

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Joint NWWAC/NSAC/MAC Focus Group on Brown Crab

28 September 2022

Rationale

The main EU producing countries of brown crab (*Cancer pagurus*) were originally Ireland, the United Kingdom and France. Recently, the focus moved to the North Sea, while fishing effort increased and entrants joined from a growing range of EU countries.

Following a steady price decrease, the European project ACRUNET was established in 2010, which aimed to ensure and sustain the economic viability of the European brown crab industry through transnational co-operation. In 2016, NWWAC established a Focus Group on Brown Crab to address the unresolved issue of transnational management. Advice was published on data collection and assessment for brown crab in 2017 ([link](#)) and on brown crab management in 2020 ([link](#)). In 2019, the MAC adopted advice on the testing of cadmium levels in brown crab exported to the People's Republic of China ([link](#)). Following the 2020 advice, the NWWAC, MAC and NSAC jointly established a Focus Group on Brown Crab which produced advice on production and marketing of Brown Crab in the EU in 2021 ([link](#)).

Issues identified in this advice relating to the sustainable management of brown crab fisheries in the North Western Waters and the North Sea as well as relating to the EU market and international trade remain unresolved. As such, recommendations made in 2021 need to be followed up in order to progress the issues, including:

- a) Continue and expand where appropriate scientific monitoring of brown crab stocks to inform stakeholders on the stock status of their fishery and thus avoid excessive exploitation and other factors which could endanger the stock;
- b) Promote the exchange of good practices between traditional and newer entrants to the fishery, including national authorities, industry, and other relevant stakeholders, particularly on matters of grading, return to the sea, landings, transport, and fisheries management, in line with the FAO's Codex Alimentarius;
- c) In the context of the Blue Economy, ensure that marine spatial planning provides adequate space for traditional economic activities, such as pot fishing, including innovative projects to facilitate fishing within windfarms, as is currently being trialled in German waters;

d) Work with the EU fishing industry and other relevant stakeholders to develop new sustainable market outlets for brown crab. In the case of the Danish industry, where brown crab is traditionally a bycatch fishery for gillnet operators, consider, for example, the development of a market for unavoidable catches of crab bodies as bait for whelk fishing, as is practice in Ireland and in the UK;

During this work it is vital to ensure that all potential crab fishers as well as other relevant actors of the supply chain are involved, as the non-quota status of this species exposes it to un-managed exploitation and an option where displacement from other fisheries occurs.

Purpose

- Overview of previous work by NWWAC, NSAC and MAC on brown crab
- Overview of outcomes from the ACRUNET project
- Preparation of joint advice on brown crab fisheries management and supply chain matters for the consideration of the relevant Working Groups and potential adoption by the Executive Committees
- Review the impact of emerging environmental issues such as:
 - o Possible threat to brown crab populations due to rising sea temperatures, invasive species, new infections
 - o MPA, which limit fishing opportunities but may improve Crab survival – finding a balance
 - o Necessary reduction in emissions which will negatively affect fishing effort and the supply chain (in particular live transport: both vivier and air freight of live crab)
- Review the role of EU (DG SANTE & TRADE) regarding brown crab
- Review the route to market(s) and identify obstacles/solutions
- Develop clear guidelines for industry regarding exports to Asian countries

Proposed outcomes

- In-person international focus group style workshop involving research institutes, development agencies, ICES, Commission and STECF representatives, members from all three ACs to identify concrete advancements to the management processes in the relevant marine areas (possibly held in Brussels with COM facilitation)
- Based on the workshop, draft advice with a series of recommendations to the European Commission and relevant EU Member States on the brown crab supply chain issues, such as:
 - Management measures
 - Collection of information on fishing effort and fleet structures
 - Potential communication tools and information sources for operators

- Specific socio-economic challenges for stakeholders in this fishery.
- Better informed industry particularly regarding potential markets and supply chain issues including potential guidelines for industry regarding exports to Asian countries

Composition of the Focus Group

Maximum of four members per AC participating on the basis of knowledge of the issue under discussion, while striving for a fair representation of the different stakeholders.

Working languages

- English

Timeline

- First FG meeting in October 2022
- Dates of additional meetings to be determined by FG members
- Workshop in mid-January
- Regular progress reports to the relevant Working Groups
- Presentation and final report to the corresponding Working Groups and Executive Committees by September 2023

Location

- Meetings via virtual conferencing
- Possibility of in-person meetings if national safety rules allow
- Site visit to Emmahaven, Groningen Seaports, and Urk for overview of supply chain from best practice on vivier vessels to sorting, and packing
- Distribution of information and documents electronically

Resources, inputs and external sources

- Regulatory framework of the brown crab fisheries
- Data from the European Commission and the Member States on MCRS, landings, stock fluctuations, seasonality, route to market, and other parameters
- Input from members
- Input from ICES, COM, STECF, national marine research institutes, national seafood development agencies

Focus Group structure

- Chairperson: TBD by FG members
- Secretariat: tbd

Focus Group member organisations