



***Nephrops* Development Group Record of Meeting with Fishers St Andrew's Hall, Fraserburgh 31st July 2010**

Rapporteur: Tony Hawkins

Draft Record

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Michael Park 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. We should not wait until the Commission wrote LTMPs for us but should take the initiative and prepare our own LTMPs. *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, Fraserburgh, Eyemouth, and Pittenweem. 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 and has been modified from the earlier version to include a short summary of the latest ICES advice.
- 2.2 The meeting then broke up into three subgroups to consider the three sets of objectives for the management plan. Giles Bartlett discussed with each group the ecological objectives; Michael Park and Jane Sandell discussed the economic and social objectives; and Tony Hawkins and Helen Dobby discussed the biological objectives.
- 2.2 Notes were prepared from these discussions and are summarised below.

3 Biological Objectives

- 3.1 The facilitators explained that it is in everyone's interests to make the fishery sustainable and not to fish too hard on *Nephrops*. With *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 should 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 Scientists were of the opinion that *Nephrops* needed to be managed as separate management units and were presenting their stock assessments by functional units to facilitate this approach. This would reduce the flexibility currently available to the fleet. Another key issue for the *Nephrops* fishery is to prevent sudden influxes of fishing pressure onto vulnerable grounds like the Farne Deeps.
- 3.3 In discussion, fishers liked the idea of a Long Term Management Plan and the idea of greater stability and emphasised the lack of continuity under the current regime,

where circumstances changed not only from year to year but also from day to day. Change in the management regime has to take place. However, with many of the recent developments in the fishery it was probably too late to rescue the position. A great influx of effort had taken place with the restrictions on the west coast grounds, and also with the changes under the cod recovery plan; where vessels had been forced to target *Nephrops* because of the restrictions on catching cod and other whitefish. In addition, vessels were being forced to use small meshes to retain their status as *Nephrops* vessels although there were conservation benefits from moving to larger meshes. Boats targeting fish could fish for *Nephrops* but *Nephrops* vessels were unable to target whitefish. This had led to an overcrowded *Nephrops* fishery. The *Nephrops* fishery had become a fishery of last resort. That made management very difficult. Overall there was a need to slow development of the fishery down, especially in those areas at risk of over-fishing.

- 3.4 There was no strong support for the management of the individual functional units or the individual allocation of quotas to each of the areas. Fishers wanted the flexibility to be able to change fishing grounds. If there were to be restrictions placed on individual functional units then one solution was to introduce '*of which no more than*' restrictions. This was preferred to the setting of individual TACs. However, although some fishers thought this would work others did not like it. They thought it would lead to misreporting. It would be better to introduce gear and other restrictions. Some favoured a solution based on restricting the horsepower of vessels fishing in the more vulnerable areas. Indeed some agreed that there was a need to protect small scale fishers who were having less effect upon the stocks. An alternative to restricting horsepower was to restrict fishing to single trawls and to ban multi-rig trawls in the affected areas, although not all fishers agreed with this. One solution might be to settle on a maximum gear spread – say 280 feet – which could be fished with a single trawl or twin rig. Others thought this would be too difficult to enforce. Another solution was to restrict days at sea based on the type of gear used. However, there was a general plea not to introduce too many restrictions and some were opposed to any gear and horsepower restrictions. There was already a need to change cod-end on moving to the Farne Deeps simply because of differences in the Scottish and English regulations. Although the English cod end mesh size was larger any conservation benefit was negated by the thicker twine – leading to higher discards.
- 3.5 There was little support for closed areas as a management tool. There was already a burden placed upon fishers through existing closures. It was suggested that if the total area already closed to fishing was estimated it would prove to be significant.
- 3.6 The Farne Deeps was a particularly vulnerable area. It provided a winter fishery, and it enabled vessels to do daily landings and return to port more often. There were too many vessels fishing that ground. It was appreciated that some of the local fishermen based at Shields did not have the option of fishing elsewhere because of their small vessel sizes.
- 3.7 There was an discussion on the wish of many fishers to make their vessels fish more effectively and how regulation should not restrict the ability of fishers to do better for themselves in terms of larger vessels with more effective gears. It was agreed that this led to 'technology creep', and that if every fisher improved their efficiency then this would place more pressure on the stocks. However, some fishers felt strongly that the fishery management regime should not curb the freedom of some fishers to fish more effectively. Any problems would be resolved by shrinkage of the fleet through economic forces.

- 3.8 Discarding of *Nephrops* was touched upon. Very few small *Nephrops* were caught on the Fladen where the larger vessels were already using very large meshes. The smaller *Nephrops* in that fishery were generally tailed. Other fishers accepted that on some grounds 'scufflers' (small *Nephrops*) were caught and that these were discarded. There was not sufficient capacity on the smaller vessels to retain them for landing. It was not possible to tackle this through an increase overall mesh size because that would render the vessel liable to classification as a whitefish vessel.

4. Ecological Objectives

- 4.1 Ecological sustainability is an important aspect of plan. Management practices should be set so as to maintain ecological processes and minimise impact on other species and on habitats for the benefit of future generations, this aspect of the plan should be complementary to the other aspects of the plan and its overall strategy. A key goal of the *Nephrops* fishery LTMP is to minimise impacts on the ecosystem and to promote recovery.

- 4.2 The working group have identified three objectives to achieve these ecological goals:
- Reduce discards in the fishery
 - Minimise damage to threatened, endangered and protected species
 - Minimise impacts on benthic habitats and associated communities and allow for recovery

4.3 Discards:

Generally, it was felt that the way to reduce discards was to increase the amount of quota available to the *Nephrops* fleet. It was thought that the amount of discards in the *Nephrops* fishery is presented as being high relative to the whitefish catch, however when expressed as a proportion of the total catch (i.e. including *Nephrops*) then the relative and absolute quantities would not be as significant. There were differing views as to the potential for technical measures to reduce discarding more than is already being achieved, although one skipper felt that separator trawls could potentially offer a solution in some circumstances. Another skipper thought large meshes immediately behind the headline was another adaptation which offered some potential. There was universal disapproval at the concept of catch limits being implemented in the *Nephrops* fishery, although this might have been affected by the relatively low whitefish quotas available to this sector under the present restrictions.

- 4.4 One group highlighted the hypocrisy regarding the use of 80mm nets and the increase in the number of days allocated relative to vessels which previously used nets in excess of 100mm when targeting *Nephrops*. This perversity was unanimously seen as being contrary to effective conservation and it increased discards, as the smaller mesh generally retained more undersized fish and other marine organisms.
- 4.5 Another issue, expressed in two of the groups was that other Member States operating in fisheries shared with Scottish vessels do not operate to the same conservation rules as apply to them e.g. Square mesh panels, Real Time Closures etc. Danish and Swedish fleets were explicitly mentioned in this regard and they were purported to discard significant quantities of small *Nephrops* (high-grading). It was hoped that one outcome of a Long Term Management Plan would be that fleets

operating in an area would have to abide to the same rules. The current system was seen to be unfair, particularly as Scotland has the most stringent conservation rules, in their view.

4.6 Threatened, endangered and protected species:

Generally it was thought that the *Nephrops* fishery caught very few species which might fall under this category. The facilitator mentioned sharks and skate (including rays) as one group of species which might be impacted by the fishery. Fishers generally thought the by-catch of these species was very low, although more rays were caught when fishing the Noup grounds. The facilitator suggested that the lack of information surrounding capture of these and other species is a factor that needs to be addressed by the plan, and that there is a crossover here between the quality of fishery dependent data available to scientists which might result in higher quotas, if fishers can demonstrate higher abundances than is seen independent surveys. Fishers welcomed the opportunity to increase observer coverage, particularly if accompanied by an exemption from the effort system; which would mean that boats could use monies use to lease days at sea to pay for observers.

4.7 Impacts on benthic habitats and associated communities:

Parts of the seabed with a soft substrate are highly diverse and productive areas which are of high ecological value. However disturbance from fishing gear is known to impact these areas. The facilitator explained to the groups why it is important to constrain the spatial footprint of the fishery to minimise its impact on the habitats and species that live there. Fishers generally disagreed that additional areas needed to be set aside, and one suggested that areas surrounding oil rigs and facilities could be used to serve this purpose. The facilitator also explained that such areas could be used to compare *Nephrops* between fished and un-fished areas, which can potentially be used to support the wider assessment within the functional unit, particularly when trying to measure natural and fishing mortality. The fishers seemed partially accepting of this position, and they appeared to accept the need to limit the overall environmental footprint of the fishery.

5. Economic and Social Objectives

- 5.1 It was clear that the over whelming requirement for the fleet was profitability but that this profitability was dependent on the status of the stock. It was underlined that a trade-off, which many saw as a limitation on the number of vessels engaged in the *Nephrops* fishery to the current number, was required to protect the stock, while ensuring continued survival of the fishing businesses. It was thought that simple regulation was essential as a precursor to profitability and to any such trade-off. All of the contributors saw flexibility and the ability to diversify as essential for providing economic resilience and that the ability to make sound economic choices was not currently present in EU and Scottish Legislation as the present regime pigeon-holed businesses, a situation they felt would worsen in the coming years. It was felt that economic success was necessary to provide for the social needs and the health of the communities associated with fishing; profitable businesses lead to local employment and increased disposable income that is then spent in the community while reducing the social costs associated with lower incomes. It was clear, however, that the participants appreciated the need to balance the social and economic requirements to ensure that business rationalisation did not become undesirable, resulting in a few large vessels owned by a small number of individuals or

businesses. The diverse nature of the fleet was seen as positive characteristic, enabling vessels to target certain species while avoiding over exploitation.

- 5.2 The need for reinvestment and regeneration of the fleet was highlighted by several participants although they felt that progress in this direction would encourage consolidation. Scrap and build and preferential loan schemes were seen as possible interventions as well as other instruments that would encourage a small amount of the necessary consolidation. Shrinkage of the fleet was seen to be almost inevitable, as weaker businesses were weeded out, and was considered by most as a positive step, although it was acknowledged that, in the current tough economic climate, it would be survival of the fittest.
- 5.3 The issue of new entrants and the continued survival of the industry through succession was met with very different opinions. Some contributors felt that public assistance and licensing rules should take account of the ease with which new entrants could access the assets necessary to become skippers and owners. Other contributors felt strongly that such assistance would reduce the fitness of the industry overall by diluting the resilience and determination of candidates, thus negatively impacting the success of vessels and the profitability of the fleet into the future. It was unclear exactly how the industry saw its own role in promoting such succession and the exact method of intervention through regulation or public assistance was not agreed due to the differing views. It was generally thought that a profitable and well managed sector was the best way to attract the next generation of skippers and crew.
- 5.4 Market and marketing issues were a constant theme throughout the meeting. The depressed market conditions, alongside ever increasing operating costs, were seen to be the biggest barrier to profitability and there was some suggestion that measures should be introduced to reduce the oversupply of certain grades of *Nephrops* as the quickest way to deliver an increase the price of the product. An increase in mesh size and quotas on tails were suggested but it was accepted that stabilising the supply would also have an impact on overall price. The need to promote the product, particularly domestically, was highlighted and the prevalence of product substitution with cheaper import was also noted.
- 5.5 It was widely felt that there should be a method of capping entry into the *Nephrops* fleet to improve the profitability of the existing fleet by stabilising the competition for both quota and markets and removing latent capacity (hip pocket licences) was viewed as a positive step. The number of vessels was seen to be a comparatively minor issue; the capacity of the fleet was deemed to be more important with the expansion of higher capacity vessels enabled by the availability of licences. It appeared that, as this was the main issue, the latent capacity within the system was more of a problem than the active licenses.
- 5.6 Gear restrictions at an EU level were deemed to have the potential to have a positive effect, ensuring equity within the Community. The use of multiple rigs (above twin rig) by other EU vessels was viewed as having a negative impact on the *Nephrops* stocks due to high grading and was seen to be inequitable as Scottish legislation currently forbids the use of rigs greater than two nets by Scottish vessels in all waters. Restrictions in terms of fishing area were thought to be negative and would further reduce the essential flexibility of the fleet.

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. We were very grateful to those fishermen who had given up their Saturday morning to discuss these issues with us. A report would now be prepared, summarising the discussions, and this would be circulated to all who had taken part.
- 6.2 Fishers attending the meeting were asked to review the report and write back if they had any comments or amendments to suggest.

7. Participants

Giles Bartlett	WWF
Michael Park (Chair)	SFF
Tony Hawkins	Rapporteur
Jane Sandell	SFO Ltd
Helen Dobby	Marine Scotland Science
George West	Bountiful
Alistair Bruce	Challenger
A. Bruce	New Dawn
James Reid	Horizon
James Reid	Horizon
James Reid	Watchful
Peter Garden	Auriga
James J. Cowie	Ocean Quest
Bill Wiseman	Lynden II
Peter Gait	Press On
Ian Balgowan	Harvester
Trevor Summers	Demares
Iain Maclean	Courage
James Buchan	Amity II
Nick Lake	Moray Firth Inshore Fisheries Group
John Clark	Reliance II