

West Coast Regional Inshore Fisheries Group

Notes of Mull Crab Pilot Project Work Group Meeting

22nd July 2019

Venue: An Roth Community Centre, Craignure, Mull

Attendees: Stuart Bell (MS), Diane Buchanan (MS), Jane Dodd (SNH), Hannah Fennel (MS), Allan MacLean (MFA), Alastair McNeill (WCRIFG Chair), David Munro (MFA), Stephen Paterson (MFA), Kenny Turnbull (MFA), Nick Turnbull (MFA),

Apologies: Iain MacEachan (MS), Kirsty Dearing (SNH). Alastair Mackie (MFA)

1. Welcome/Introduction

Chair welcomed attendees and gave a brief account of the process by which the Mull Crab Pilot Project began. Stemming from earlier stages of inshore fisheries groups (Pilot IFG & SWIFG) until the formation of the WCRIFG, Mull fishermen have sought to gain management control of the fisheries associated with local waters and to trial methods that will improve sustainability of stocks and the industry on the island. Initially submitted to Marine Scotland by WCRIFG as a proposed project under the banner of a D&R MPA, which included a scallop management strategy together with a crabbing box. The creation of a D&R MPA was considered inappropriate though it was believed that the two aspects of the proposals could be split i.e. scallop management and a crab zone, with a view to the former being considered by means of outreach support and the latter, a crab pilot project. The Mull Crabbing project would explore both zonal management and 'community' management while the scallop proposals would look at potential local sustainability management measures. Resulting applications along these lines led to the Mull Crab Pilot as a two phased project between 2018 and 2020 and, the scallop area being included in the review undertaken by MRAG Consultants which will be considered at the WCRIFG meeting in August 2019.

Mention was made at the start of the discussion of concerns about Southern Irish vessels (mobile sector) fishing in waters close to Mull and the risks they pose with regards to the pilot area. Request made by MFA for Marine Scotland to explore the potential to take preventative. The same issue has been raised previously by Tiree based RIFG members.

2. Review of Phase 1

The first phase of the pilot ran from the 1 October 2018 until the 31 January 2019. There were no breaches of the voluntary aspects of the pilot by fishermen from either sector. This meant that during the period of the pilot creel fishermen had sole access to the defined geographical area of the trial

(crabbing box) and no more than 300 creels per vessel were deployed. The results of this were that the creel fishermen 'could sleep at night' in the knowledge that their gears had not been towed away thereby relieving the stressful position some felt previously. Incomes were steady as a result during the trial period. The mobile sector's main concern was that having agreed to the pilot, and confirming this remains the case, they are concerned that loss of access to the crabbing box is an additional area of water where the locally based trawlers are subject to exclusion. Mention was made of MPAs in this context and the discussion focussed on areas which fishermen believe they could fish in the MPA without impacting on the designated feature namely skate. It was suggested that this issue may be explored further though currently the status quo remains.

What may happen post Phase 2 in 2020/21 onwards was raised as nobody wishes to revert to the position that pertained in the past when issues surrounding gear conflict occurred. Given that it is unlikely that new legislation will be available in time for the 2020/21 season, consideration to extending the pilot until such time as regulatory management becomes available is desirable.

Marine Scotland has accrued information from Fish 1 forms but in order to preserve confidentiality, particularly given the small number of vessels involved, details could not be shared at this stage. However, details will continue to be accrued during phase 2 and members expressed a wish to move from paper forms to electronic means of providing relevant information currently required via Fish 1. Members questioned the need for some of the details in Fish 1 forms which they believe are of no relevance with a view to electronic data collection being more fit for purpose. In the meantime, members were encouraged to ensure they complete Fish 1 forms correctly.

The meeting agreed that Phase 2 should take place without any changes to the defined area or other management conditions in order for consistency when the outcomes of both seasons are reviewed next year. Discussion took place around claims of exclusion from participation as raised at the WCRIFG meeting in March, but it was believed there were no issues in this regard. Five vessels will most probably participate in Phase 2 though the meeting was mindful of the need to allow any new start into the industry to take part if the situation arises.

Actions:

- (i) Phase 2 to commence on the 1 October 2012 until 31 January 2021
- (ii) potential scalloping zone in MPA to be investigated
- (iii) future opportunities to maintain crab zone post Phase 2 of pilot to be explored

3. Crab Tagging

The Chair thanked Matt, Orkney and Maddy (CMPP) for providing feedback and maps on crab tagging results pertaining to the WCRIFG area and particularly, the crab box specifically for the purpose of informing the Mull Work Group Meeting.

Since November 2018, 93 tag batches have been released which means 930 crabs have been tagged in the west coast. 77 crabs have been recaptured

and most of them were released (58 crabs). Of these 77, 63 were female and 12 were male (sex was not recorded for 2 recaptures)

The maps attached, illustrate the crab tagging activities and recaptures from west coast data to date. Additionally, tagging activity is focussed in the crab box. The project is already starting to provide valuable insight into the movement of crab both inside and outside the Mull crab box. Data is amalgamated and recaptures by sex have not been separated.

There are a number of recaptures which have been plotted but do not have a direction of travel, specifically recaptures recorded around Northern Ireland. This can be due to releases points yet to be submitted, or when the recapture was recorded no tag number was given or the tag number had worn away preventing this information being recorded. It's vital that the participating fishermen continue to submit their crab release logbooks as this is how cross referencing the batch location to individual tags is subsequently reported.

Members mentioned that tying of tags could conceal contact information and/or erase some of these details. Sometimes the only way to see the details from a recapture animal is to cut the tag off.

Map A – Distribution of all reported crab tagging releases and recaptures to date across the west coast rIFG

Map B - Distribution of tagging and recapture activity specifically in the Mull crab box.

Map C- Movement directions of recaptured Individuals from the information provided by the fishermen in the crab box.

Map D – Overall recapture movements, including recaptures outside of the crab box.

Actions:

- (i) Crab tagging to continue during the pilot but in general too
- (ii) Chair to advise Mat of issues with tying tags which conceal contact details

4. DONM

A further review meeting will be organised post Phase 2 the date of which will be arranged in early 2021