

Crab Management Update

Officers' Recommendation

That Members note the contents of this update and the potential future workstreams for inclusion in the Annual Plan 2023/2024.

Background

D&S IFCA Officers presented a paper to the B&PSC on 20th October 2022 relating to the pressures and risks to the static gear fisheries in D&S IFCA's District. A summary paper was then taken to the Full Authority on 15th December 2022 and noted by Members. Officers were asked to keep Members updated on any information relating to the issue raised by the fishing industry.

This paper provides up to date information on the discussions currently taking place on possible future crab management both regionally and nationally. It also provides an insight into the work Officers are proposing to undertake next year to gain further knowledge of the issue that are facing D&S IFCA's static gear fishers in particular relating to crustacean fisheries and planned research for 2023/2024.

National Fisheries Management Plans

D&S IFCA sits on national groups that have fed into the development of the Tranche 1 Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs), to meet the legal requirement as set out in the Fisheries Act 2022 and Joint Fisheries Statement published in November 2022. The draft Crab and Lobster FMP together with its Evidence and Research Plan and Stakeholder Engagement Report have been presented to Defra who are currently reviewing and quality assuring these documents through the Gateway review process. In addition, an Impact Assessment is currently being developed to accompany the FMP. The draft versions are not available for public review but Defra is planning to launch a public consultation on the Crab and Lobster FMP (as well as the Whelk FMP) on 10th May 2023, which will last for 12 weeks.

Four early management intervention have been highlighted in the draft FMP, and these will be consulted on separately to the FMP itself. The proposed implementation of the FMP, in particular in relation to delivery of tasks and objectives, will be through an Annual Work Plan and production of an Annual Report. Management measures will be discussed through the national groups based on engagement and science and developed to meet the objectives of the Crab and Lobster FMP. It is important that D&S IFCA maintain its position on the Management and Research Groups for the Tranche 1 FMPs and also where possible on the Tranche 2 FMPs. Once the Crab and Lobster FMP is in place, Officers will be able to understand more on what possible management measures are being considered for future iterations of the FMP. Defra has provided additional funding to IFCAs to enable them to engage fully in the FMP process.

Summary Outputs from the Project UK SW Crab Management Workshops

Project UK is a collaborative partnership between the fishing industry, regulators, scientists, NGOs and the seafood supply chain. The project aims for an environmentally sustainable future for UK fisheries, through implementation of credible Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs). Industry representatives on the Project UK crab and lobster FIP Steering Group requested support to help coordinate and deliver their requests to government for how they

would like the crab fishery in the South West to be managed. Input was gathered from industry through an online survey and five in person workshops, as well as additional written and online input from industry members unable to attend in person.

The workshop groups discussed a range of technical measures, input controls (i.e., limits on the fishing effort) and output controls (i.e., limits on the amount of fish landed). There was clear consensus across the workshops for increased enforcement, and improved regulations for the quality of crab landed. There was general agreement that the current fishing pressure is too high, and that a mixture of licence caps and effort controls could be used to ensure management is fair and equal across the fishery to secure the sustainability of stocks while maintaining the socioeconomic requirements of the fleet.

An online survey was undertaken first before the workshop. There were 57 responses.

The biggest concerns raised were:

- Latent capacity
- Nomadic vessels
- Need for more industry involvement in decision making
- Increasing pressure on the stock
- Need for more scientific data on the crab fishery
- Lack of enforcement of current management measures
- Large vessels inside 6nm/fishing over winter
- Landing of soft-shell crab
- Inconsistent minimum landing size (MLS)
- Fishing/scrubbing berried females
- Recreational fishing

Suggestions for management:

- Pot limits/enforcement of pot limits
- January-March closure
- Alignment of minimum landing size (MLS)
- Effort or quota restrictions for larger vessels
- Differing management needs for small and large vessels

Five workshops were held in the South West in March and April 2022.

The groups discussed the following management options and which they felt are, or are not, suitable for the South West crab fishery:

Technical measures

- Minimum landing sizes
- Closed areas
- Gear modification
- Non capture of females (berried and/or non)

Input control

- Managing fishery by licence
- Capping all unused shellfish permits and entitlements
- Days at Sea
- Pot limit

Output control

- Managing fishery by TAC
- Managing fishery by bag limit

The table below summaries the responses:

Management option	Workshop						Other written input
	Ilfracombe	Stokenham	Brixham	Newquay	Newlyn	Online	
Seasonal closure							
Alignment of Minimum Landing Size (MLS)							
Restrictions for larger vessels							
Gear modification e.g. escape gaps							
Ban on berried females							
Managing fishery by licence							
Capping all unused shellfish permits and entitlements/latent capacity							
Days at Sea							
Pot limit							
Managing fishery by TAC							
Zonal management							
Prohibition of crab as whelk bait							
SSS - size, sex, season							
Recreational limits*							
Management of quality							
Increased enforcement of regulations from IFCA/MMO							

	Agreement
	Unsure or only with other caveats
	Disagreement
	Not discussed or not considered an issue

*Despite survey results, this was not considered an issue by workshop participants

Key Discussions during the Workshops :

a. Only retaining high quality crab

There was agreement across all workshops that poor quality crab should not be landed and there should be a ban on landing soft shelled crab. There was also a call for alignment of Minimum Conservation Reference Size across the 6nm limit and increases enforcement both at landing sites and at sea.

b. Pressure on Stocks.

All agreed that pressure on the stocks is too high and dealing with latent capacity was felt to be a priority. There was an agreement for increased management on larger vessels along with how 'larger' is defined, Effort management was considered, and some fishers thought pot limitations might work but would need appropriate technology to best enforce it. There was concern that pot limits are not enforceable and the effort could be manipulated by using different pots, modifying pots or misreporting of pot numbers. There was no agreement on how a pot limit could be allocated. Days at sea was felt to be appropriate for larger vessels and this could be phased in for smaller vessels, although smaller vessels are already restricted by weather. A cap on tonnage of crab landed per vessel was discussed, possibly determined by historic landings.

c. Mandatory fishery closures

This was discussed as some fishers thought it could be useful but there was no agreement on the best time of year for a closure. Smaller inshore vessels are restricted by weather so a winter closure might be appropriate but larger vessels (viviers) would prefer the summer and there was no agreement on what happens to the pots during the closure. Spatial closures inshore limiting vessel size was discussed but there was concern for those vessels that already operate and how that would affect the vessels, their crews and markets. The IPA was seen as an example of good practice.

There were areas of research identified that would need consideration for the success of future management:

Effort Research

- Review of accuracy of CPUE data for use in monitoring uptake of fishing opportunities, including consideration of inflated pot reporting.
- Review of how to determine appropriate pot limit allocation, including the efficiency and effort distribution of different types of pots.
- Review how days at sea could be fairly phased in for all vessels >10m over time without leading to misreporting in the short term.
- Consolidate data on number and size of vessels in the fishery to existing determine pressure, and research a more appropriate approach to define the fleet and fishing effort rather than classifying and managing by vessel size.
- Clarification on international vessel access to the fishery, and how much pressure this contributes to the stock status at present.
- Determine a fair process to cap licences belonging to smaller vessels that need to be flexible in what they catch so might not catch some species for several years.
- Review of potential displacement, and consideration of other FMP approaches and how this might interact with crab and lobster fisheries

Stock science

- Review of appropriate minimum (and maximum) landing sizes, and increased data on size of maturity and how this contributes to stock replenishment.
- Review of life history traits and lifecycle analysis to determine the most appropriate seasonal closures for stock health, including whether a closure could be timed with an increased presence of soft-shell crab on the ground, and if there are trends in mating or juvenile activity.
- Research potential legislative definitions of soft-shell crab and develop tools to qualify shell hardness for enforcement purposes.
- Review of natural mortality levels, or impacts on the stock from sources other than the direct fishery (for example indirect impacts of trawl or dredge fishing in the same area).

Next Steps for D&S IFCA

The concerns raised by members of the static gear fishing industry are still alive, current and need addressing. The timing of management introduced through the FMP is unlikely to be at pace and therefore D&S IFCA is proposing under the 2023/2024 Annual Plan to carry out several workstreams that will gather information and evidence to help inform any future management of the crab and lobster stocks in the D&S IFCA's District

D&S IFCA Officers will undertake in-person engagement with Fishermen's Associations and their members across the District to discuss, in more detail, what management the fishers believe would be appropriate for the crab stocks within D&S IFCA District. These discussions will be based on the outputs highlighted above from the Project UK's workshops that took place in the South West. These events will be followed up by further communication and engagement with all Permit holders to provide the opportunity for their opinions to be heard.

D&S IFCA sits on the Crab and Lobster FMP Research Group which has identified evidence gathering needs for the FMP and has obtained Fisheries Industry and Science Partnership Funding to undertake several workstreams. D&S IFCA Officers are working with South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen, Seafish Authority and the University of Bangor to undertake these workstreams to help inform the science and potential management of crab and lobster stocks. One key area of work is looking to develop a methodology to measure the hardness

of crab shell that might be used to determine whether a crab being landed is soft and how this can be best monitored. The landing of soft-shelled crab has been an area of concern for many years raised by members of the crustacea potting fleet, and has been suggested as an early intervention in the draft Crab and Lobster FMP. Durometers, devices that are used in American and Canadian crustacea fisheries to determine the hardness of crab shell, will be trialled on board fishing vessels in Devon and Welsh waters. The research will also gather further data on the catches and landings of crab and lobster than can feed into other research work packages, highlighted as evidence needs in the FMP. D&S IFCA is currently working with academics from the University of Bangor to employ a research assistant who will work with D&S IFCA's Environment Officers to gather the relevant scientific data.

D&S IFCA Officers will also obtain MMO held data on crab and lobster landings into ports in its District to look at changes in landings over time. Information from Potting permit applications will also be compared to previous years to look at changes in the level of effort in terms of pot numbers since the permitting system was introduced.

D&S IFCA is also liaising with Cornwall IFCA as to its next steps on how they plan to manage the pressures on stocks in its District and what management measures they will be considering. CIFCA is planning engagement with the industry to identify management measures to address the emerging effort control issues.

Background Papers

- B&PSC meeting 20th October 2022 ([Agenda Item 8](#)) – Report on the Pressures and Risks to the Static Gear Fisheries in D&S IFCA's District
- Authority meeting 15th December 2022 ([Agenda Item 9](#)) – Report on the Pressures and Risks to the Crustacea Pot Fisheries in D&S IFCA's District