

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL



**Joint North Western Waters Advisory Council,
North Sea Advisory Council and
Markets Advisory Council
Focus Group on Brown Crab (*Cancer pagurus*)**

WG1 Markets Advisory Council, 7 June 2023, Brussels



NWWAC, NSAC, MAC Joint FG Brown Crab

Some Context

Total Landings 2019

	EU	UK
(Live weight (tonnes))	10,000	31,000
Value (€)	28,000	85,000

Non-Quota species which creates a unique fishery management challenge.

The market consists of live and processed crab which has also created a very specialised supply chain and global route to market but developed from a very narrow live/fresh market based almost entirely in France.

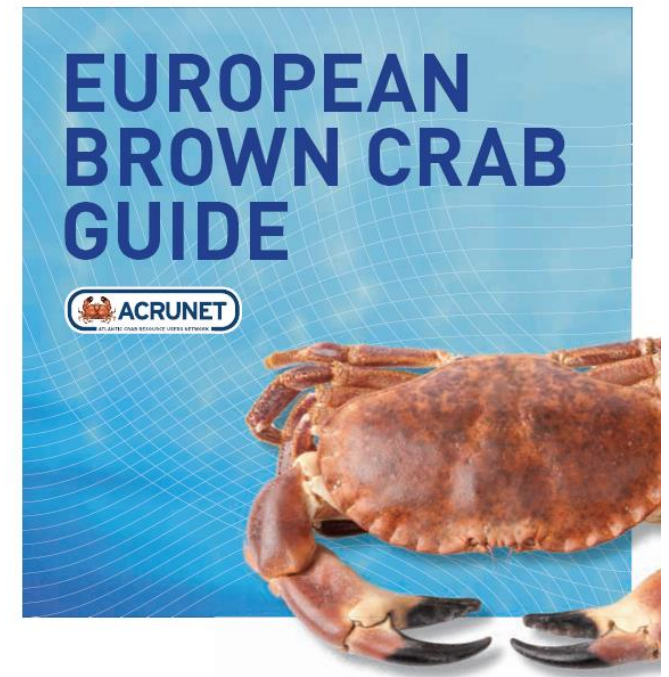
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- **How the current fishery evolved**

- 2000 – 2010: Largely a small vessel, inshore artisanal fishery constrained by weather conditions, distance from markets. A small number of >15m of dedicated vivier vessels entered the fishery mostly in the Channel but also NW Ireland
- 2010 – 2015: The >15m vivier vessels grew in number and expanded particularly on the NW Irish, Scottish and North Sea areas. Ireland was constrained by very low Days at Sea which drove this fleet to move further from their home waters. During this period the Asian markets began to open up
- During both periods the challenges of getting live crustaceans from remote fishing grounds to both European and Asian cities drove the development of sophisticated *vivier* and airfreight transport.
- 2016 – 2023: This has been, and to an extent still exists, a very challenging period for the industry. Brexit, COVID, the knock-on effects of those on the Asian supply chain and, most recently, the enormous drive for Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE)

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- **What actions have been taken in the past?**
- Irish and UK industry formed an informal group to discuss and improve markets and were joined by their French colleagues in the 2000- 2010 period.
- This informal group formed the basis of the ACRUNET project - ACRUNET was an Interreg project which examined many of the same issues still of concern.
(<https://www.acrunet.eu/acrunet-deliverables.html>)
ACRUNET produced some very valuable deliverables such as the European Brown Crab Guide available in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. BUT IT NEVER REACHED CONSENSUS ON CRAB MANAGEMENT.
- All the ACRUNET deliverables could, and should, be republished and, if necessary translated into further languages.



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- **What does the Focus Group consider are the greatest challenges for brown crab?**
- Stock levels: The landings are decreasing – is this due to over-fishing, climate change, new un-diagnosed disease?
- The possible negative impacts caused by open access to brown crab fisheries?
- Cadmium levels in brown crab which have frequently caused closure of Asian markets?
- Are there increased disease levels or is it more reporting?
- Does the development of ORE have a disproportionate effect on brown crab and those depending on those fisheries?
- Are Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) a threat or a safety net for brown crab?

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- **What are the available current management measures?**
- Minimum landing size (MLS):
- “Light” crab to be returned to sea: This is a measure which all responsible crab fishers already do as (1) light crab are likely to die if added to a store box or vivier tank and will cause many other crab to die also and (2) light crab will return to condition quite quickly and can be caught when fit for market.
- Only whole crab to be landed i.e. crab are de-clawed at sea and landed while the bodies may be used as whelk bait. This measure is difficult to monitor.
- Area/Seasonal limits: Would need to be specific to a particular area and based on scientific evidence to justify. Would also need to be monitored to measure what benefit, if any, results.
- Days at Sea limits: Has the ability to drive effort as the fleet will adapt to meet the criteria.

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- **Why has Non-Quota Status not worked for brown Crab?**
- It has meant that there are little or no constraints on increased effort
- There is not the same ratio of size of vessel versus catch – a relatively small crabber can service several thousand pots or traps.
- Modern vivier crabbers as small as 12m have as much catching capacity as a 15m vivier vessel.
- Brown Crab, and all crustacean species, have completely different life-cycles e.g. a brown crab goes through a cycle of shedding its exoskeleton to allow growth followed by a period of recovery. During this time they should not be landed but returned to sea and in a relatively short time they will return to condition. There is no “closed season” to facilitate this life cycle so attempting management as applied to finfish is not effective.

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- **What management measures would work? Results from the May Workshop**
- Stock levels: The landings are decreasing – is this due to over-fishing, climate change, new un-diagnosed disease? How significant is by-catch?
- STECF report – presentation to the Workshop available – identify information gaps – is MEY (Maximum Economic Yield) an option?
- Co-existence with ORE installations? UK and Netherlands investigations in the North Sea
- The possible effects of EMF (electric-magnetic fields) on crustaceans?
- Cadmium issues for Asian markets – how this is managed and are the efforts paying off?

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- The Joint NWWAC, NWAC and MAC will compile advice for the European Commission in the coming weeks. Your input would be most welcome. Please contact the AC secretariats if you wish to be included or contact me directly:-
- Norah Parke
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- Thank you for your interest.