

Minutes

Joint NWWAC/NSAC/MAC Focus Group Brown Crab

Virtual meeting via Teams

24 January 2023

Participants

Enda Conneely	IIMRO
David Jarrad	Shellfish Association of Great Britain
Salomé Khatib	CNPMEM
Mo Mathies	NWWAC Secretariat
Carlos Mesquita	Marine Science Scotland
Geert Meun	VsNed
Aodh O'Donnell	IFPO
Norah Parke	KFO
Tamara Talevska	NSAC Secretariat
Matilde Vallerani	NWWAC Secretariat

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair Norah Parke welcomed all participants. Apologies were received from Adam Holland, Jarek Zielinsky and John Lynch in advance of the meeting. The minutes from the previous meeting and today's agenda were adopted.

Action points from the last meeting (December 2022)

1	Investigate data on use of crab as whelk bait and what would happen if it was not used.
	There is a substantial project by Galway University developing alternative whelk bait that was mentioned during the last meeting. Shouldn't take too long for the project to finish and results will be made available to the FG.
2	Members to highlight studies on mortalities from other regions if available
	Following up for next meeting to hear from Martial Laurans, Ifremer (France). Update from Northern Ireland to be conveyed by the Secretariat under agenda item 3.
3	Secretariat to invite other national research institutes to present at the next meeting
	Same for action point 2

2. Overview ICES WGCRA – Carlos Mesquita, Marine Scotland Science

The ICES WGCRAAB is an expert group which sits under the ICES Science Committee (SCICOM) whose general objectives are to work with the ICES community to build dynamic and internationally relevant science programmes, i.e., ensuring good links between data and advice, promoting engagement between scientists and production of scientific outputs.

The original group focused on snow crab in Canada and spider crab in Europe, however the remit of the group was expanded to other species including brown crab and European lobster.

Meetings are held every year in November to discuss the progress made. The list of participants is extensive, ranging from western Atlantic to north east Atlantic with many from Ireland and the UK.

Three main goals:

- 1) crustacean fisheries: considering appropriate stock management and review monitoring programmes
- 2) New knowledge: impact of climate, genetics, spatial distribution
- 3) Promote collaboration between different institutes with joint work and combined stock assessments

4 main areas of work:

- 1) Fisheries statistics compiling data on effort, discards. Aggregated fisheries data for each species are published in the WG report
- 2) National stock assessments of the covered fisheries providing comments on fisheries sustainability
- 3) Environmental variables and drivers, such as temperatures, acidification, and their impact on biology of the species
- 4) Strong research component: climate change, food safety, etc.

In recent years the group is focusing on building capacity to provide advice and would like to move more towards an advisory role.

Projects over the years include tagging of brown crab which has been feature work for the group for many years. More recently the group has carried out a successful integrated stock assessment on the shared stock between the UK and France in the Western Channel.

In addition, studies on maturity were carried out and published in the last years as well as work on contaminants, e.g. cadmium and mercury, and food safety.

The group has also been trying to tackle the role of climate, in particular the North Atlantic Oscillation, on brown crab and snow crab. There might be some opposite effects of some climate and trends or effects on these two species, and a paper is being developed on this with further studies going on at this time.

This is not a closed group and new participants are welcome to engage.

The Chair thanked Mesquita for the comprehensive presentation and felt that the information exchange between the WG and the industry has improved over the years.

Mesquita stated that the objective of the WG is to publish what is going on with main crustacean species covered by the group and felt that engagement with the industry would continue under the new chair as well.

The Chair enquired regarding the Dutch representative on the ICES WG.

Mesquita responded that this person has more interest in wind farms but that he is also a useful contact point to connect with fisheries. For example, the WG currently has no landing data from the Netherlands for which a special request is needed.

Geert Meun added that the Netherlands is important from a market and distribution point of view. Though there is a number of vessels operating in the North Sea, the majority is not linked to the Netherlands. Only 3 vessels are operated by Dutch enterprises. He advised that he had established contact with Marcel Rozemeijer from Wageningen Marine Research, who is also a member of the ICES WG, regarding the Dutch research on brown crab.

Responding to the Chair's query if an increase in Dutch vessels targeting brown crab could be expected, Meun stated that there might be one or two possible additions. A decommissioning scheme is in place in the Netherlands, which will see a decrease of 50% in effort over the next few months. The Chair felt that in Ireland, the decommissioning scheme would drive the change in the opposite direction as crab is a non-quota species.

The Chair enquired if any other environmental drivers are being identified other than the overall climate change?

Mesquita stated that work carried out has mostly been temperature related by colleagues in Greenland on snow crab. More attention on this in the future needs to be put on identifying environmental drivers on this side on the Atlantic.

Enda Conneely asked if there were any studies on seismic impacts on crustaceans. The Chair added that this was potential problem in Irish waters because of the interest for ORE projects. She felt more information on this is needed, and suggested that at some stage the ICES WG could consider this.

Mesquita stated that this topic had not yet been discussed in the WG unfortunately, but that he would report back.

3. Update Northern Ireland – NWWAC Secretariat

The following overview was kindly provided by Adam Holland, Fisheries Science Support Officer (ANIFPO/NIFPO), who unfortunately was unable to attend the meeting. (adam@seasource.com)

Project UK run by the MSC has selected fisheries to potential become part of a Fishery Improvement Project (FIP). Northern Irish Brown Crab has been selected as one of these fisheries to potentially become a FIP.

The Northern Ireland Fishermen's Federation (NIFF) which comprises of the two Fish Producer Organisations in Northern Ireland (ANIFPO/NIFPO) commissioned a pre-assessment of the entire Northern Irish Brown Crab fishery through Poseidon Aquatic Resource Management.

For the NI crab fishery the aim of this work was to establish an overview of the fishery in its current state in relation to the MSC standard. Fishermen in NI have recognised issues with the fishery over the years such as increasing effort in the same fishing grounds, and a decline in size of the species. Beginning in 2011 the NI fishermen requested 15 management measures to be imposed on the fishery to assist in the recovery of the stock, three of which have been successfully brought in:

1. Increase in MLS to 150mm.
2. Ban of retention and sale of white crab
3. Ban of retention of crab "toes" or claws

Several measures are also being developed such as the ban on landing soft shell crab (crab that has recently cast its shell). Other developments around inshore VMS and an NI inshore FMP are also underway.

All these factors are linked with a lot of the potential actions being proposed and needed to meet the MSC standard if the NI brown crab fishery was to enter into a FIP. The inshore VMS and FMPs would address some of the actions in the draft action plan for the fishery.

The next stage includes making a decision to put the fishery through a FIP which currently does not seem to be a popular decision both for the fishing industry and for government departments due to lack of resources. This FIP, as we have seen with the involvement with the UK Nephrops and Scallop FIPs, requires significant resources from industry, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI). The most likely decision may be to postpone entering into a FIP until a time when industry is ready for such a process or buyers are asking for it.

However, from the proposed management measures and action plan from the pre-assessment, the NI brown crab fishery is in a better position to bring forward these measures and suggestions. Anecdotally fishermen have seen an increase in size and weight of landings since the roll out of an increased MLS to 150mm. No matter the decision, the pre-assessment highlights key areas for the fishery to focus its resources on and will use this as a framework to progress to a more sustainable fishery.

Some the actions required to meet the MSC Standard include:

- Improved evidence base – ref points and connectivity with other Irish Sea nations
- Harvest strategy/HCRs
- Catch composition – clarification on secondary species and separation between different fisheries/gear
- ETP management strategy
- Inshore VMS
- Development of FMP

The Chair enquired regarding the full list of management measures suggested. She felt that the minimum landing size is quite a high bar, and wondered if this could work in other areas too. She also was curious to find out how well do they think their management plan is working?

Action: Secretariat to contact Holland with the draft minutes and invite him to the next meeting

The Chair followed this by asking Salomé Khatib about the state of play on the crab stocks in France.

Khatib stated that she had no specific updates on that, but heard from Martial Laurent, Ifremer, that he was going to attend the next meeting to present and update.

Action: Khatib to confirm with Laurent once date for next FG meeting has been set.

4. Workshop/site visit planning, discussion & next steps

Mathies reviewed the group's intention to organise a workshop and site visit in Holland as included in ToR. She explained that organising a site visit would be quite complicated as the site in the Netherlands is difficult to get to. It would also be quite expensive for the ACs. The NWWAC has no capacity to organise the logistics of this site visit which is difficult regarding logistic, cost and time aspects. However, an in-person workshop would be much easier to establish as it is less time consuming and easier to attend. For a location of the workshop she suggested the CNPMEM premises in Paris in April-May, which would need to be checked with the NSAC and MAC Secretariats. She asked members how important a site visit was for them in light of the explained difficulties.

The Chair agreed that a site visit is not feasible due to the logistics and time constraints. She suggested that a possible alternative could be to show videos of crab being landed in the less accessible ports, such as Eemshaven, at the workshop. She personally knows the Irish people involved and felt they would be very cooperative. Other places where crab is landed could do the same.

Mathies and Conneely supported this proposal.

ACTION: Members to organise videos to show at workshop.

Kathib confirmed that the CNPMEM would host the workshop in their building but would need to check room availability.

ACTION: The FG will come back with a number of dates in early May to propose to the CNPMEM.

ACTION: Secretariat to draft ToR and objectives for the workshop and reflect on the list of participants, including experts from the ACRUNET project

Tamara Talevska informed the group that the NSAC is organising another workshop on 02 May.

Conneely proposed that a hybrid setting could also be considered.

Mathies stated that an in-person workshop would be preferred to make sure the group reaches its targets, but that hybrid set-up can be considered closer to the time if needed.

The Chair stated that if there were participants who could not attend in person due to reasonable circumstances, an online debate could be encouraged and facilitated if needed, but that the aim is to bring all participants together in person.

5. AOB

Date for next meeting: 28 February, 09:00 – 11:00 IE | 10:00 – 12:00 CET

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

1	Secretariat to contact Holland with the draft minutes and invite him to the next meeting
2	Kathib to confirm with Laurent once date for next FG meeting has been set.
3	Members to organise videos to show at workshop.
4	The FG will come back with a number of dates in early May to propose to the CNPMM.
5	Secretariat to draft ToR and objectives for the workshop and reflect on the list of participants, including experts from the ACRUNET project