



***Nephrops* Development Group
Record of Meeting with Fishers
St Andrew's Hall, Fraserburgh
Saturday 16th October 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 in advising the Commission and described why the NSRAC was preparing a 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. We should take the initiative and prepare our own LTMPs. We had chosen *Nephrops* as the first fishery for which we would write our own plans. The structure of the plan would be based on a framework prepared after discussions with scientists and fishermen. An important feature of the plan was that fishers themselves would be involved in preparing it.
- 1.2 The preparation of the plan was a completely new process, which we were pioneering. 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 To meet the commitment to consulting the industry a series of meetings had been held in Whitley Bay, Fraserburgh, Eyemouth, and Pittenweem. We were now returning to Fraserburgh to include fishers who could not attend the earlier meeting. Similar meetings would be taking place with *Nephrops* fishermen in Denmark and the Netherlands.
- 1.4 We had prepared a plan which outlined the different issues. However, it was just a draft intended to stimulate discussion and raise a number of options. 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 of:

- 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 better things would be. However, we had to produce a credible and comprehensive LTMP which could be agreed by the Commission.
- 1.6 Tony Hawkins, the rapporteur of the NSRAC, would take us through the draft plan before it was opened up for discussion. Scientists were present, Helen Dobby and Ewan Bell, together with Michael Park, and there would be full scope for discussion of the plan with them.

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 went on to consider the three sets of objectives for the management plan. Helen Dobby and Ewan Bell led the discussion on the biological objectives; Tony Hawkins led the discussion of the ecological objectives. Michael Park led the discussion of the economic and social objectives.
- 2.2 Notes were prepared from these discussions and are summarised below.

3. Biological Objectives

- 3.1 Helen and Ewan corrected Tony's remarks made during the presentation which implied that scientists wished to introduce TACs for each of the Functional Units for *Nephrops*. It was more accurate to say that scientists think that management needs to be done at a local level. TACs for each Functional Unit were not necessarily the best way to take account of local depletions. There were examples of such local depletions in other seas – for example off the Portuguese coast and on the Porcupine Bank. In the North Sea the Farne Deep had been in a good state up until 2006 when a large influx of Scots and Irish boats had gone onto the grounds and depleted the stocks. The state of *Nephrops* there was still not looking good. Some kind of management was required which would take account of such local depletions.
- 3.2 Further scientific surveys had been done this year. Botney Gut had been surveyed. The intention of the assessments was to ensure that there were sufficient mature animals to keep the population going, and that there was a proper balance between the sexes. The Farne deeps fishery mainly caught males.
- 3.3 We also had to bear in mind that the condition of *Nephrops* stocks might change as cod stocks recovered. It was possible that fewer cod had led to more prawns. As cod became more abundant it might be necessary to cut back the fishing mortality on *Nephrops*. The main issue at the moment however was how we might prevent over-fishing on particular Functional Units.

- 3.4 One fisher thought there was no need for any restrictions. Fishers from Fraserburgh no longer went to the Farne Deeps or to the Noup. In the case of the Noup the problem was that there was insufficient quota for the monks and megrims that were caught there. Most of these grounds had been fished seasonally. When fishing in an area was poor they would no longer fish there
- 3.5 Helen pointed out that the fishery as a whole might be self-regulating but this would not prevent a particular area declining. In addition, if there were fewer *Nephrops* in an area then fish might no longer go there. Mike Park said that the Farne Deeps had undoubtedly declined through over-fishing.
- 3.6 Fishers were concerned about the accuracy of the stock assessments and the scientific advice. Scientists were only guessing about how many *Nephrops* were found in each burrow. Fishermen had gone about as far as they were able in terms of regulation. They did not need more.
- 3.7 Mike Park said that if we did not come up with our own plans for dealing with depletion of the Functional Units then the Commission would do that for us. That was a greater threat. It would be better to accept that there is a problem and suggest ways of doing it which are more acceptable to fishermen.
- 3.8 It was pointed out by fishermen that in the future some areas would be closed to them. There were plans for protected areas and for large wind farms in areas like the Moray Firth. It was likely that much of the Firth would be closed.
- 3.9 Barrie Deas thought that most *Nephrops* stocks were currently stable. We need to keep it like that. There are a few problem areas like the Farne Deeps which had to be handled properly. He accepted that fishing effort might be reducing as a result of vessels coming out of the fleet.
- 3.10 Fishermen pointed out that they were catching *Nephrops* in a mixed fishery. It was not possible to separate management of prawns from management of haddock and other species. What was needed was a total management plan which applied the whole fishery, rather than a species by species approach. Mike Park said there was a management plan for haddock and saithe in place. In preparing the draft management plan the working group had recognised that the fleets catching *Nephrops* were very diverse. A few vessels caught only prawns but many were dependent on a much wider range of species. In Eyemouth there was a perception that fishers had been forced to concentrate on prawns because fishing opportunities for other species had been removed. They wanted to go back to fishing for whitefish with prawns as just one of several species being caught.
- 3.11 Fishermen were concerned that the Moray Firth fishery had disappeared as a mixed fishery; so had the Noup. It was important to get these fisheries back. Many of these grounds had formed part of a seasonal pattern of fishing. They had gone to the Farne Deeps in the autumn for a 6 week fishery. The seasonal nature of the fisheries provided some protection. Now these areas could not be fished in because fishermen were not allowed to catch the species present there. Fishermen had already given up a great deal without actually gaining anything.
- 3.12 Mike Park pointed out again that it was important for fishermen to agree to measures for dealing with any areas which became depleted. If we did not make any proposals for this then individual TACs would be imposed. When pressed, a number of fishermen liked the 'of which no more than' option for any stock coming under threat. The problem with that solution was that the pain mainly fell on those fishermen who

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depended on that particular ground, who might not have the ability to move elsewhere. Fishermen agreed that it might be possible to provide some local safeguards in those circumstances. There might be a possibility of limiting the type of vessel or gear to be fished in such an area. Catch and quota profiling might also be looked at. Currently management did not take account of the seasonality of the fisheries.

- 3.13 Another option might be to link quota to a preferred area. Those declaring for an area would be able to take their full quota from it. Others might have a multiplier applied if they took from a depleted area which was not their preferred area. Their landings would be increased by a factor.
- 3.14 One fisher asked whether fish quotas might be linked with prawn quotas. Every Functional Unit brings a by-catch of fish. In the Noup these would be monks and megrims. In the Farne Deeps it would now be whiting. Was there a way of linking quotas together? Tony Hawkins thought scientists had been remiss in not taking account in management of the fact that fishers caught what they caught on a ground. They had little control over what was caught, and yet each species was currently subject to different restrictions and management measures. It was agreed that the mixed fishery aspects of the management plan needed to be subject to further consideration.
- 3.15 Fishermen returned to querying the accuracy of the surveys and asked why the surveys were not done where the boats were fishing. They had never seen scientists doing these surveys while they were fishing. The surveys were not done where the prawns actually were! It was agreed that there was a mutual lack of understanding between fishers and scientists, not only over the surveys but also over the way that fisheries were conducted.

4. Ecological Objectives

- 4.1 A key goal of the *Nephrops* fishery LTMP is to minimise impacts on the ecosystem. The NSRAC working group had 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
- 4.2 Discards were a problem because fish were being caught and were sometimes abundant but fishermen lacked quota for them. They had to be discarded. They would often shift from an area if discards were high. However, fishermen were sometimes forced to dump marketable fish because they could not afford to lease quota for them, especially if prices for that species were low. Discarding of *Nephrops* was rare and only took place on grounds like the Firth of Forth and the Farne Deeps where prawns too small to be tailed were sometimes caught.
- 4.3 Fishermen asked why they were restricted to twin rig gears whereas other countries were towing multi-rigs. Mike Park could see no reason for such restrictions where landings were already limited; [the 'net' limit is currently imposed by a Scottish](#)

[Statutory Instrument \(SSI\) that applies only to Scottish vessels.](#) He asked: if you were told you could land all of your catch would it influence your gear design and fishing behaviour? The answer was yes, but there would need to be additional quota awarded as an incentive. It would be worth exploring what could be offered to meet fishermen half way on this. It was pointed out that catches would need to be monitored carefully and such a programme would need to be a voluntary one at first.

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- 4.4 In terms of threatened, endangered and protected species, it was acknowledged that some species were no longer as abundant on the fishing grounds as they had once been – but the changes had happened a long time ago. It was suggested that some of these species might be released by incorporating large meshes in the belly of the net. The effort regime might be used to provide incentives for the adoption of such measures – currently the regime worked against their adoption. Fishers pointed out that such measures could not be used by all boats.
- 4.5 With respect to protecting animals living on the seabed through Marine Protected Areas there were already areas which looked as if they would be closed off to fishing, especially where wind farms were planned. It would be better to site closed areas where *Nephrops* were not being caught. There are areas where there aren't any prawns. Tony Hawkins pointed out that there might be pressure from conservation interests and government agencies to conserve some of the areas where prawns were found – to help retain and recover the special features of such areas. Wouldn't it be better for fishermen to take part in deciding on where those areas were located rather than leaving it to others to decide?

5 Economic and Social Objectives

- 5.1 It is in everyone's interests to make the fishery sustainable and not to fish too hard on *Nephrops*. Mike Park asked what could be done to make fishing businesses more profitable. Fleets must make enough money to renew themselves and create a good living for fishermen. There are already heavy additional costs placed upon fishers as a result of the regulations, and the need to lease quota and days at sea.
- 5.2 Fishers thought there were two main ways of improving profitability. One way was to increase the price of prawns. This might be achieved by landing less, or landing them more evenly, and by improving quality. Having less boats fishing would improve profitability and so would removing the need to lease quota and days.
- 5.3 It was thought that auctioning prawns while the vessel was still at sea was one way to go – to do what the pelagic fleet did. Currently prawns are often sold on a contract basis. In general there was a need to place fishermen in a stronger position. Greater diversity in fishing opportunities could play an important part here. Fishermen wanted to catch a range of species, matching their fishing to the seasons. The current management system stood in the way of that.
- 5.4 There was a question about the reference years for TAC allocation. Would that change with the advent of a management plan? Mike Park thought that allocating TACs to functional units would result in 'gaming'. Fishers from elsewhere might deliberately target local grounds like the Firth of Forth to keep their quota for grounds closer to home. That would make management more complicated. Member States would have to stop that happening by bringing reference years up to date. There would be winners and losers. We did not think that allocating TACs to functional units was the way to go. It would raise a range of Relative Stability questions both within a country and between countries. There would be strong resistance to this,

especially since we are coming up to CFP Reform. However, sensible measures to protect functional units are needed and would have to be included within the LTMP

6 Summing Up

- 7.1 Michael Park summed up by saying that this was the last of the meetings in the UK. We would come back to Fraserburgh and present a more final LTMP document in due course, including specific proposals. We intended that this should be a plan created from the bottom up.

7. Participants

Michael Park (Chair)	SFF
Tony Hawkins	Rapporteur
Helen Dobby	Marine Scotland Science
Barrie Deas	NFFO
Ewan Bell	CEFAS
William McIntosh	Daisy PD245
Andrew H Buchan	Favonius PD17
Andrew Buchan	Favonius PD17
Alistair Bruce	Challenger FR90 & New Dawn FR470
Peter Strachan	Ben Arkle PD400
Stephen West	Daystar BF151
Adam Tait	Rebecca FR143
Alexander West	Mia Jane W FR443
John Nicol	Fruitful Vine BF240
Alexander Nicol	Flourish BF340
Ralston Johnston	Amethyst BF19
Michael Watt	Sardonyx BF206