

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

Friday, 9 July 2021

10:00 - 12:00 CET

Zoom online meeting

Welcome from the Chair, Norah Parke

Adoption of agenda and the last meeting's minutes (14.06.21): adopted

Draft Advice

- **Consideration of draft advice proposal**

The Chair highlighted that the Focus Group reached a crucial point in the drafting of advice. The crab fishery is quite complex, as is demonstrated by the collaboration between three Advisory Councils. Live and processed crab are distinct and have their own regulatory and supply chain specificities, which must be kept in mind. This is particularly true for the recent developments of the fishery in the North Sea. The traditional European market is very competitive with seasonal fluctuations on price patterns, but stable. The most lucrative market is East Asia, particularly China. Nevertheless, the rules on cadmium levels in the Chinese market remain a problem, particularly communication with the administration. Communication within Commission services and with Chinese authorities needs to improve to help solve this problem.

The Focus Group proceeded to consider the draft recommendations.

The Chair, in relation to draft recommendation a), mentioned that there were indications from scientific institutions of significant pressure in the traditional producing countries.

Geert Meun (VisNed) recognised that it was important to gather more information about the status of the stocks. Mr Meun expressed willingness to work with fishers and national institutes to determine how the stocks have developed.

The Chair, in relation to draft recommendation b), emphasised the importance of grading, in order to avoid the presence of low-quality crab in the market and to contribute to the sustainability of the stock.

Lucile Toulhoat (CNPMEM) suggested the inclusion of a reference to exchange of good practices on "effort regulation".



The Chair provided examples of management measures taken in Ireland, which differ from the French licensing system. On the other hand, there are no brown crab management measures in place in the North Sea other than those described by EU Regulation 2019/1241.

Geert Meun (VisNed) agreed that effort management is important, but expressed doubts on the specific measures. In the North Sea, it is difficult to determine the best way to regulate. There is a significant increase of offshore windfarm parks, which can be an opportunity for the development of the fishery. More information on the stock is needed.

The Chair expressed hope that the European Commission would assess the developments and develop a plan that can accommodate the different needs of the industry.

Jarosław Zieliński (PSPR) explained that, in Denmark, brown crab is not a regulated fishery, only a bycatch fishery. The definition of effort management rules might have an impact on other fisheries. Therefore, the reference should be to “fisheries management”, but not “effort”.

Geert Meun (VisNed) agreed with the previous intervention.

The Chair, in relation to draft recommendation c), commented that the establishment of MPAs is at a different stage in the different Member States. In Ireland, the designated MPAs will be “fishery-friendly”, in order to avoid displacement of activities. Fishers are seen as “custodians”.

Geert Meun (VisNed) explained that, in the Dutch waters, about 2% are closed areas. This will increase up to 15% until 2030. The Dutch government is in discussions with the European Commission and other Member States to develop joint recommendations. Mr Meun argued that it is important to ensure that Natura 2000 areas are open to fisheries. Most of the NGOs are opposed and prefer 100% closed areas without any activities.

The Chair commented that, in Ireland, the NGOs seem to take a more reasonable approach. Currently, there is 2% of protected areas. The ambition is to have 10% by 2030 and 30% by 2050. The Chair argued against completely closed areas. Other activities, such as offshore wind farms, could be part of MPAs and allow access to certain types of static gear fisheries.

Jarosław Zieliński (PSPR) stated that, from the perspective of the brown crab fishery, Poland is not a coastal State. The situation in the Baltic Sea is quite different.

Lucile Toulhoat (CNPMEM) stated that, in France, the MPAs network is quite developed. France already reached 30% of MPAs in some areas. Ms Toulhoat draw attention to the EU’s Biodiversity Strategy, which implies that the EU network of MPAs should be 30% in 2030, of which 10% as “strictly



protected areas”. It is still not known what will be authorised in the “strictly protected areas”. She expressed concern about the Commission’s focus on “no take zones”. The concept still needs to be further defined. It remains unclear if it will be legally binding. As for offshore windfarm parks, Ms Toulhoat explained that there are about 10 projects under development in France, including in important fishing areas. She argued for coexistence of activities, including fishing with static gear, dredging and trawling.

The Chair, in relation to draft recommendation d), highlighted that the Chinese is quite lucrative, but quite risky due to the cadmium rules and the varying approaches by the administration.

Jarosław Zieliński (PSPR) explained that, following consultations, there is significant interest in the Polish industry to explore and process brown crab. Polish producers, processors and consumers can benefit from it. Brown crab is already marketed in Poland in small quantities, but there is a demand. In combination with EMFAF financing for promotion, there could be an increase of demand for brown crab. There will also be a focus on adjacent markets and exports to China. The Polish processing industry relies on imported raw material, around 1 million tons, which is then exported. Therefore, the distribution channels already exist.

Geert Meun (VisNed) explained that catches landed in the Netherlands are going to China. It is the most important market and will continue to be in the near future. There are no indications of changes to the Dutch health certificates.

The Chair, in relation to draft recommendation e), commented that there are indications of changes in China on the stringent limits. At the same time, the consultation concluded at the end of October and there was no news since then. The EU Delegation to China needs to follow up. The Chair highlighted that cadmium is naturally occurring in brown crab. Additionally, the lifestyle of consumers in the EU and China are different, which impacts the exposure to cadmium.

In relation to draft recommendation f), the Chair highlighted that it was a one-off situation and that she was not aware of exported brown crab being refused. The measures undertaken by the EU industry seem to be appropriate.

In relation to draft recommendation g), the Chair commented that the impact of Brexit was particularly relevant for traditional operators in France and Ireland.

In relation to draft recommendation h), the Chair exemplified that Ireland established a Seafood Task Force to develop projects and options, such as tie-ups and decommissioning, for the different fishing sectors. There will be financial support under the Brexit Adjustment Reserve.



In relation to draft recommendation i), the Chair emphasised the importance of assistance for operators impacted by the increased bureaucracy, particularly Irish operators.

In relation to draft recommendation j), the Chair recalled that there is a significant campaign from NGOs in the UK to include decapods as sentient animals in the national animal welfare rules. She emphasised that proper animal welfare is part of production practices. Otherwise, the industry would not be economically viable.

The Focus Group proceeded to consider the draft main text.

Geert Meun (VisNed), under the subsection on Danish production, suggested to change the reference to the most recent regulation on technical measures.

Lucile Toulhoat (CNPMEM) proposed amendments to the subsection on the French production, in order to harmonise it with other subsections and to use objective data.

The Chair, in relation to subsection on Dutch production, wondered if there had been any conflicts between potters and trawlers.

Geert Meun (VisNed) explained that, for several months, the operators have been communicating and informing each other of their activities. Most of the activities are in German and Danish waters. There were some conflicts due to the displacement of activities connected to Brexit. Nevertheless, in general, communication is positive between the different operators.

Jarosław Zieliński (PSPR) stated that he would be encouraging the Polish administration to follow the recommendations of the Focus Group, in order to determine the most appropriate measures. Currently, the only limitation is having a fishing license that allows fishing outside the Baltic Sea. Mr Zieliński argued in favour of the development of standards to ensure the highest quality of crab. In Poland, a licensing system will be developed, but details are not yet available. He suggested the organisation of a seminar to share experiences between fishers from different Member States.

The Chair agreed that it would be quite relevant to organise a seminar in 2022.

Jarosław Zieliński (PSPR), in relation to grading and animal welfare practices, mentioned that there was good knowledge in Poland, because many Polish fishers worked on board of Scottish and Irish vessels.

The Focus Group agreed with the proposed amendments.



The MAC Secretary General explained that, as a way forward, the document would be recirculated via written procedure to the FG members until consensus is reached. In September, the document would be considered by the relevant Working Groups and, afterward, by the Executive Committees. Following adoption, the advice would be submitted to the European Commission and Member States.

AOB

None.

Summary of action points

- Draft advice proposal:
 - Secretariat to circulate, via written procedure, the amended draft advice proposal, in order to reach consensus among members.
 - Once there is agreement from the Focus Group members, draft advice proposal to be put forward to the relevant Working Groups of the MAC, NWWAC and NSAC for consideration.



List of attendees

Representative	Organisation
Geert Meun	VisNed (NSAC)
Jarosław Zieliński	PSPR (MAC)
Lucile Toulhoat	CNPMEM (NWWAC)
Norah Parke (Chair)	KFO (NWWAC)
Pedro Reis Santos	MAC Secretariat
Stavroula Kremmydiotou	MAC Secretariat
Tamara Talevska	NSAC Secretariat

