



Nephrops LTMP Development Group
Saughton House, Edinburgh
18th April 2011

Rapporteur: Tony Hawkins

Draft

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Michael Park welcomed participants to the meeting, which had been convened to take forward the latest draft of the Nephrops Long Term Management Plan. The agenda was agreed.
- 1.2 A very first draft version of the LTMP had been taken round the fishing ports and discussed with fishers. As a result, the development group had now been presented with a revised version of the plan, prepared by the rapporteur, for further discussion and amendment. The intention was then to present the plan to the industry for further discussion and refinement.

2 The plan

- 2.1 Tony Hawkins described the main provisions of the Nephrops LTMP. Throughout its preparation it had been recognised that there must be buy-in from the industry and other stakeholders. A great diversity of views had been obtained at the port meetings. However, there had been agreement on a number of aspects of the plan. Fishers had emphasised the need for greater stability within the fishery, which had gone through a period of major change. Fishers had also emphasised the lack of continuity within the management regime. They had pointed to the great influx of effort as a result of the cod recovery plan and also reduced fishing opportunities on the Scottish west coast. Vessels had been forced to use small mesh nets because of the provisions of the cod recovery plan, although there were clear conservation benefits for some vessels from using larger meshes. Fishers sought greater flexibility and less regulation. They accepted that there was a need to slow the expansion of the fishery down
- 2.2 Scientists attending the meetings had emphasised the benefits from moving towards lower fishing mortality, giving higher yields. There would be benefits in setting levels of F higher than that currently prevailing on the Fladen, but lower than that on some of the other functional units. There should be a gradual move towards a target F. Depletion of the resources was a problem for some of the functional units. Vessels were free to move between grounds and this had resulted in an unacceptably high

harvest rate on some grounds. Management at the functional unit level was required. The Commission favoured the setting of individual TACs for the functional units, but that would give rise to many management problems and would reduce flexibility for the fleet. Accreditation bodies were unhappy at the lack of data for some of the functional units and wished to see a formal strategy for stock rebuilding. They supported the ICES advice that management was required at the functional unit level. Environmental NGOs had stressed the need to reduce discards of both Nephrops and white fish. The impacts of the fishery on the ecosystem should also be reduced, both respect to the capture of endangered species and protecting seabed habitats.

- 2.3 In terms of setting biological objectives, most participants in the meetings had agreed that fishing capacity should be matched to the long-term sustainable yield. This could be achieved by setting a long-term F of 0.1 for the functional units, as a proxy for F_{MSY} . However, there would also need to be back-up provisions. Should there be a major change in the Nephrops stocks, as a result of environmental change, or cod recovery, then a trigger level should be set, based on the outcome of UWTV surveys. If the stock fell below the trigger level then the target for F should be revised.
- 2.4 With respect to the functional units there were two problems. Data were lacking for some of the functional units; which would need to be resolved. Moreover, some functional units were vulnerable to over-exploitation. The Commission was proposing to set TACs for each of the functional units. This would lead to a lack of flexibility and would bear hardest on those fishers dependent on a particular functional unit. There would also be major problems in allocating the quotas. It had been agreed at meetings with fishers that this was not the way to go. The draft plan was now suggesting that there should be Sustainable Fishing Plans for those functional units judged to be vulnerable – to be retained for as long as they were vulnerable. It might be necessary to insert '*of which no more than*' provisions for functional units for which data were lacking.
- 2.5 In terms of ecological objectives, there had been no great enthusiasm from fishers for additional conservation initiatives. However, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive – which was currently being implemented – would require Good Environmental Status to be demonstrated. There were several environmental indicators listed within the Directive that would affect fisheries. In addition to maintaining fish and shellfish populations in a healthy state there would now be a requirement to maintain biodiversity through the protection of species and habitats. There was also a requirement to ensure that seabed integrity was not adversely affected. A key aspect of the Directive was to minimise impacts on the ecosystem. In terms of our plan, the key aspects would be to reduce discards, protect endangered species and minimise damage to the seabed. In terms of discards, the regulations, and catch composition rules in particular, encouraged discarding. The plan would have to deal with this problem and should also encourage the development of environmentally friendly fishing gears and fishing practices.
- 2.6 In terms of economic objectives, the general principle was to land less but earn more. We should be aiming for a modern, safe, fishing fleet, which was earning profits. We would have to consider provisions for dealing with technology creep. One clear objective would be to avoid regulation that made fleets less efficient, or which imposed

unnecessary burdens. And any changes should be imposed gradually to allow fishers time to adjust.

- 2.7 The plan had now been revised to reflect the views expressed at the port meetings. There were no really novel proposals or solutions to the problems of the fishery; just a series of measures which would move it in the right direction. We now needed to go through the plan to refine it.
- 2.8 There was some discussion of the time frame for completion of the plan. The Commission's proposals for individual TACs had not gone through last year, but would be raised again this year. Discussions would begin in May on TACs for Area VII, and Area IV (the North Sea). The NWWRAC was aiming to set out its views before the Policy Statement came out. Rather than wait for completion and agreement to the plan could we present it to the Commission soon, perhaps as work in progress? A radical new approach was expected from the Policy Statement and a simpler process was being sought for setting TACs. Unless we told the Commission now of our initiative there was a risk that our views would be overcome by events. Jane Sandell pointed to the difficulties that would be caused if individual TACs were set and referred to the difficulties in allocating quotas for the Porcupine Bank fishery, where '*of which no more than*' provisions had been introduced.
- 2.9 It was agreed that the plan would be revised following this meeting and approved, as a work in progress, at the Demersal WG planned for May 5th. Given the urgency we should then send the plan immediately to the Commission.
- 2.10 It was also agreed that the plan needed to give greater emphasis to the difficulties that would arise if TACs were set for each functional unit. Allocation of the TACs between member states would introduce problems, as would the allocation of national quotas. Renegotiating TAC allocations for each functional unit would be a nightmare task. Jane Sandell and Michael Park would prepare a short note on the problems raised by setting individual TACs and would forward it to Louise Cunningham who would make any necessary additions and then pass it to Tony Hawkins for inclusion in the revised plan.
- 2.11 The idea of sustainable fishing plans received strong support. Tony Hawkins said that a project proposal for the preparation of a draft sustainable fishing plan for the Farne Deeps had been submitted to Defra. We did not yet know the outcome, but if the project did go ahead then we could make more rapid progress in developing the concept.
- 2.12 Giles Bartlett thought that the weakest part of the plan was the economic and social sections. We had not really arrived at a clear set of economic or social objectives or targets. Pim Visser said that there was a problem with fluctuations in supply leading to changes in prices. Including economic objectives within the sustainable fishing plans could perhaps solve this problem. We should certainly try to deal with these economic difficulties.

3. The main provisions of the plan – biological objectives.

- 3.1 In terms of the science, Carlos Mesquita of MMS pointed out that currently F is set not for the whole North Sea but for each functional unit for which data are available. That then leads to a total TAC for the North Sea. It would be difficult to set an overall North Sea F.
- 3.2 There would be particular problems in applying '*of which no more than*' provisions to individual functional units for which survey data were not available – although this was what the draft plan was suggesting. That suggestion had been included to prevent there being an incentive to not carry out surveys. However, such provisions were heavy handed and it would be very difficult to subsequently allocate the quotas. In practice most of these areas were relatively small and perhaps could be subsumed within the overall North Sea TAC. Currently, surveys were done for the Fladen, Moray Firth, Firth of Forth and Farne Deep. It had not proved possible to extend surveys to the Noup, Horn's Reef, Botney Cut, and the central part of the North Sea. Moreover, it was unlikely that such surveys would be possible in the future because resources were not available. There was some discussion on whether the surveys could be carried out by commercial vessels but it was concluded that they could not. Trawl surveys and CPUE measures might provide additional information but they could not substitute for the UWTV surveys on which the stock assessments were now based. Seafish would be reluctant to get involved in stock assessments even if they had any money. The Dutch had no resources to spare. The Danes had, however, been planning UWTV surveys for Horn's Reef and the Skagerrak/Kattegat.
- 3.3 It was suggested that the ICES assessment working group should be asked to consider this issue. Currently they discuss the methodology rather than the extent of the surveys. There might be a case for the UK, Netherlands and Denmark planning the surveys jointly, to see whether coverage could be improved. There was a particular need to cover the Central North Sea/Devil's Pit grounds. Gaining accreditation for the North Sea Nephrops fisheries had not been possible because of the lack of stock assessments for some of the functional units.
- 3.4 Jane Sandell stressed that the areas we did know about were all stable and that in these circumstances we perhaps did not need additional surveys. If we gained an indication that the surveyed areas were vulnerable then we could consider measures that would protect them. We could set a target value of F for the areas that were surveyed, and extend this value to other areas would not be expected to have an adverse impact. Nor did we need '*of which no more than*' provisions for these small areas. There might, however, be a case for conducting surveys on the Devil's Hole and central parts of the North Sea, as a larger catch was taken there. Carlos Mesquita mentioned that scientists were giving thought to how these areas might be surveyed. Giles Bartlett asked whether the surveys could perhaps be spread over two years to give wider coverage. CPUE might then be used as an annual index to ensure that nothing was going wrong between years.
- 3.5 It was agreed that the target F of 0.1 should be used as a proxy for F_{MSY} and applied to those functional units for which surveys were carried out, and subsequently used to determine a TAC for the North Sea as a whole.

- 3.6 The next question was what should be done in terms of management measures for those units that were not being assessed. It was agreed that the application of '*of which no more than*' measures was too drastic. Rather, each functional unit, not just those that were vulnerable, should have a sustainable fishing plan, including those units that were not currently assessed. The latter could each have a plan that commenced by proposing that a stock assessment should be carried out, and then went on to consider how the area should be managed in the absence of a full stock assessment. This might involve catch-monitoring measures
- 3.7 It was agreed that this was the best way forward. Every functional unit would have its own sustainable fishing plan. For healthy functional units the plan would simply sit in a file on someone's desk. The overall North Sea TAC, determined for a target F of 0.1 for each functional unit, would be the main management tool. If a particular functional unit became vulnerable to over-exploitation then its own plan would be dusted off and individual measures implemented that were specific to that functional unit, and most appropriate to the perceived problem.

4. Ecological objectives

- 4.1 No revolutionary ideas had come forward on reducing discards either of Nephrops or white fish. However the whole climate in relation to discards was changing and there was now stronger emphasis on vessels landing all that they caught. The plan would have to conform to that change in emphasis.
- 4.2 High grading was taking place in some of the North Sea fisheries for Nephrops. Where quotas were restrictive smaller Nephrops caught earlier were thrown over the side and larger ones substituted. One option was to keep the smaller Nephrops and tail them but there was a penalty incurred in doing that as 1 kg of tails was treated as equivalent to 4 kg of whole prawns. In this case the discarding was a consequence of limited quotas – and often just a perception that quotas would later prove limiting. The solution to this problem is for better management of the quota by POs, to ensure that the quota was fully utilised.
- 4.3 One way of reducing the number of small prawns caught was to use a larger mesh size in the cod end. Currently, the Nephrops fleet cannot increase the selectivity of the gears by increasing mesh size because mesh size is used to define vessels belonging to that sector. Additional days at sea restrictions were placed upon vessels using larger mesh gears under the cod recovery plan. This was perverse, and there was an urgent need to decouple the cod recovery plan and days at sea restrictions from the Nephrops fishery. There was a case for requiring larger Nephrops vessels to land all they caught and for monitoring this by means of reference vessels, with the landings profile as a check upon other vessels.
- 4.4 With respect to the discarding of white fish, strenuous efforts should be made to reduce by-catch of fish for which the vessel had no quota. However, vessels were not always able to control the proportion of the catch that consisted of over-quota fish. Many Nephrops vessels were now using gears with the same front ends as white fish gears, with large meshes, but they could not increase the mesh size in the cod end,

which was imposed under the cod recovery plan. Scottish vessels had taken the unilateral measure of reducing twine size. They used single 4 twine as opposed to the double 5 twine used by other fleets. The former effectively made the mesh size equivalent to 87mm rather than 80mm.

- 4.5 It was agreed that discard reduction measures had to be tailored to the particular fleet or vessel. These measures could be accommodated within the sustainable fishing plans for different functional units. By 2013 there should be flexibility within the regulations to apply different measures in different areas. Of course, if vessels were required to land all that they caught there would be no need to specify mesh size at all. That could be left to fishers to decide. Our plan should describe the required output rather than specify the detailed measures by which the output would be achieved. We should be aiming for a results-based system, where fishers became responsible for their own actions.
- 4.6 In terms of endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) species, there were already major provisions in place to prevent them being landed. Moreover, in UK waters there were extensive plans for marine protected areas, which would extend their protection further. It could be argued that there was no need for additional measures. Giles Bartlett suggested that as a first step the plan should include provision for monitoring the capture of ETP species. These animals should be recorded in the electronic logbooks. They should be recorded by species; not all skates and rays, for example, were classed as endangered. Information on their capture could also be collected from reference vessels. In terms of improving the survival of live specimens returned to the sea, the sustainable fishing plan could set out procedures for best practice. Tagging of specimens could also be undertaken as a voluntary measure. Advice on handling these fish with minimal damage could be obtained from Seafish and the Shark Trust. If there were severe problems with the capture of endangered species then the plan could specify additional measures. The inclusion of these measures would ensure that the management plan was fully compatible with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.
- 4.7 In terms of damage to benthic habitats the first step would be to determine the fishing footprint within a functional unit. Fishing activity could be mapped on particular grounds. There might be spaces which were not fished and which could be set aside as protected or reference areas. However, by 2013 there will be an extensive network of MPAs in UK waters, offering protection. It is only if soft sediments are under represented that additional areas might need to be set aside.
- 4.8 Fishers had made it clear that they did not want to volunteer areas for protection. They were already losing good fishing grounds to MPAs and also to wind farms. It was appropriate for the LTMP to adopt a pragmatic approach. Fishers would respect the areas already designated as MPAs or as reference areas.

5. Economic objectives

- 5.1 it was not the task of the LTMP to tell fishers how to run their businesses, or the POs how to organise themselves. The POs themselves already play a marketing role that

is recognised under the existing regulations for Common Market Organisations. They can act collectively or individually to moderate the supply of Nephrops to the market. Getting agreement is often a problem for the POs as some exist for distributing quota while others are prepared to play a marketing role. However, those problems are for them to resolve. There do not appear to be any ways of maximising value by establishing a close season or closing the fishery to protect juveniles or females. It is recognised that over-supply can be a problem but again that is for the POs to deal with and they should be encouraged to do so. The LTMP will state clearly that there is a risk to the ecosystem from landing too many prawns and selling them too cheaply

- 5.2 It was especially important, however, from the standpoint of the LTMP not to instigate measures that create inefficiencies for the fishing fleets.

6. Sustainable fishing plans

- 6.1 Currently, many fishers think of sustainable fishing plans as mechanisms for matching quota to both availability and markets. The aim of such a plan is to get maximum value out of what is landed. Our definition is rather wider; the sustainable fishing plan is put in plan to meet all eventualities and to fulfil biological, ecological and economic objectives. The first step in preparing such a plan is to ensure that full information is being collected on the state of the fishery, and of the resource it depends upon. It can then go on to consider the aim of exploiting the stock in a sustainable way, which is fair and equitable to all fishers. Such a plan is not a local plan, as the agenda suggested. It is not intended to be discriminatory; rather, it seeks to curb fishing practices that are unsustainable or damaging to the environment. An important element of such a plan is an analysis of how the functional unit has been fished in the past and in the present, and defining which fishing methods are compatible with maintaining a healthy Nephrops resource. If the impact of the fishery has to be reduced it has to be done in a fair and equitable way. The main elements of the plan would be concerned with protecting the resource itself. However, it could adopt wider ecological and economic objectives if participants so wished.

- 6.2 There were, however, slight differences in the way participants viewed the sustainable fishing plans. Some thought that these should be adjuncts to the main LTMP, to be invoked for functional units if there were uncertainties, or problems of over-exploitation. Others saw them as the core of the LTMP; the sustainable fishing plans setting out the main management options for a particular functional unit.

7. The way forward

- 7.1 The rapporteur would take the comments made and modify the LTMP accordingly. The revised plan would be circulated by the end of the week and comments would be invited, promptly, from all participants. The LTMP would then go forward to the Demersal WG in London on May 5th for comment and acceptance as work in progress.

- 7.2 The plan would then be passed to the Commission and member states for information, as work in progress. This should be done as soon as possible in order to influence deliberations on future TAC setting for Nephrops.
- 7.3 The plan itself, when agreed by the ExCom, would be presented to the industry at a single central event, where comment would be invited. The date and location of the event would be discussed at the Demersal WG.
- 7.4 In the meantime, we hoped that the Newcastle bid would be successful and would enable us to go forward in preparing a model sustainable fishing plan for the Farne Deeps. If the bid was unsuccessful we might have to think again, but it was likely that there would be other sources of finance willing to fund this work.

8. Action points

1. Jane Sandell and Michael Park will prepare a short note on the problems raised by setting individual TACs and will forward it to Louise Cunningham who will make any necessary additions and then pass it to Tony Hawkins for inclusion in the revised plan (2.11).	Jane Sandell Michael Park Louise Cunningham
2. The rapporteur will take the comments made and modify the LTMP accordingly. The revised plan will be circulated by the end of the week and comments will be invited, promptly, from all participants (7.1).	Tony Hawkins Participants
3. The LTMP will go forward to the Demersal WG on May 5 th for comment and acceptance (7.1). If the Demersal WG agrees it will then be passed to the Commission, as work in progress (7.1; 7.2)	Secretariat Barrie Deas
4. The plan itself, when agreed by the ExCom, will be presented to the industry at a single central event, where comment will be invited. The date and location of the event will be discussed at the Demersal WG (7.3).	Secretariat Barrie Deas

9. Attendance

Forename	Surname	Organisation
Giles	Bartlett	WWF
Louise	Cunningham	Scottish Government
Tony	Hawkins	NSRAC – Rapporteur
Jane	Sandell	SFO
Denis	Clark	NFFO
George	West	SWFPA
Carlos	Mesquita	MSS

Ian	Wakenshaw	NFFO
Daniel	Whittle	Whitby Seafood
Bill	Wiseman	SWFPA
Rory	Campbell	SFF
Mike	Park	SFF - Chairman