

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

Monday, 14 June 2021

14:00 - 16:30 CET

Zoom online meeting

Welcome from the Chair, Norah Parke

Adoption of agenda and the last meeting's minutes (19.03.21): adopted

Stock Sustainability

- Presentation on recent crab stock status developments by Chair
- Update from members on their national stock status
- Exchange of views

Click [here](#) to access the Chair's presentation.

The Chair provided an overview of landings of brown crab by Irish and UK vessels in the 2010-2019 period, which did not show any major fluctuations. There was a distinct increase in the value of the landings, which was a big driver for effort.

The Chair explained that, initially, based on the landings, she believed that nothing had changed. Nevertheless, in the recent past, monitoring of catch per effort has shown a rapid decrease in catches in Ireland on the northwest coast, Scotland on the northeast coast and France in the Channel. There are suggestions from the scientists that there may be a recruitment issue for these separate fisheries.

The Chair committed to providing the FG with any additional information when it becomes available. It is important to know if there is a recruitment problem due to possible environmental issues such as increased acidity or other factors not yet identified.

Patrick Murphy (ISWFPO) suggested that trials on egg quality and brown crab reproduction could be useful. Mr Murphy wondered if it would be possible for operators to gather this data.

The Chair responded that it would be a good initiative, which could be implemented directly, in a voluntary manner, by the operators without requiring the intervention of public authorities. Scientific experts in Ireland have prepared a questionnaire to fishers to inform their research. The Chair highlighted that the number of active Irish vessels did not increase substantially, but that the quality of the vessels has changed. Originally, it was a small-scale inshore fleet, which suffered restrictions



from weather conditions. Currently, many vessels have been upgraded, which means longer seasons, more pots and less weather restrictions. The number of pots, as a measure of effort, has increase substantially.

Lucile Toulhoat (CNPMEM) confirmed that the pattern in France was the same as in the Irish and Scottish fisheries. Landings are declining since 2016. At the end of May, a meeting took place between French fishers and Ifremer, where it was recognised that the start of the fishing season was catastrophic. A project has been established to collect specimens to determine if these are affected by a pathogen. A survey to quantify the observations of fishers in relation to the presence of clear and dying crabs. The fishers have requested socioeconomic measures from the national authority, especially the authorisation to diversify the fishery for part of the year. There is a lack of knowledge on the future of the stock.

The Chair responded that the presence of a pathogen could be greatly contributing to the problems faced in France. The susceptibility to the pathogen could be connected to other underlying issues. In Ireland, there has been no indication of the presence of the pathogen. The Chair expressed deep concern about the status of brown crab across different geographical areas.

Michael Andersen (DFPO) informed that he would look into the situation in Denmark. Even though there is no targeted brown crab fishery by Danish fishers, it is an important bycatch. There is no registration of effort and pots are not used. An increase in the acidity of the waters would have significant impact in other Danish fisheries.

Peter Breckling (German Fishermen Association) stated that, in Germany, there was no scientific data showing changes of abundance or recruitment, but that there were also no targeted investigations on the matter. For a long time, brown crab fishing did not take place in German waters. There was some activity by Irish and French vessels. German inspectors received information on this activity. The brown crab fishery seemed to be a good option for German fisheries, due to the new offshore windfarms being built. There was indication that abundance would increase in offshore windfarms due to additional hard substrate. More information is needed on the recruitment failure, particularly if it will happen in other areas or is connected to fishing intensity. There is a need for additional scientific work on the matter. For new operators, additional market information would also be useful.

Geert Meun (VisNed) agreed with the previous intervention. Until 5-6 years prior, there was no direct fishery of brown crab in the Netherlands, only bycatch. Taking into account the planned offshore windfarms parks, until 2030, 25% of demersal fishing ground will be lost. The Dutch fleet has an increasing interest in fisheries with static gears or pots. It is very difficult to gather the necessary scientific information on the development of the stocks. No decrease in landings was noticed. Landings and pots have been stable, according to information provided by a few Dutch fishers.



The Chair stated that, according to information provided by Irish vessels operating in the North Sea since 2010, there is a decline in the recent years, but that the effort also increased significantly. The chair emphasised the importance of grading, in order to return low quality crabs back to the sea. In a few weeks, the quality of the returned crabs will have improved. Selling high quality also ensures higher profitability for the producer.

Michael Andersen (DFPO) informed he contacted Jarek Zieliński (PSPR) about the sustainability of the stock when targeting brown crab from Danish ports. According to the information provided, lower catch rates than usual are not experienced. There are some issues connected to market regulations and exports to the People's Republic of China.

Patrick Muphy (ISWFPO) exemplified that, in the past, there were breeding projects with lobsters, which helped solve stock sustainability issues. Soft and small crabs should not be landed. Protection measures might be needed.

Michael Andersen (DFPO) expressed concerns that the introduction of EU-level protection measures to solve problems in some EU waters would lead to increased burden for operators in Danish waters where additional measures are not needed. For example, Danish operators would be against an obligation to land whole crabs. Management measures should only be introduced where these are needed.

The Chair recognised that the introduction of protection measures could indeed potentially affect Danish gillnet fishers for whom brown crab is only a bycatch. The Chair drew attention to the lack of information on the stock status in the North Sea and encouraged members to gather information from their national scientific experts.

Access to Fishing Grounds in the North Sea

- **Exchange of views on increased effort implications**

This agenda item was addressed together with the previous item.

Animal Welfare

- **Update on ongoing developments**
- **Exchange of views**

The Chair informed that, the following week, she would meet with David Jarrad (SAGB) to discuss animal welfare in the UK. The UK Animal Welfare Bill was passed on 29 April 2021 and comes into force on 29 June 2021. The Bill is confined to vertebrate animals. Nevertheless, activists will continue



with public campaigns to increase animal welfare protections for crustaceans. The Chair highlighted that it is important to be aware of potential EU actions on animal welfare, particularly for crustaceans. There could be significant implications for live transport.

Draft Recommendations

- **Consideration of list of potential draft recommendations**
- **Way forward**

The Focus Group proceed to consider the list of potential draft recommendations circulated ahead of the meeting.

The Chair emphasised the importance of establishing exchanges good practices, instead of the adoption of strict regulatory measures.

Peter Breckling (German Fishermen Association) suggested changing the order of the first two draft recommendations, so that issues of stock are mentioned before market issues.

Michael Andersen (DFPO) highlighted that the stock can decrease due to other factors apart from excessive exploitation. It is important to monitor for potential decreases in the stock.

Patrick Muphy (ISWFPO) expressed concerned about the wording of draft recommendation d). As a minimum protection measure, there would have to be minimum size for landed crab bodies.

The Chair clarified that, for Danish operators, brown crab is a bycatch from gillnet fisheries. The claws are harvested. The bodies would normally end up in landfill.

Patrick Muphy (ISWFPO) argued that the separation between bycatch and the fishery should be clear, in order to avoid opening up a completely unregulated market for crab bodies.

Peter Breckling (German Fishermen Association) suggested that draft recommendation d) should be contextualised in a broader frame. There are several options to develop new brown crab markets. The case of the Danish gillnet fisheries is only one example of a sustainable brown crab market.

The Chair, in relation to draft recommendation e), commented on the difficulties to find the relevant officials to discuss the application of regulations by China. The application of regulations regarding Health Certificates for brown carb is erratic and liable to change for individual countries with little warning. The Health Certificate issued by the Netherlands authorities seems to have least problems and most countries now use the Netherlands as an export hub.



The Chair further explained that, the previous year, China launched a public consultation to raise the minimum permitted levels of cadmium in brown crab. Ireland and the UK made submissions to this consultation, but no responses were received. A more active approach from the EU could potentially help achieve more progress, instead of individual interventions from national embassies. The issue particularly affects traditional operators exporting to China, but it also has an impact on newer entrants due to price implications.

In relation to draft recommendation f), Chair wondered if the members could provide examples of practices based on the best available science, which would demonstrate the safety of exported crab.

Patrick Muphy (ISWFPO) stated that COVID-19 practices could be mentioned, including the applicable protocols in the case of outbreaks. The protocols could be included with the health certificate.

The Chair, in relation to draft recommendation i), asked members whether the situation in the UK land bridge had improved in the recent months.

Patrick Muphy (ISWFPO) responded that the situation has improved, following the agreement on the access to waters by EU vessels. The land bridge continues to be used.

The Chair, in relation to draft recommendation j), highlighted that brown crab must be transported in absolutely pristine conditions. Otherwise, the crab dies.

Patrick Muphy (ISWFPO) underscored that animal welfare measures must be appropriate. Measures designed for other animals should not automatically be applied to crustaceans.

Peter Breckling (German Fishermen Association) highlighted producers are aware of growing public awareness of animal welfare. Producers should be helped in the implementation of the best practices of the sector to meet the growing public awareness.

The Chair proposed to recirculate, via email, the amended list of draft recommendations, in case members want to suggest additional amendments.

The Secretary General suggested that the Chair and the Secretariat could start working on a draft main text, which should reflect the agreed draft recommendations.

AOB

- **Date of the next meeting**

The Chair proposed holding the next meeting on Friday, 9 July 2021.



Summary of action points

- Draft recommendations:
 - Secretariat to circulate, via email, the amended list of draft recommendations, in order to allow members to suggest additional amendments
 - Chair and Secretariat to prepare draft main text, which should reflect the agreed draft recommendations
- Animal Welfare:
 - Chair to provide an update on the meeting with David Jarrad (SAGB) on stock status and animal welfare developments in the UK
- Stock Sustainability:
 - North Sea operators to collect information on the stock status from scientific experts and fellow operators
 - Secretariat to circulate ACRUNET's video on crab quality



List of attendees

Representative	Organisation
Anaïs Roussel	CRPMEM Hauts-de-France (NWWAC)
Geert Meun	VisNed (NSAC)
Jean-Christophe Raymond	CNPMEM (NWWAC)
Lucile Toulhoat	CNPMEM (NWWAC)
Michael Andersen	DFPO (NSAC)
Norah Parke (Chair)	KFO (NWWAC)
Patrick Murphy	ISWFPO (NWWAC)
Pedro Reis Santos	MAC Secretariat
Peter Breckling	German Fishermen Association (NSAC)
Stavroula Kremmydiotou	MAC Secretariat

