

MINUTES

NWWAC Focus Group Whelk

Virtual meeting via Zoom

23 June 2021

14:30 – 16:00 CET

1. Welcome and introductions

The vice-Chair (Dimitri Rogoff) welcomed all the participants to the meeting. The agenda was adopted as drafted. Apologies were received from Pascal Coquet and Lucile Aumont in advance of the meeting.

Action points of the last meeting (14 April 2021) include:

1. Secretariat to update draft ToR and circulate amongst members. Any comments and suggestions from members should be sent in for consideration prior to the ToR being submitted to ExCom for approval.

Terms of reference approved via electronic procedure by the ExCom on 13/05

2. Secretariat to prepare template for data collection to be agreed by members of the FG.

Final version template sent to members of the group on 24 May.

3. Secretariat to organize a presentation on the MSC certified whelk fishery in France for the next meeting (ask Normandie Fraicheur Mer to present).

Normandie Fraicheur Mer was not available for this meeting, their presentation will be organised for the next meeting.

4. Secretariat to organize a presentation on the research project by the Fishery Committee of the Hauts de France for the next meeting (ask SMEL to present).

Done – see paragraph 2

5. Secretariat to launch a doodle to establish the next meeting date.

Done

2. Presentation by Laurence Hegron on closed and ongoing projects on whelk in the Channel (SMEL)

Laurence Hegron: I am very happy to be presenting a synthesis of the work that SMEL has done on whelk so far, which has been going on since 2000 and always in great collaboration with organisations such as the CRPMEM Normandie and Normandie Fraicheur Mer.

The SMEL is a research and development organisation based in Normandy, aiming at promoting economic activities on living marine resources, in particular fisheries and mariculture.

SMEL has been monitoring the whelk resource since 2002. The context of this research is characterised by some issues:

- A large quantity of whelks under the regulatory size available on the market
- Climate change impacts on this cold water species
- An important economic activity but a stock with limited data

The investigations followed several directions: the problem of sorting on board, acquiring knowledge about the species (growth, reproduction) and the impact of climate change on egg laying, acquiring data on catches (on-board observations and fishing activities) in Normandy. This work also contributed to the awarding of the MSC Ecolabel to the whelk in Granville Bay in 2017.

For what concerns the sorting of whelk, in 2002, 2006 and 2009 we looked at the equipment on board: in 2002, the main equipment used was the manual sieve, but this was then replaced by a rotating cylinder allowing for a mechanic sorting of whelk. Similarly, we saw a progression also on grid spacing, starting with a majority of 19mm in 2002 to 90% of 21mm in 2009, which also reflects current situation.

In 2002/2003, between 5 and 35% by weight of the catch landed was under the regulatory size. We thus examined the situation and found out that while the regulatory size of whelk refers to the height of the animal, the sorting was based on the length. We made many measurements to try and understand the proportion between length and height and determined that a whelk of regulatory size was 45mm high and 20.3mm long. To ensure compliance with the regulatory size, a 22 mm grid was applied to all vessels in 2009.

The programmes BULOCLIM and BESTCLIM (2013-2015) focused on the biology of the species, also in the context of climate change. Whelk is a widespread species in the temperate and cold waters of the northern seas. The Breton Normand Gulf constitutes the southern limit of its geographical distribution for an economic activity. These elements make whelk a vulnerable species in the face of climate change. reproduction, spawning and recruitment.

We first focused on growth and examined the aging of whelk especially through the statoliths. The results of this research indicated that a 45mm whelk is approximately 2 years old. We then worked on reproduction and sexual maturity. In this context, we took the opportunity to compare whelk from the Contentin peninsula to whelks from different geographical areas (Shetlands, Ireland and Oléron, a more southern area in France). Results showed that in colder waters size at sexual maturity was bigger than in warmer waters. In Normandy (Contentin) almost 20% of the whelk examined had a sexual maturity size between 45mm and 48mm.

We also looked at populations structures in the four different areas. It is clear that Shetlands' whelks are way bigger (90mm) than those from Oléron (50mm).

We then studied the impact of climate on reproduction sites for males, looking at different scenarios (temperature as in Contentin, 3 degrees higher and 3 degrees lower). Results showed perturbed sperm production cycles in the warmer scenario. We also examined the effect of climate on eggs laying and we found that there are more than 3 times more laying with a cold vs hot climate. It is also important to consider that the bigger the female is big, the bigger the laying, the thicker the

capsule with the egg. At the same time, embryo development was more difficult with warmer temperatures.

Through the projects ESHANO, MECANOR and COGECO we monitored the stock and the fishing activity.

Normandy is the leading whelk production region in France and Europe with more than 10,000 tonnes/year and a turnover of over 20 million euros. However, the data on the whelk stock are too limited to enable a scientific assessment, which would be necessary to provide management advice to achieve sustainable catch rates.

ESHANO:

- More than 50 campaigns over 7 years of monitoring including 12 on the ESHANO project
- Looked at catch per unit of effort. More data for the Western Channel than the Eastern Channel: in both cases, higher CPUE for whelks larger than 45mm
- Looked at size frequency and structure, which are very much differing between Western and Eastern Channel. The latter is a more recent fishery, where we found a significant amount of young size class, while in the former we have larger whelks even if in small numbers.
- Monitoring of fishing effort by self-sampling at sea from volunteer fishermen. Results show a break in the fishery performance that always happens in the summer, when the water gets warmer.
- From the large amount of data collected we identified a series of warning and danger reference points in relation to the CPUE

Méthode	Niveau des seuils	En kg pour 100 casiers	
Normandie	Equivalent RMD	160	2*DPUE <u>lim</u>
	Seuil Alerte ou DPUE trigger	108	1.35* DPUE <u>lim</u>
	Seuil danger ou DPUE Lim	80	= DPUE <u>lim</u>

MECANOR (2020-2023):

- Aim: improving the management the pots and traps metiers in Normandy and in the North of France
- Project led by the Hauts de France Regional Fisheries Committee. Partners: CRPM Normandie, Ifremer, SMEL and University of Caen
- Problem: the drop in sole yields has led some Hauts de France gillnetters to turn to the pots and traps metiers
- In the absence of an assessment of stocks of whelk and large crustaceans, the project aims to carry out a diagnosis of the Channel East and North Sea pots and traps fisheries (Whelk and large shellfish)
- Financed by the EMFF
- Method:
 - o Bibliography and description of the fishery to define data acquisition strategy

- Carrying out observation campaigns at sea to collect indicators catches per unit of effort, size profile, maturity
- Development of Pêchéo, an online tool for fisheries reporting and analysis
- Assessment of whelk stocks using models adapted to specificities of the traps and pots metiers and limited data stocks

COGECO (2021 2022)

- Aim: to implement effective and concerted management of two species of the Bay of Granville (whelk and scallop)
- Project led by the SMEL. Partner: CRPMEM Normandy
- Provide common indicators of the state of whelk and scallop stocks in the Normand Breton Gulf
- Monitor fleets and fishing activity
- Better support professionals in the sustainable management of fisheries and adapt the fishing effort to the state of resources
- Financed by the FEAMP
- Method:
 - Launch of an annual survey with vessels specifically chartered
 - Referenced and perennial stations (Carteret, Granville, Pirou)
 - Identical period each year (March / April)
 - 4 days of fishing and 5 lines of 8 traps per site
 - Harmonization with the prospecting carried out by Jersey in March

In 2017, the Marine Stewardship Council awarded the whelk fishery of Granville Bay with its ecolabel, which guarantees that fishing is sustainable if it meets 3 main principles:

- Principle 1: The sustainability of the resource and fishing activity
- Principle 2: Preservation of the marine environment
- Principle 3: Effective management of the fishery

It also promotes the fishing practices and the profession to the general public.

Under this ecolabel, the fishery is audited every year and reassessed every 5 years. The SMEL provides the CRPMEM Normandie with scientific and technical data objectives on fishery monitoring.

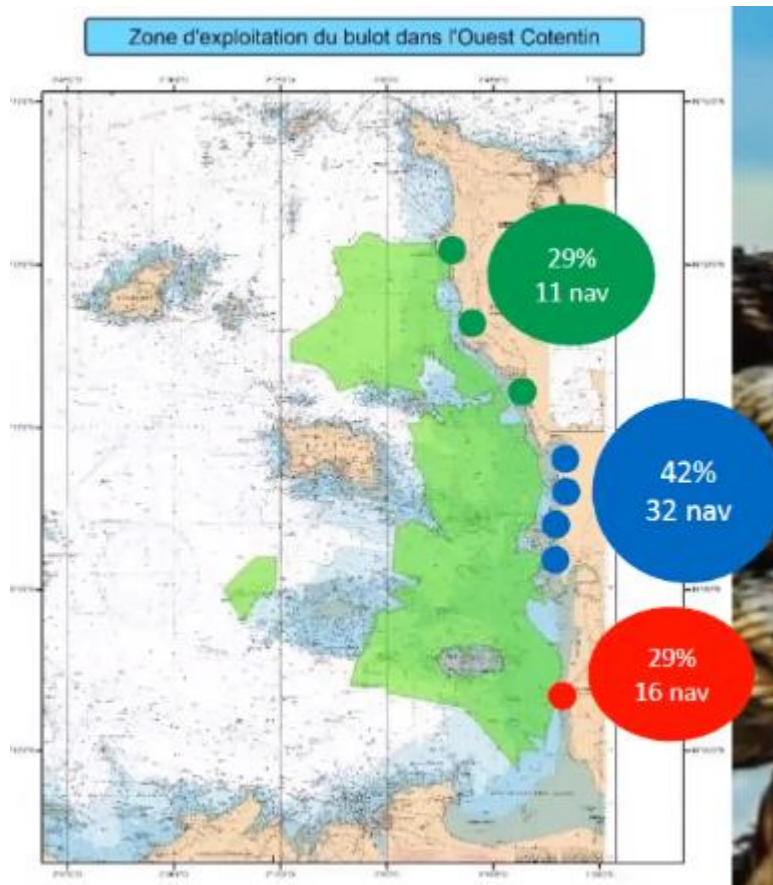
The management framework for the whelk fishery is composed as follows: the Whelk Committee inside the CRPMEM Normandie proposes measures to the Council of CRPMEM Normandie, which deliberates and decides on these measures. The measures are then presented to the National Authority (DIRM) which can in turn decide to make them compulsory. One of the latest whelk measures introduced thanks to the proposal of the Whelk Committee is a 10% reduction of the daily quota.

- **Questions and answers**

Manu Kelberine: Would it be possible to show on screen the area that we refer to when we speak of whelk stock in the Western Channel?



Laurence: The green area is the whelk harvesting area. The habitat area, which is not shown in the map below, is way larger than the harvesting area.



Manu: Do I understand correctly that the colder the water, the better the egg laying, but at the same time the recruitment has a precise temperature range?

Laurence: Yes, this is what we found out through research on technical platforms, but it can be complicated to reproduce a natural environment in an exact way. However, we also considered a similar study in the UK which had very comparable results.

Anais Mourtada: My question concerns the alert and danger reference points. Are these thresholds specific to the study that has been done?

Laurence: In the framework of the project BESTCLIM, which was looking at the biology of whelk in relation to climate, we also monitored the fishing activity and collected socio-economic data, to understand the sustainability of the activity in warmer waters scenarios. For the thresholds, we worked with Ifremer, which started studying some models to adapt them to the whelk fishery. We tested our data with one of these models to obtain the annual landings profile. There was a confidence interval to calculate. We had a maximum and a minimum around the year with the lowest landings, which was 2019, and this is how we got our thresholds. We also discussed these results with the fishers in the Whelk Committee. These are of course trends that need to be consolidated and we hope that the MECANOR project will refine all this work.

Vice-Chair: Thank you very much Laurence for this presentation covering all the challenges that we will be facing. First of all, whelk is going to be one of the first species impacted by climate change.

We are also experiencing many fishers reorienting their activity on this fishery, not just in the Hauts de France but in Normandy as well, which is an issue we should also consider. Laurence then mentioned selectivity, which in practice is very complicated to implement successfully and on which more work needs to be done. The valorisation of the whelk resource is also very important, and in this regard I think we should try to organise again a presentation from Normandie Fraicheur Mer on the ecolabel. We could also consider the IGP certification, which could be an important tool to valorise both our fishing activity and the product. Finally, an issue that hasn't been discussed today and that concerns the whelk resource, is cohabitation, as fisheries operators need to share the fishing areas. I think this is more complicated in the Eastern Channel, as there are multiple fleets, with vessels from different countries and of various dimensions, targeting multiple fisheries.

3. Updates on the questionnaire

Anais Mourtada is collecting all the information from the different regions in France.

ACTION: Anais will send the questionnaire to the Secretariat once the data is complete.

4. AOB

Vice-Chair: For what concerns the other MS that might be involved, we are now sharing the fishery in the Eastern Channel with the UK. It is also true that Belgian and Dutch fleets might become interested in the whelk resource in the future. Therefore we need a framework in place. For what concerns cohabitation, we had the Central Channel meetings in the past, which reunited all the interested fishers to tackle the issue, especially focusing on the Western Channel. However, it had also been mentioned that the Eastern Channel should have been included in the discussions as well, especially concerning whelk. Unfortunately, we could not have this meeting because of covid and Brexit. It would be good to resume this meeting to discuss about cohabitation, which I think is an issue for both EU and UK fishers.

Mathieu Vimard: Indeed, we had agreed to discuss cohabitation issues in the Eastern Channel in the Central Channel meeting last year already, but covid slowed down the process a bit.

Secretariat: Do you think the NWWAC should have a role in this? If so, which role?

Mathieu: I think cohabitation is more an issue for the fishers. This Group should focus more on technical measures as we had mentioned already, for example proposing a licenses quota for the Eastern Channel or a maximum vessels size, which will be better discussed once we know the information resulting from the questionnaire.

Manu: Historically, the Central Channel meeting was created to address cohabitation issues between trawlers and caseyeurs, which is not necessarily an issue for the AC. I think that the measures that Mathieu mentioned are specific to the Eastern Channel. I think that for the Western Channel, we are more in a perspective of measures in a gentlemen agreement style than a licenses quota.

Vice-Chair: Indeed Manu, we have to keep the two zones separated as they have very specific issues. I think that the NWWAC could attend the Central Channel meetings as observer, but these are just agreements between professionals.

Secretariat: Maybe it could be useful to ask our UK colleagues to present about their fishery at the next Focus Group meeting?

Mathieu: I also wanted to raise another issue with Bill which is related to offshore wind farms. There is only one functioning wind farm in the Channel, south of Brighton. We see the Brighton fleet working a lot in the middle of the Channel, close to the border with the EU, and I am wondering if the implementation of this windfarm has moved these coastal vessels further offshore?

Bill Brock: There has indeed been an effect following the implementation of the wind farm. The area is now a no take zone, as there is the risk of snagging the gears on the seabed after the installation of the wind park. Like you see the UK fleet close to the median line, we too see the EU vessels within our 12 to 6 miles lines, where they used to fish historically, and they are also affected by the wind farm. Thus, the wind farm has caused a large problem and we found it very difficult alongside with the developers. I hope you will have a different situation in France. On the request to provide information on our fishery, I will report back to the Whelk Working Group and let you know.

ACTION: The Secretariat will share the questionnaire template with the UK observers to allow for data collection on the UK context as well.

ACTION: Secretariat to contact the UK observers to organise a presentation to learn more about the whelk fishery in the UK (measures in place, market aspects, etc).

Mathieu: Are fishers experiencing reductions in the fisheries resources availability in the area around the wind parks? Or are the impacts limited in the farm area?

Bill: Yes they have, because the wind farm create an electromagnetic effect around the cables, but also the noise and vibrations certainly affect the fish. The wind farm is also blocking the migratory pathway for some species. We certainly noted a shift change since the wind farm has been established.

5. Next steps & planning

Members agreed that the next meeting will be organised in September, as the next months will be very busy for everyone. Moreover, this will provide for more time for collecting the relevant information for the questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire should possibly be presented at this meeting in September.

ACTION: Secretariat to organise a presentation from Normandie Fraicheur Mer on the MSC ecolabel for the next meeting of the Focus Group.

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

1	Anais will send the questionnaire to the Secretariat once the data is complete.
2	The Secretariat will share the questionnaire template with the UK observers to allow for data collection on the UK context as well.
3	Secretariat to organise a presentation from Normandie Fraicheur Mer on the MSC ecolabel for the next meeting of the Focus Group.



4	Secretariat to contact the UK observers to organise a presentation to learn more about the whelk fishery in the UK (measures in place, market aspects, etc).
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Participants

Anais Roussel	CRPMEM Hauts-de-France
Delphine Roncin	From Nord
Anais Mourtada	CNPMEM
Manu Kelberine	Pecheurs de Bretagne
Mathieu Vimard	Organisation des pêcheurs Normands
Dominique Thomas	OPCMEMMN
Dimitri Rogoff (vice-Chair)	CRPMEM de Normandie
Cécile Beaudéan	CRPMEM de Normandie
Bill Brock (observer)	Leach Fishing Enterprises
Julien Dubreuil (observer)	CRPMEM de Bretagne
Lionel Bottin (observer)	CDPMEM 14