



## Meeting of the *Nephrops* Long Term Management Plan Development Group

Friday 25<sup>th</sup> September 2009  
Pentland House, Edinburgh

Rapporteur: Tony Hawkins

Draft for Demersal WG

### 1. Introduction, Apologies & Report of Last Meeting

- 1.1 The chairman, Michael Park welcomed participants to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Pim Visser, Michael Anderson, Hazel Curtis, Helen Dobby, Caroline Gamblin, and Sebastian Metz.
- 1.2 A previous meeting of the *Nephrops* LTMP Development Group had been held on 14th April 2009 and had resulted in the preparation of a draft Long Term Management Plan for the North Sea *Nephrops* fisheries. That plan followed the outline agreed at the Edinburgh Workshop and incorporated social and economic as well as biological and ecosystem objectives.
- 1.3 The draft plan had now been commented upon by others, and new text had been included. Hazel Curtis of Seafish and Helen Dobby of Marine Scotland Science had made especially important contributions. We could now go forward and refine the plan further for presentation to the Demersal Working group and then to fishers.

### 2. The scope of the LTMP

- 2.1 It would be especially important for the plan to be in a form which could readily be understood and accepted by fishers, providing options for them to consider. The plan should be very clear and should say clearly where we are now, where we want to go, and how we will get there. There were potential conflicts between different objectives and difficult decisions would have to be taken.
- 2.2 The core issue within the plan would be concerned with the management of the different functional units for *Nephrops* within the North Sea. We should not simply

suggest one option for dealing with this issue. There were alternative approaches. We would also have to consider how the plan would fit within a reformed CFP. Self regulation might dispense with the need for horizontal regulations applying to all fisheries. There would be much greater scope for a regional approach.

- 2.3 Several participants thought a clear vision of where we wanted to go should be provided at the very beginning of the plan. The management plan itself should be quite short and simple. What we had now was the text which might accompany the plan itself. The new plan would need to go beyond a simple statement of harvest control rules which formed the basis of most current plans. It would be wider in scope and it would be long term – aiming perhaps 15 years into the future. It should include a market perspective and should be aimed at achieving profitable fisheries. The plan would need to consider the impact of climate and ecosystem changes. With *Nephrops*, any major change in cod abundance could have major impact upon the *Nephrops* stocks and the fishery. Managing change should be part of the overall vision.

### **3. The main objectives of the LTMP**

- 3.1 It was suggested that the main objective of the LTMP should be to achieve a sustainable and profitable *Nephrops* fishery, matched to the resource, taking account of ecosystem changes, and minimising damage to the environment. The fishery itself should be stable, with safeguards against over-exploitation. Information would need to be collected on the fleet and its structure, especially in relation to the different functional units, but the plan should not be too intrusive or dictate the future structure of the fleet.
- 3.2 Following discussion of the overall objectives of the LTMP it was agreed that we did not want to develop an abstract vision based on ‘theological’ considerations. Rather, the vision should come from close consideration of the biological, social and economic objectives. Also, profitability of the fleet should not be our main concern. There were too many factors which influenced that. Markets change and it is not easy to forecast how they will develop. The important task was to match overall fleet capacity to the state of the resource. We could be sure that there were no great untapped resources of *Nephrops* within the North Sea. We had to deal with the resources we had. Profitability was essentially the concern of individual businesses. However, we would need much more analysis of the fishery, the fishing fleets and the markets, as they are now, to formulate plans on where we want to be.
- 3.3 It was suggested that resilience of the sector might be an important factor. This led to a discussion of the role of social objectives. Such objectives required knowledge of which communities or ports derived benefit from the *Nephrops* fisheries – not forgetting that many people derived benefits from these fisheries, not just those involved in the fishing fleet. The social benefits from these fisheries were quite widespread.
- 3.4 In social and economic terms what we were really aiming for was a modern, safe, fishing fleet, able to renew itself and able to provide a stable supply of fish,

matched to the requirements of the market, at stable prices for the processing industry and consumers, operating in a way which would enable the costs of all the participants to be met. Essentially we should be setting out to provide conditions where all those involved in the industry could achieve the best possible outcome for their businesses. These were important aspirations, which needed to be recorded, but should not specify how individual businesses should operate. Bodies already existed which were charged with putting incentives in place to achieve maximum quality and a stable supply of *Nephrops* to the markets. Oversupply over time was a particular feature of the *Nephrops* fishery. We could not resolve these problems within the LTMP but we could draw attention to them.

- 3.5 What we should do was to address the problems which arose when supply, and the efficient operation of the industry, was influenced by regulatory decisions made by fishery managers. There was no doubt that cod recovery measures, and quota and effort restrictions on other fish stocks could affect the *Nephrops* fishery dramatically. There was an opportunity for anyone to jump into the *Nephrops* fishery. This had both its good and bad sides. It provided flexibility for some fishers, but this could have an adverse impact upon others.
- 3.6 A major management consideration for *Nephrops* stocks is that management should be at the functional unit level rather than a North Sea level. Participants discussed the problem of limiting exploitation of especially vulnerable functional units. At the last meeting we had endorsed 'of which no more than' provisions for functional units which were under threat. However this would not always be a satisfactory solution. It would for example restrict fishing unduly for those dependent on that particular functional unit. Imposition of such a clause might also put accreditation of the fishery in that area at risk. Separate TACs for the different functional units was an alternative, and was a preferable arrangement from a scientific standpoint. However separate TACs would give rise to problems of relative stability and in the allocation of the TACs, both domestically and internationally. In the past the Commission had suggested basing an overall North Sea TAC on the state of the weakest functional unit, but that would be unduly precautionary as it would also restrict fishing in areas where *Nephrops* were abundant. Effort restrictions within a functional unit were another possibility and perhaps a capacity cap in terms of setting out a list of permitted vessels (based on historic activity). Gear restrictions – for example restricting gears to single rig – were another possibility. The implications of these different management regimes would have to be considered carefully.
- 3.7 A further issue to be considered was whether there was a need for more functional units to be defined. Alternatively, should some functional units be merged? There was a problem with catches taken from outside the current functional units and we should highlight this as a topic requiring more information. Some of these areas might be difficult to survey as they probably consisted of small pockets of *Nephrops* distributed within a larger area.

#### **4. Elaboration of the LTMP**

- 4.1 Participants then went through the draft LTMP page by page with more detailed comments. The revised LTMP is presented with this report.

## 5. Action Points

5.1 The next stage in the preparation of the LTMP is endorsement of the general approach by the Demersal Working Group and the ExCom. Important issues to be resolved include:

- The need for management at a functional unit level
- Consideration of how fishing mortality on the vulnerable functional units might be limited
- Controlling the transfer of effort into the North Sea *Nephrops* fishery
- Setting economic objectives
- The possibility of designating new functional units, or at least providing information to enable stocks which fall outside the current units to be considered fully
- Consideration of how reductions of fishing mortality in the longer term might be achieved
- Consider how contractions in fleet size might be achieved?
- Seek alternatives to catch composition rules for reducing discards – a discard pilot project?
- Marine Protected Areas for soft muddy bottoms, or development of less damaging gears?

5.2 New information which may be required includes:

- An analysis of the numbers and types of vessels and their capacity, from all nations, operating within the different functional units. There is a general lack of effort data, especially for the under-10m fleet.
- More information on markets and the factors affecting them, including:
  - Seasonal variation in landings and in quality and their impact on markets
  - Seasonal and other fluctuations in demand
- JAKFISH to provide a short commentary on the assessments, and on alternative management objectives, expressed in simple language.
- Information on economic trends

- Information on by-catch and discards of whitefish and other species for all sectors of the fleet. Those experts advising on accreditation of the North Sea *Nephrops* trawl fishery have noted that the discarding of cod, haddock and whiting is not routinely recorded. It is not clear which sectors of the fleet may be discarding, and whether there are inshore/offshore differences, or differences between different grounds
- Development of ecological indicators for the *Nephrops* fishery
- Information on the damage which *Nephrops* trawls cause to the seabed and marine fauna
- Defensive mapping of fishing effort for *Nephrops* in the North Sea, using VMS and other sources, to ensure that any displacement of effort as a result of MPA and wind-farm proposals can be evaluated.
- Further examination of the economic information, in particular estimations of capital invested is necessary to determine the level of profitability and return on investment within *Nephrops* fleets throughout the North Sea. The collection of economic data from all Member States engaged in the fishery should be a priority.
- Information on downstream multipliers, and the benefits obtained by processors and those components of the industry closest to the market.

## 6. Attending

Michael Park	Chair, SFF/NSRAC
Tony Hawkins	Rapporteur
Barrie Deas	NFFO/NSRAC
Jane Sandell	SFO
Dennis Clarke	NFFO
Anne McLay	Marine Scotland Science
John Watt	SWFPA
Craig Burton	Seafood Scotland
Edward Whittle	Whitby Seafoods
Colin Brodie	Seafish
Giles Bartlett	WWF
Colin Faulkner	Scottish Government