



NSAC Advice Ref. 9 14-15

Management of the Farne Deeps Nephrops Fishery

This paper was approved by the NSAC Executive Committee via a written procedure on the 12th October, 2015. On this occasion consensus has not been achieved amongst the Executive Committee and so it is a majority advice paper with a minority position being expressed by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations (NFFO) which is explained in the footnote at the end of the document

1. Background

- 1.1 A draft Long Term Management Plan (LTMP) for *Nephrops* was submitted by the NSAC to the Commission in February 2014. The Commission referred the draft LTMP to STECF, which responded with comments in its plenary report of April 2015 – [48th plenary meeting report \(plen-15-01\)](#). (Section 5.1, page 19). Revision of the LTMP to take account of the comments received from STECF is currently being considered by the NSAC, but the context of the LTMP has now changed. The Commission is preparing a Multi-Annual Mixed Fishery Plan for the North Sea, and the LTMP for *Nephrops* must fit into the wider context of that Mixed Fishery Plan, and also take account of current provisions for implementing the Landing Obligation.
- 1.2 The NSAC LTMP sets out objectives and options for managing the *Nephrops* fisheries of the North Sea. The overall goal is to ensure that further development and improvement in the *Nephrops* fisheries can take place in a sustainable way, without affecting natural resources adversely. The LTMP aims to ensure that stocks of *Nephrops* are maintained above levels that can produce Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). However, within the North Sea *Nephrops* occurs in discrete populations limited by substrate type. Each of these Functional Units (FUs) must be considered separately and catches within them managed to ensure that the level of exploitation is consistent with MSY for each FU. The LTMP aims to ensure that *Nephrops* will be exploited at a rate that is sustainable and consistent with the upper limit of F_{msy} through the setting of targets for each of the FUs. An overall TAC for the North Sea would then be set, consistent with the target values for all the individual FUs.



- 1.3 Advice from ICES and STECF has been that current management of *Nephrops* in the North Sea does not currently provide adequate safeguards to avoid depletion of resources in the FUs. A key element of the NSAC LTMP is therefore to achieve management for each FU through the preparation of FU Fishing Plans, within the wider context of a Mixed Fishery Plan for the North Sea. A Fishing Plan would describe in detail the way in which an individual FU was to be managed and exploited. Each Fishing Plan would be intended to ensure the biological objectives were met for each FU, while also taking account of any displacement effects upon other FUs as a result of the measures taken. For each FU an abundance level would be set, with advice from ICES, which would prompt a revision of the target value for fishing mortality in the event of a major change in stock size revealed by underwater TV surveys. Measures would be taken to restore the stock, and would be maintained in position until such time as the fishery indicators showed that the stock was restored to an acceptable level, when those measures would be lifted.
- 1.4 Management at the FU level through Fishing Plans would provide the necessary controls to ensure that fishing pressure was in line with the scale of the resources in each of the stocks defined by the FUs. At the same time this approach would also retain flexibility for the fleets to move between grounds and to engage in mixed fisheries.

2. Current State of the Farne Deeps Functional Unit

- 2.1 Stock size within the Farne Deeps has been generally declining since 2005 and has been below MSY Btrigger since 2012. The 2015 abundance estimate is the lowest of the time series. Harvest rates have been above Fmsy for all years except 2008. The latest estimate of stock abundance (obtained from the underwater television survey conducted in June 2015; estimated at 568 million individual *Nephrops*) is below the MSY Btrigger value (858 million). The harvest rate has increased over the last 3 years and is now above Fmsy. Large mature females that have failed to successfully mate increasingly dominate landings and this is likely to have a negative impact upon future recruitment levels.
- 2.2 Overall the *Nephrops* stocks in the North Sea do not appear to be over exploited. However, the latest ICES assessment for the Farne Deeps FU is that fishing pressure is above MSY (Fmsy) and that stock size is below MSY (Btrigger). In these circumstances it will be important to adopt specific management measures to protect the Farne Deeps FU.
- 2.3 Pending the adoption of a Mixed Fishery Plan for the North Sea, and the development of specific proposals for *Nephrops* within that plan, developed through a process of regional consultation, the NSAC has, by majority, come forward with specific advice for dealing with the current situation in the Farne Deeps



3. NSAC Majority¹ Advice for the Farne Deepes Nephrops Fishery

- 3.1 Having discussed the merits of various measures to be considered for the Farne Deepes the NSAC, by majority, has decided that the most effective means for promoting the recovery of the Farne Deepes *Nephrops* fishery would be through the application of an “*of which no more than*” measure. That is, the temporary imposition of a landings quota to the Farne Deepes until such time as the *Nephrops* stock within the FU was no longer vulnerable. The landings quota would then be lifted once the stock had recovered.
- 3.2 The imposition of new catch restrictions within the Farne Deepes fishery would undoubtedly introduce many problems for all those participating in the fishery, and especially for those vessels that do not have other fishing opportunities that they can turn to. The NSAC therefore proposes that a 2-stage approach should be adopted to bring fishing pressure down. A staged approach would be in line with the provisions of the Common Fisheries Policy.
- 3.3 In its current advice ICES has suggested a fishing mortality rate for the Farne Deepes FU that is consistent with MSY. An Fmsy harvest rate of 8.1% would give a total catch option of 1,114 tonnes for 2016. However, ICES has also suggested that a more cautious response might be considered. Under the ICES MSY Approach a harvest rate of 5.4% would give a total catch option of 738 tonnes. The NSAC, by majority, suggests that the recommended Fmsy harvest rate option of 1,114 tonnes should be adopted for 2016 and 2017, with a lower harvest rate being adopted in 2018 should the stock remain in a poor state. Although a two-stage approach would reduce the speed of stock recovery, it would allow time for the dynamics of the fishery to be examined in greater detail and for other supplementary technical and spatial measures to be considered. The effects of displacement of fishing effort on to other FUs could also be taken into account.
- 3.4 Management of the Farne Deepes FU through the adoption of an “*of which no more than*” measure would provide the necessary control of fishing pressure. The NSAC recognises, however, that with this approach a problem will arise over the allocation of fishing opportunities within the fishery. The Farne Deepes is close to the English coast and participation in fishery almost exclusively involves vessels from the United Kingdom. The NSAC recognised that the administrations involved would need to work with Producer Organisations to find the best outcome in terms of providing adequate fishing opportunities for all those who have a record of fishing in the area¹. The NSAC would be willing to facilitate those discussions.
- 3.5 The NSAC has decided, by majority, that the introduction of additional accompanying measures, including the adoption of more selective fishing gears, or spatial measures, would contribute to the overall aim of reducing fishing pressure on *Nephrops* and should be further examined.
- 3.6 The NSAC has a clear vision that, in line with the draft LTMP, the ‘*of which no more than*’ provision that limits fishing pressure shall be lifted once the stock biomass within the Farne Deepes has recovered. The recovery level would in the first instance be based on stock size rising above MSY (Btrigger). It is essential therefore that agreement is



reached to revoke the measure when appropriate; and this forms a crucial part of the NSAC proposal.

¹ The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations (NFFO) has within its membership, two groups of vessels potentially affected, should an "*of which no more than*" quota be applied to the Farne Deeps *Nephrops* fishery: locally based vessels of limited range and visiting vessels from Northern Ireland. These groups hold opposing views. The local vessels argue that they would be disproportionately affected by an "*of which no more than*" quota, unless their fishing opportunities were subject to additional safeguard measures. For the more nomadic vessels, the Farne Deeps represents an important winter fishery and they would be strongly opposed to measures that would place an additional strain on their flexibility and therefore their viability.

