



***Nephrops* Development Group  
Record of Meeting with Fishers  
Granary Meeting Room, Pittenweem  
24<sup>th</sup> September 2010**

**Rapporteur: Tony Hawkins**

**Draft Record**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 As at previous meetings, 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. 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, and had decided that we should involve fishers themselves in that process.
- 1.2 Barrie Deas gave the overall background for the preparation of LTMPs. This 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 The NSRAC had also decided that to be credible 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 and then again in 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. However, 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 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 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.

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) and has been modified from the earlier version to include a short summary of the latest ICES advice.

2.2 The meeting then to consider the three sets of objectives for the management plan. Jane Sandell led the discussion on the ecological objectives; Helen Dobby led the discussion of the biological 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. General points**

3.1 What had this plan got to do with keeping villages like Pittenweem alive? If still more restrictions are placed upon fishing then there will be no fishing villages. It was explained that this plan was different. This time any restrictions would be agreed from the bottom up. They would not be imposed from above.

3.2 Who would approve the plan at the end of the day? The Commission and Council of Ministers would have to approve the plan and put it in place under the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy. However the plan was being prepared with the full engagement of fishers, and would be put forward by the North Sea Regional Advisory Council which was largely made up of fishers' representatives. The NSRAC was taking a draft plan around the fishing ports and would return with a more developed plan, based on the advice and comments of fishers, for further discussion.

3.3 The main fear of fishers is over the management of the Functional Units. Fishers did not want more restrictions placed on the Firth of Forth fishery. Further regulation of that fishery will mean the end of fishing by local boats – which did not have the option of fishing elsewhere. The fishery in the Firth had previously been much more diverse and had caught a range of species. Cod and haddock could no longer be caught and the sprat fishery had been closed although sprats were abundant within the Firth.

The *Nephrops* fishery was free from discards. One of the main problems was access by larger vessels from elsewhere.

#### **4. Ecological Objectives**

- 4.1 A key goal of the *Nephrops* fishery LTMP is to minimise impacts on the ecosystem. The 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 not a problem in the Firth. There is sometimes discarding of small prawns which cannot be tailed but these would survive. No fish were being caught and discarded apart from a few flukes. Square mesh panels had reduced discarding by letting fish escape. In the past, when smaller mesh panels were used, there had been a by-catch of mackerel, but this no longer took place with an 80mm square mesh panel. The current gear restrictions were appropriate. Boats were fishing single nets with short (3 hour) tows.
- 4.3 It was pointed out that under a management plan it might be necessary to demonstrate that there were no discards. If discards were monitored it might be possible to obtain larger quotas. How could this monitoring be done? It was agreed that a limited observer programme would suffice, and that the fleet could easily be profiled for this purpose. Observers were already going out on some vessels. It is not possible for fishers themselves to record discards.
- 4.4 In terms of threatened, endangered and protected species, grey seals were common in the Firth and were having an adverse effect upon fish stocks. In general prawns themselves were increasing perhaps because of an absence of predatory fish like cod. There are no skates rays or dogfish being caught. Dogfish had occurred in the Firth in the past and there had been a fishery for them, but they had been the first to disappear.
- 4.5 There were already a number of protected areas within the Firth including SACs (Special Areas of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive) and SPAs (Special Protected Areas under the EU Birds Directive) but these had no effect upon fishing.

#### **5 Biological Objectives**

- 5.1 It is in everyone's interests to make the fishery sustainable and not to fish too hard on *Nephrops*. ICES 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. What did fishers think? Fishers pointed out that the fishery in the Firth of Forth had been going on for 30 years and catches had remained at the same level or increased although the overall effort had also increased. Mesh sizes were now larger. There was no need for stronger management – except in the case of larger twin rig vessels which were catching *Nephrops*. Because other kinds of fishing opportunities in the Firth had been

reduced the fishery for prawns now occupied almost the whole year, where it had once been for only six months of the year. The real problem in the Firth was the lack of opportunity to diversify into other species like sprats and mackerel.

- 5.2 Mike Park pointed out 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. It was pointed out that the Firth of Forth fleet has limited opportunity to fish elsewhere. Some boats did go to the west coast and would like to retain that flexibility. However, the Firth needed protection from larger vessels from outside the area. Many of those larger boats had reduced mesh size from 100mm to 80mm (as a result of the cod recovery plan) and this had done little to protect prawns. One of the best solutions for improved management would be to keep the larger twin-rig vessels away from the Firth of Forth. Currently there is a length restriction only within the inner Firth. Twin-riggers are the ones which are discarding and catching all the other species. They are also fishing 2 nets for 6 hours whereas local boats fish a single net for 3 hours.
- 5.3 Closure during the green-sac or green-head period was not an option as that was the most important time for the Firth of Forth fishery, and also on the west coast.
- 5.4 Helen Dobby asked whether an 'of which no more than' provision for vulnerable areas would be better than assigning TACs to the Functional Units. The response was that there is a strong feeling that within the Firth there is already a lack of quota and that imposing further restrictions would make matters worse. Quota is already being taken up by others in the early part of the year leaving some vessels with very restricted fishing opportunities. This problem of quota allocation might be an internal quota allocation problem but it was having a devastating effect on some local fishers. Barrie Deas said that an 'of which no more than' provision would constrain over-exploitation. However, he agreed that if it was applied in its simplest form it would be local boats which would suffer. Once quota had been taken up other larger boats could fish elsewhere but the small local boats could not. Perhaps the provision could be combined with gear restrictions. One suggestion which came forward was a restriction to gear width, which could be taken up with a single net or two nets. A kilowatt engine power restriction was also suggested. There was a need to support vessels from the smaller ports to enable small villages like Pittenweem to survive. One concern about 'of which no more than' provisions was that the figure might be progressively cut. There was also some concern that despite the survey results for the Firth of Forth being good the TAC for the North Sea as a whole might be cut – with a knock-on effect upon the Firth of Forth.
- 5.5 Mike Park hoped that the NSRAC would be able to come up with a plan which would treat different fishers differently. Barrie Deas pointed out that there would need to be a safety net for any functional unit which was in trouble, but there should be flexibility so that any restrictions could be removed when the stock recovered.

## **6. Economic and Social Objectives**

- 6.1 The fishing fleet needs to be profitable so that it can renew itself. What is it that is currently restricting earnings. Is it quotas? Prices? Or technical measures? There was general agreement that prices are too low. The quotas were also limiting and because of low prices it was impossible to buy additional quota. At the moment fishers have to accept the quota that the government gives them and then fish it so

as to get the best prices. Prices, however, are not set locally but by the larger scale boats landing their catches in Fraserburgh. From a PO standpoint the problem was not the quotas but the price for *Nephrops*. However, one local fisher had run out of his quota of 11 tonnes after 5 weeks so quota was a problem for individual fishers. What fishers wanted was a quota to be set for the whole year at a reasonable level.

- 6.2 Diversifying is proving a problem for fishers in small ports like Pittenweem. Boats could not go hand-ling for mackerel although that would be profitable. The sprat fishery was closed but sprats were plentiful. Squid had provided a bonus this year as they had been locally abundant. Investment was needed in Pittenweem. A local cooperative had provided tanks for the storage of prawns and lobsters and that had been beneficial.
- 6.3 It was pointed out that all fishers were in the same boat with respect to prices. Levelling out supply and demand is a difficult problem. Rationalising catches across the year would be beneficial as there is a huge glut in summer. The SFO has tried to deal with this but as soon as the price starts to rise than vessels from outside the PO start to land and the price falls again. Cooperation within the industry is the only way to even out gluts but getting collective action has proved not to be possible. Landings in Pittenweem were only small relative to Fraserburgh and could not influence the overall price.
- 6.4 There was concern about the average size of the prawns falling. It was pointed out that as a fishery develops this tends to happen as the older larger animals are removed. However, it can also be a sign of good recruitment or lack of predation on the young animals.

## **7 Summing Up**

- 7.1 Michael Park summed up by saying that the meeting had been immensely useful. There had been confirmation of some previous views and also discussion of new subjects. Barrie Deas said that this meeting, together with others, had provided a wealth of understanding.
- 7.2 Fishers attending the meeting had been disappointed that previous meetings to discuss langoustines or crabs had got nowhere. There were now more people engaged in talking about fishing that there were fishermen. They hoped that this meeting would be different. Barrie Deas said that the NSRAC would be happy if fishers recognised that the contributions they had made were reflected in the management plan which was produced. Essentially, at Pittenweem we have a small coastal artisanal fishery which had special requirements. It was pointed out that the government gave money to farmers to set aside their land. Why couldn't the government allocate money to make fishing more sustainable? Barrie Deas replied that governments and the European Union had not wanted fishing to go down the same route as farming – with fishers becoming subsidy junkies and adding to the tax burden of others. However, the idea of transitional support for sustainable actions was a good one. We could perhaps include this suggestion for transitional support within the management plan, perhaps to be handled through the European Fisheries Fund.
- 7.3 Another area of concern was the lack of young fishers going into the fishing industry. There was no attraction for young people to enter fishing. Mike Park thought that this would remain the case until fishing became more sustainable, more stable and more profitable.

7. Participants

Michael Park (Chair)	SFF
Tony Hawkins	Rapporteur
Jane Sandell	SFO Ltd
Helen Dobby	Marine Scotland Science
Barrie Deas	NFFO
Henry Murray	St Adrian
Jim Fyall	FifePO
Bill Hughes	FMA (Pittenweem) Ltd
W G Smith	St Adrian
T Gordon	Tamamlyn
B Gourlay	Winaway
A Armit	Winaway
Sandra Turnbull	Under 10m Association
A H Guy	Sincere
J Walsh	Launch Out
Bob Dunsire	Harvest Moon

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