated version has not yet been tested. D. Browne explained that the current work is focused primarily on addressing a key issue for the Irish scallop industry, namely ring wear and the associated impact on selectivity and operating costs. Reducing the need for frequent replacement of dredge bellies was identified as a potential economic benefit. While future work has not yet been formally defined, D. Browne expressed an intention to consult with the industry and incorporate its recommendations into any further gear modifications, emphasising the importance of stakeholder involvement in subsequent trials.

John Lynch welcomed the work and highlighted its potential dual benefit in reducing costs while maintaining optimal selectivity and lowering seabed impact. He confirmed its willingness to collaborate on a more advanced project in 2026, preceded by preparatory meetings and potential refinements to the gear before further trials take place. D. Browne also noted the existence of a UK report reviewing alternative measures to minimise unwanted catches and habitat impact in king scallop fisheries, in which both the N-viro dredge and skid technologies are highlighted. He added that researchers at Heriot-Watt University have tested skids in combination with the N-viro dredge, although such combined testing has not yet been undertaken within the Irish trials.

Paper suggested by D. Browne: [Review of Alt measures scallops clean 0.pdf](#)

Further discussion from the Chair reflected on earlier experiments with similar systems, which had encountered issues with rapid gear and structural failure. These past experiences reinforced the need to focus first on improving the resilience and effectiveness of the skids before exploring broader adoption.

Manu Kelberine referred to his own experience with beam dredges, where they had tested bags with larger mesh sizes, and with differing spacing of skids welded directly onto the dredge frame rather than as an autonomous structure. He explained that they had also installed brooms or guides on the bags to create space for stones to pass underneath and avoid damage. His main question concerned the type of seabed on which the trials had been carried out, whether they were conducted on homogeneous grounds, and how vessel power had influenced the results, pointing out that behaviour of the dredge can differ significantly between sandy, muddy or more uneven substrates.

Daragh Browne clarified that the team had used a similar experimental design to previous trials. On

the port side of the vessel, they deployed twelve dredges with different ring sizes, namely 75, 85 and 92 millimetres, in four repeated sets without skids. On the starboard side, the same configuration was used but with all dredges fitted with skids. A randomisation process was applied for each tow in order to account for any positional bias along the beam. He emphasised that both sides were deployed simultaneously on the same ground to ensure that seabed type and conditions were identical, precisely for the reasons raised in the question, again apologising for having omitted this clarification earlier.

Presentation of recent developments from the French side – The Chair

The Chair opened the discussion and mentioned the need to amend the delegated regulation on the box, from “October 15” to open the area on “the first Monday after October 15”. From the Irish perspective, J. Lynch expressed readiness to amend the text as suggested and indicated that the Irish fleet would observe the new rule regardless of formal agreement, so immediate implementation would not pose compliance issues.

The Chair then shifted the discussion to the ring size. He noted that the French national committee had experimented with a 92-millimetre, and proposed this threshold to the Irish counterpart.

J. Lynch responded by explaining their position. While personally willing to support a move to a 92mm ring size, he emphasised that agreement from fishermen was essential, as they preferred a common ring size across jurisdictions. He highlighted practical concerns from trials, noting that different dredge sizes had varying impacts depending on area, particularly where the minimum conservation reference size for scallops was 100mm. Fishermen were concerned that when the rings get worn, larger scallops could be released unintentionally. Additionally, they wanted a level playing field when fishing across UK, Irish, and French waters, avoiding the need to adjust gear between territories.

The Chair stressed the importance of stock evolution and the need to harmonise measures while recognising differences in fishing zones and practices. He underlined that the objective was uniformity with other jurisdictions despite these differences. M. Kelberine emphasised the need for a shared European approach and a clear declaration of intent, arguing that progress could only be achieved if all parties were convinced and moving in the same direction. X. Tétard added that any change to the reference size must first be agreed internally within the French group to provide a solid basis for negotiations with the UK, noting that differences in current practices already existed among countries.

John Lynch reiterated that agreement on 92mm rings could not yet be reached without consulting the Irish fishermen. However, he confirmed that Irish fishermen were willing to participate in workshops or meetings, either trilaterally with the UK or initially between Ireland and France, as proposed by Mo Mathies. M. Mathies outlined a tentative timeline for moving forward, suggesting contacting UK counterparts and the European Commission, identifying participants, and scheduling a workshop, possibly in March, though early February could be feasible if all logistical challenges were addressed. She highlighted the complexity of coordinating schedules, room availability, and ensuring the right participants, including scientists, were present. She stressed the need for sufficient lead-in time to organise such an event effectively.

The Chair highlighted the administrative processes and the importance of clear objectives, follow-up actions, and internal consensus to avoid delays. M. Kelberine clarified that recent trials were empirical rather than formal scientific studies, though they provided valuable practical insights. Alannah Gourlaouen highlighted the need for presentations that were clear, tangible, and meaningful for fishermen, ensuring that professionals could relate to them and understand the

implications of potential changes. She also emphasised that management measures should be common across jurisdictions to ensure fairness and consistency. Finally, Falke De Sager explained that the Belgium position is to follow an approach which would ensure a common measure for each fleet.

5. Discussion on the upcoming Trilateral meeting FR-IE-UK

This was addressed in other points of the agenda.

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

No AOB.

Action points:

1	Amend the new draft Terms of Reference to extend the Focus Group's area of work to the entire Channel.
2	Members are to appoint one representative per organisation to attend the meetings, in order to comply with the maximum number of participants permitted for a Focus Group under the NWWAC Rules of Procedure. Each representative may also nominate a substitute to attend if they are unable to participate.
3	The Secretariat will contact Anabel Andujar Vazquez to request an update on the timeline for the Multi-Year Strategy Group on King Scallop.
4.	The Secretariat will contact Juliette Hatchman to ask her what is going on in the Scallop Working Group, and then if they would be interested in participating in the trilateral workshop and ask her suggestions for other experts.
5.	The Secretariat will organise, in the first half of 2026, a workshop dedicated to discussions on management measures for scallop. Draft Terms of Reference will be prepared for a workshop comprising a morning session for French and Irish fishers and an afternoon trilateral session including the UK.
6.	Secretariat and FG Members to draft a letter to Member State Group to amend the delegated regulation on the opening of the box on the first Monday following the 15 of October.

The Chair concluded the session by thanking all participants and interpreters, and noting that follow-up actions would proceed according to the agreed plan, including administrative approvals and coordination with relevant parties. The meeting closed with a general sense of agreement on the proposed process, though recognising that progress would depend on achieving internal consensus within each organisation and then among members before trilateral discussions with the UK could take place.



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