



***Nephrops* Development Group  
Record of Meeting with Fishers  
Rex Hotel, Whitley Bay  
19<sup>th</sup> June 2010**

**Rapporteur: Tony Hawkins**

**Draft Record**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 Barrie Deas opened the meeting and introduced the participants. He explained the role of the NSRAC and its *Nephrops* Development Group and described the context of the Long Term Management Plan for *Nephrops*. Long Term Management Plans were going to be central to the future of the CFP and already featured heavily in the annual EU/Norway agreement. Should we wait until the Commission wrote LTMPs for us or should we take the initiative and prepare our own LTMPs in the form of advice from the NSRAC? *Nephrops* had been chosen to begin the process of writing our own plans.

1.2 Although management plans can be short, and consist just of simple harvest control rules, for *Nephrops* the NSRAC had chosen to prepare a deeper broader document that defined where we wanted to be in terms of:

- Biological conservation; obtaining a sustainable fishery
- Ecological objectives; meeting Society's demands that the impact of fishing be within acceptable limits
- Economic and social objectives; ensuring a profitable fishery

1.3 The NSRAC had also decided that the LTMP for *Nephrops* should not be passed down from above but developed in close cooperation with the industry itself. To meet this commitment at a UK level a series of meetings were being held in Whitley Bay, Eyemouth, Pittenweem and Fraserburgh. Similar meetings would be taking place with *Nephrops* fishermen in other EU countries.

1.4 We had prepared a plan which outlined the different issues but it was just a draft. The actual plan would take fishers' views into account. This was your fishery and this plan would be your plan. The current plan presented a list of options for discussion about:

- Where we are now in the *Nephrops* fishery

- Where we want to be in 5 or 10 years
  - How we are going to get there
- 1.5 The more that the fishing industry could take charge of its destiny, the less that it would be subject to the demands of the Commission, with TACs set on the basis of ever changing criteria and effort restrictions that forced up costs but delivered little in terms of improving sustainability of the fisheries. A credible and comprehensive LTMP offered a way through which we could escape the worst features of the CFP:
- Micro-management
  - Remote and bureaucratic management measures
  - Complexity
- 1.6 Tony Hawkins, the rapporteur of the NSRAC, would take us through the draft plan before it was opened up for discussion.

## **2. Presentation of the draft LTMP for North Sea *Nephrops***

- 2.1 The plan was presented. A summary of the presentation is available on the NSRAC website at [www.nsrac.org](http://www.nsrac.org)
- 2.2 General discussion centred upon the objectives of the LTMP, and the measures that would be necessary to make the *Nephrops* fishery more sustainable. There was particular concern over the state of stocks in the Farne Deeps, and how this functional unit might be protected against the heavy invasion of fishing effort which had characterised the fishery in recent years. Although some flexibility in the ability to roam between different areas was advantageous, and was provided for under the CFP, nevertheless heavy effort was being concentrated into a narrow coastal strip and this was affecting the *Nephrops* stock adversely. There was particular concern over the damage being done by the larger twin-rig vessels where the heavy 'clumps' used to couple the nets together were capable of damaging the seabed.
- 2.2 Discarding was not seen to be a major problem in the fishery. Some small *Nephrops*, below the minimum landing size, were discarded and there was discussion of whether there might be benefits in landing all *Nephrops* and removing the MLS restrictions. There was a perennial problem in this fishery, as with others, over the discarding of large marketable whiting because of lack of quota. There is a problem over the mismatch of quota availability with high whiting abundance in this area, as in other areas, and this problem is already being addressed by the NSRAC.
- 2.3 There was discussion of different management measures including separate TACs; the introduction of the '*of which no more than*' restrictions for functional units where fishing mortality was especially high and the fishery was less sustainable, the capping of effort, and restrictions to particular methods of fishing. It was recognised that local TACs and '*of which no more than*' measures might have an especially strong impact on local fishers, who were not able to switch their fishing to other more distant areas.

- 2.4 Discussion was then concentrated on the three main areas of the LTMP and resulted in a series of general thoughts and conclusions which are described below.

### **3 Biological Objectives**

- 3.1 It is in everyone's interests to make the fishery sustainable and not to fish too hard on *Nephrops*. In doing this for *Nephrops*, for which conventional stock assessments are not appropriate, it is sensible to do this in terms of setting a target fishing mortality (F), as catch rates are easy to monitor. It might not be too difficult to arrive at an overall target F to be used for the setting of the North Sea TAC. This might be around the value of  $F_{0.1}$ , which is slightly higher than the value which currently prevailed on grounds like the Fladen, but lower than the current value for the Farne Deeps. This target could be approached gradually.
- 3.2 There is an important need to prevent sudden influxes of fishing pressure onto vulnerable grounds like the Farne Deeps. However, the solution may have to be tailored to local conditions. There is a glimmer of a solution for the Farne deeps in the adoption of provisions like '*of which no more than x tonnes be taken from the Farne Deeps*'. However, by itself that might have an unduly harsh effect on local fishers with smaller vessels, who were unable to fish elsewhere. Perhaps quotas could be allocated in a way which would protect those fishers with a track record in the affected area? Currently, vessels from the Irish Sea were able to gain access to North Sea quota by trading with North Sea P.Os. The North Sea P.Os might not be prepared to trade this quota if '*of which no more than*' provisions were in place. A solution might be found to this problem in allocating quota at a national level. Jane Sandell would look at some of the quota allocation options.
- 3.3 There was some scepticism over risks to *Nephrops* stocks from a recovering cod stock, in terms of heavier feeding upon *Nephrops*. However, there might be other circumstances under which particular stocks become highly depleted, for example environmental change. It was acknowledged by fishers that it would be useful to set trigger points to enable fishing mortality to be adjusted in the event of a sudden collapse or increase in the stocks. The trigger point might be based on results from the underwater TV surveys and the size distribution of *Nephrops in the catches*. We would ask JAKFISH to provide advice on how a trigger level might be set and how an appropriate new value might be arrived at for circumstances where *Nephrops* became substantially less, or more, abundant.
- 3.4 There was a risk of damage to the relatively narrow strip of *Nephrops* grounds in the Farne Deeps from the deployment of twin-rigs and other damaging gears. These problems were unlikely to be resolved through local agreements but might be resolved through the adoption of additional ecological conservation measures aimed at reducing the impact of damaging gears.

### **4. Ecological Objectives**

- 4.1 In terms of discards, it was recognised that this was not a big issue in the Farne Deeps, as a recent report had pointed out. Moreover, discarding was often seasonal. In these circumstances fishers were reluctant to take on the burden of recording discards. The main problem was with whiting, but this was a problem for all fleets and resulted from the mismatch between the high whiting abundance and the low quotas being allocated. Wider solutions were being sought for this particular problem; one possible solution being the introduction of catch quotas rather than

landing quotas for whitefish (see NSRAC paper on whiting discards on the NASRAC website). Some *Nephrops* below the minimum landing size were being discarded and there might be benefits from removing the MLS restrictions to enable all *Nephrops* to be landed. Those *Nephrops* being discarded did not survive and as there are advantages to fishers in not targeting small *Nephrops* (as they are difficult to process) there are already incentives for reducing these as a proportion of the catch, either by moving away from areas where small *Nephrops* are abundant or through adopting more selective fishing gears. There would be advantages from landing the whole *Nephrops* catch in terms of providing valuable data to scientists. A discard 'allowance' could perhaps be added to the current TACs for the discards to be landed. It was agreed that the advantages of taking away MLS restrictions and landing all *Nephrops* would be investigated further. There had already been a trial, in which English vessels had been permitted to land all that they caught. We would need to look at the results of that trial.

- 4.2 In terms of the capture of threatened or endangered species the main problems were likely to be through the catching of sharks, skates and rays. Few of these were being caught but this may be a consequence of their low current abundance. It was considered important to monitor the capture of any endangered or threatened species.
- 4.3 In terms of impact upon the seabed and vulnerable habitats, *Nephrops* grounds are often on very fine mud which is susceptible to damage. It was thought that the heavy 'clumps' associated with twin-rigging were likely to be damaging to the seabed and that it might be better to restrict such vessels from fishing in especially vulnerable areas like the Farne Deep. There is a lack of information on the damage done to the seabed by the different gears used to catch *Nephrops* which needs to be addressed by scientists. Marine Protected Areas provide an alternative solution for conserving vulnerable sea life and habitats. There is already pressure for member states to move in this direction from the Commission through various Directives. In addition, some member states were taking their own initiatives (like the English 'Net Gains' proposals). Fishers were reluctant to 'volunteer' areas for designation, however, and were concerned that cooperation with those seeking MPAs could lead to very large areas being designated. On the other hand, cooperation in other areas like Rockall Bank had resulted in solutions satisfactory to all parties. There are undoubted advantages from the closure of areas to fishing in terms of enabling comparisons to be made between fished and un-fished areas and assessing impacts on the seabed and the fragile animals which live there.

## **5. Economic and Social Objectives**

- 5.1 The main economic target should be a profitable fishing fleet. There is evidence from Seafish that smaller vessels come under more pressure in hard times. However, this was disputed. Currently it is not just *Nephrops* fishers who are not making the profits they would like to. Some processors too were unprofitable. The main economic problem was thought to be the great influx of larger more mobile vessels into the *Nephrops* fleet when other fisheries came under restrictions. Fishing for *Nephrops* is seen as the fall-back position. Although that gave flexibility to some fishers, it had an adverse effect upon conservation of the stocks in some areas and had a strong economic and social impact upon those fishermen normally operating in those areas. The lack of decommissioning schemes made this influx of vessels almost inevitable. The fishers present thought that there were perhaps too many of the larger more mobile *Nephrops* vessels. There might be advantages in having a more restrictive

licensing regime, or restrictions to particular gear types in vulnerable areas. However, people had to be able to leave the industry with dignity and with safeguards. The imposition of blunt measures by fishery managers had been a problem in the past. Restrictions in quotas and in days at sea affected profitability. Reform of the CFP should lead to greater provision for regional and local measures and might enable vessels to become more profitable.

- 5.2 There was general agreement that the main aim should be to move to a lower volume, higher value fishery – as the *Nephrops* fishery had been in the past. This would benefit both catchers and processors. However, there was no obvious solution to achieving this aim in the context of a fishery with wide access and with the current system of rights-based management. One possibility might be a move to a lower target fishing mortality – perhaps based on maximum economic yield. However, a period of adjustment would be required with such a move. People would go out of business and there would be a need to soften the blow. There might be advantages in adopting a system of quota trading like the Danish model, where small boats could buy quota from other small boats and from large boats, but larger vessels could only buy from large boats – a kind of non-return valve for protecting smaller vessels. We need national systems for quota trading adapted to local conditions and to the problems that arise, and with adequate safeguards to prevent excessive consolidation. There is a need to protect local infrastructure and training facilities but this can be difficult within a free market. These are perhaps issues for member states to resolve.

## 6 Summing Up

- 6.1 Michael Park summed up by pointing out that this was the first of a series of meetings with the industry. We were seeking comment and agreement on the main objectives of a Long Term Management Plan for *Nephrops*. Although attendance had not been as great as we would have liked, the quality of the comments had been high and we now had much to think about. A report would be prepared, summarising the discussions.

## 7. Action Points for the NSRAC

1. Jane Sandell will look at some of the quota allocation options for <i>Nephrops</i> which might assist in controlling the vessels fishing in a vulnerable area like the Farne Deep under 'of which no more than provisions' (3.2).	Jane Sandell
2. JAKFISH will be asked to provide advice on how a trigger level might be set and how an appropriate new value might be arrived at for circumstances where <i>Nephrops</i> became substantially less, or more, abundant (3.3).	Ewan Bell
3. Find a recent report on discarding by <i>Nephrops</i> vessels along the north east coast of England (4.1).	Barrie Deas? Ewan Bell?
4. Find the report on a recent trial, in which English vessels had been permitted to land all that they caught (4.1).	Barrie Deas? Ewan Bell?
5. The advantages of taking away MLS restrictions for <i>Nephrops</i> and for landing all the <i>Nephrops</i> caught	<i>Nephrops</i> Group

will be investigated further (4.1).	
6. The lack of information on the damage done to the seabed by the different gears used to catch <i>Nephrops</i> needs to be addressed by scientists. (4.3). Perhaps the Secretariat should seek scientific advice from ICES through the Commission?	Secretariat?

## 8. Participants

Giles Bartlett  
Mike Park (Chair)  
Barrie Deas  
Tony Hawkins  
Jane Sandell  
Ewan Bell  
Dennis Clark  
Edward Whittle  
Terry Auld  
Andrew Auld  
Michael Smith

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