

Joint MAC/NWWAC/NSAC Focus Group on Brown Crab Minutes

Tuesday, 17 November 2020

10:00 - 11:30 CET

Zoom online meeting

Welcome from the Secretariat, Pedro Reis Santos

Adoption of draft agenda: adopted

Membership of the Focus Group

- **Introduction roundtable**

The members of the Focus Group proceeded to introduced themselves, highlighting the connection of their association with brown crab.

Chair of the Focus Group

- **Election by the members**

Norah Parke (KFO) was elected Chair by the FG members. Mo Mathies (NWWC Secretariat) mentioned the possibility of electing a Vice-Chair. No member expressed interest in applying for the Vice-Chair position. It was agreed that members could contact the MAC Secretariat via email to express interest.

Terms of Reference

- **Overview of purpose, proposed outcomes, timeline, resources**

Click [here](#) to access the Terms of Reference.

The Chair explained that brown crab fisheries have changed significantly in the past five years, particularly in the North Sea. Originally, operators were focused in Ireland, Scotland, the Channel and the North Sea. Irish fishing vessels would spend most of the fishing season in the North Sea and would return to Ireland for a short time. The brown crab sector grew significantly, especially due to exports of live crab to China. One of the issues is that Brown Crab is a non-quota species, so it is not managed as stringently as species fished under quota. In 2009-2010, the industry faced a crisis, due to a decrease in prices, while fuel price was increasing. Therefore, the three producing countries (Ireland, France, and the United Kingdom) plus the import countries, Spain and Portugal agreed to establish



the [ACRUNET project](#) (Atlantic Area Transnational project) which aimed to secure the economic and social viability and sustainability of the European brown crab industry. The outcome of the project is available online. ACRUNET was unable to address the problem of the differing management systems in the producer countries, so the issue was taken up by the NWWAC, which has adopted an advice on the matter. It is important to establish parameters and a possible way forward, including an analysis of the current situation, vessels involved in the fishery, the relevant market, among other factors. The Chair proceeded to read the adopted Terms of Reference.

- **Exchange of views on expectations for future discussions and draft advice**

Patrick Murphy (ISWFPO) suggested that the FG should also take into account the biology of the crab, including size, as well as fishing practices, when drafting the advice.

Michael Andersen (DFPO) highlighted the importance of respecting established fishing practices. For Danish operators, brown crab is a common bycatch in gillnets fisheries, so they would prefer for their activities not to be affected by other operators targeting the species. A protocol has been developed by the industry on this matter.

The Chair recognised that, when a fishery develops very rapidly, newcomers might not be aware of existing protocols. It is important to use the ACs and other communication platforms to ensure that the message is passed on. The Chair wanted to know if there was a limit to the amount of brown crab that could be landed as bycatch by Danish operators.

Michael Andersen (DFPO) responded that there is no limit. The entire crab is landed, even though the claws were the most important part. A hammer is used to disentangle the brown crab from the gillnets, so the crab is landed into pieces. The member also argued against a differentiation between inshore and offshore vessels, noting that, in Denmark, both small and large vessels were involved.

Jarosław Zieliński (PSPR) called for the coverage of sanitary requirements under the scope of a code of good practices, including requirements for fishers and processors, on issues like transshipments and landings. The processing industry is looking for quality crab, so not broken crab. In the case of Snow Crab fisheries, there are good practices established by the FAO's Codex Alimentarius.

The Chair exemplified that Irish vessels are certified (Bord Iascaigh Mhara - Irish Sea Fisheries Board) Responsibly Sourced Seafood. The Chair wondered if the proposed good practices would function similarly to a grading system.

Jarosław Zieliński (PSPR) explained that there are codes of best practices on how to treat fish to ensure best quality, so he would like the establishment of a similar code for Brown Crab. This could take the form of responsibility seafood standards guides developed for the industry.



Sarah Horsfall (EMPA) highlighted that the situation, in terms of certification schemes, was similar in the UK. The member wondered about the potential impact of Brexit, particularly of a “no deal” situation.

Peter Breckling (German Fishermen Association) highlighted that issues of sustainability, overfishing, and animal welfare were not explicitly mentioned in the terms of reference.

The Chair mentioned that the issue of animal welfare has been raised in the UK, which can have implications on the transportation of live crab.

Sarah Horsfall (EMPA) explained that, in the UK, there is an active animal welfare campaign group called “Crustacean Compassion” focused on crab and lobster, particularly on the fishing methods and the live transportation. The issue of sentience in crustaceans is being considered. Several studies have been conducted to determine if crustaceans feel pain. If crab is found to be high in the sentient scale, additional care measures will need to be introduced. At the moment, the industry is providing a lot of evidence on how they are handled, transported, and treated. Additional measures might be introduced in the UK. In the new year, there will be results of the scientific projects, which can be shared with the FG.

Pedro Reis Santos (MAC Secretariat) explained that animal welfare had not been a focus for the MAC, but that that it was usually a strong focus in the advice produced by the AAC. The Commission is currently assessing its policy on fish welfare, which is likely to also cover wild caught fish.

The Chair proposed to include animal welfare in the list of topics to be considered by the FG.

Peter Breckling (German Fishermen Association) emphasised that some EU Member States were particularly focused on the issue of sustainability and overfishing, so the FG should be aware.

The Chair stated that overfishing does not seem to be happening. There was concern that the Brown Crab population would decline when the fishery gained popularity, but that has not happened, even though there are no quotas or management measures in place. Sustainability is what drove the French, Irish and UK industries to work together. The Chair proposed that, at the next meeting, each person could present how their country stands in terms of the fishery, in order to establish the common ground.

Patrick Murphy (ISWFPO) highlighted that participation in the fishery is determined by the price. The exact biomass of Brown Crab is unknown. The gear takes up space, so there is a limit. There is agreement across Member States on this matter.

The Chair emphasised the importance of involving more countries in the process.



Michael Andersen (DFPO) underscored that the issue of transportation of live crab would be very important in the future.

Mike Turenhout (Visfederatie) highlighted that, in terms of market access, animal welfare is achieving increasingly significant importance, so the FG should consider this issue.

The Chair recognised that the FG should take a proactive approach on animal welfare and proposed to include the topic under the next meeting's agenda. It is important to collect as much information as possible.

Lucile Toulhoat (CNPMEM) explained that animal welfare is increasingly being discussed in France, but that Brown Crab has not been specifically identified. Nevertheless, the French industry will continue to monitor future development. In relation to TACs, there is no consolidated position, but France has a limited license scheme to manage the fishery.

Overview of previous MAC and NWWAC advice

- **NWWAC Advice on Brown Crab Management (2020)**
- **Testing for Cadmium Levels in Brown Crab Exported to People's Republic of China (2019)**
- **Others**

These agenda items were addressed together in the previous item.

Public Consultation by the Government of China on Cadmium Levels

- **Exchange of views**

The Chair explained that the Chinese market is very important for Brown Crab. Even though the exported quantities are relatively small when compared to the landings, the export prices affect the price of the fishery at local level. Once the supply chain of crab to China collapsed, the prices to fishers in the producer countries also collapsed.

The Chair also drew attention to the sanitary controls for heavy metals. Brown crab can have high levels of cadmium through its life. The Chinese Government is quite sensitive to the issue of cadmium. The maximum amount of cadmium to be tolerated in Brown Crab is 0.5 mg per Kg in all its edible parts. In the EU, it was deemed that the average person does not eat enough crab in a year in addition to other cadmium sources that Brown Crab could pose a danger. In the EU, the cadmium levels are calculated only testing the white meat, while Chinese authorities test white and brown meat. The situation is a significant problem for crab exporters and creates a lot of uncertainty. In the past, China has banned imports from certain countries. Recently, the Chinese Government launched



a public consultation to raise the acceptable cadmium levels from 0.5 to 3mg per Kg. In this case, 70% of Brown Crab exported by Irish operators would meet this level. The Irish and UK Governments have provided feedback to this public consultation. The Chinese Government is also open to suggestions on the preparation of samples. There is demand amongst Chinese customer for more imported Brown Crab. The Chair shared her expectation that the Chinese Government would not reach an EU-wide agreement, but would develop specific health standards with individual Member States. The results of the Public Consultation should be published next year.

Sarah Horsfall (EMPA) underscored the large impact of the Chinese market. UK exporters have been excluded since the previous December, because consignments continuously fail the tests. Even with the possible change in acceptable cadmium levels, exporters would not be prepared to risk 100% of their exports being checked at the airport. The UK Government does not agree with 3mg per Kg, because all edible parts are being tested. Therefore, it should be raised to 11 to 13mg per Kg. The frequency of crab consumption is not high, since it is considered a delicacy. The UK Government has proposed to test only the white meat, instead of all edible parts. The UK also included videos on how to test crab samples. The consultation was launched in May, but governments were only made aware in September. The results might take several years.

Michael Andersen (DFPO) wanted to know more about the natural occurrence of cadmium.

The Chair explained that scientific tests demonstrated that there were no excessive levels of cadmium in the North Sea. The Chair further explained that the crab, when building its shell, encapsulates cadmium. Older crabs have higher levels of cadmium.

AOB

- **Next meeting**

The Chair proposed that the next meeting could take place in January, which would allow members to know the impacts of Brexit more clearly.

Sarah Horsfall (EMPA) suggested the development of a questionnaire to the members to compile the national positions on Brown Crab, such as on sentience, legislative framework, number of vessels, capacities, and fishing gear, including the impact of wind farms.

Peter Breckling (German Fishermen Association) explained that, in Germany, energy companies had to provide compensation payments when building wind farms in sandy areas, in order to exclude fisheries activities, which was not being accepted by fishers. The member drew attention to the importance of market and sustainability issues.



Summary of action points

- Animal Welfare:
 - Topic to be included in the next meeting's draft agenda, in order to discuss and collect information on national scientific studies concerning welfare and sentience
- Questionnaire on national information:
 - Chair and Secretariat to prepare a questionnaire, ahead of the next meeting, on the national positions on Brown Crab, covering issues such as sentience, legislative framework, number of vessels, fishing capacity, and fishing gear
 - Member to present their feedback at the next meeting



List of attendees

| Representative | Organisation |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Anaïs Roussel | CRPMEM Hauts-de-France (NWWAC) |
| Geert Meun | VisNed (NSAC) |
| Jarosław Zieliński | PSPR (MAC) |
| Lucile Toulhoat | CNPMEM (NWWAC) |
| Michael Andersen | DFPO (NSAC) |
| Mike Turenhout | Visfederatie (MAC) |
| Mo Mathies | NWWAC Secretariat |
| Norah Parke (Chair) | KFO (NWWAC) |
| Patrick Murphy | ISWFPO (NWWAC) |
| Pedro Reis Santos | MAC Secretariat |
| Peter Breckling | German Fishermen Association (NSAC) |
| Sarah Horsfall | EMPA (MAC) |
| Stavroula Kremmydiotou | MAC Secretariat |

