

# Recreational Angling Sector Group

MARKED M

## AGENDA

Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2023

19:00 – 21:00

### Meeting location:

Virtual meeting on MS Teams

## 1. Welcome and Apologies

**Apologies:** Wayne Comben, Mike Spiller, Steve Porter, Trevor Gibbs

**Attending:** Sam Cunningham, Chris Holloway, Allan Green, Colin Francis, Sarah Birchenough (DCO, Southern IFCA), Emily Condie (Southern IFCA), Fred Harris (Southern IFCA), Alice Hall (University of Plymouth) and Peter Davies (University of Plymouth)

Sarah Birchenough introduced Alice Hall and Peter Davies from the University of Plymouth who were attending the meeting to give a presentation to Members on the Angling for Sustainability Project. She also updated Members that Phil Higgins would no longer be a part of the RASG, Members expressed their thanks to Phil Higgins for his work on the group. Sarah Birchenough also introduced Emily Condie and Fred Harris, both IFCOs at Southern IFCA, who will be taking over the administration of this group going forwards.

Members of the group introduced themselves for the benefit of those attending who were new to the meeting.

## 2. Minutes of the Last Meeting (13<sup>th</sup> December 2022)

The minutes were agreed.

## 3. Presentation: Angling for Sustainability Project, University of Plymouth

Alice Hall and Peter Davies from the University of Plymouth gave a presentation on the recently funded FISP project 'Angling for Sustainability'. The project is being delivered in partnership with the Professional Boatman's Association, the Angling Trust, Natural England and Southern IFCA.

The speakers provided some background to the project and outlined that the University of Plymouth have been working on fish tagging programs over the last few years utilising acoustic telemetry techniques. The FISH INTEL project set up a network of receivers which is currently operational with the tagging work under that project focussing on bass, black bream, pollock and crawfish. An explanation was provided on how receivers are deployed, and the array networks constructed with a fine scale array deployed in the Sussex IFCA district to map black bream movements provided as an example. It was outlined that the Angling for Sustainability Project is looking to expand the black bream tagging work into Dorset.

Detail was provided on the Angling for Sustainability Project, which is a partnership between the scientific community and the fishing industry. The fishing industry partner for this project is the Professional Boatman's Association (PBA) who will act as a consortium to aid liaison with fishers, help identify vessels that could help with the project and help identify what kind of questions anglers would want to ask about the species being monitored and how these questions might be able to be answered using acoustic telemetry work.

The project will run for two years and details were provided on the planned workstreams during this period. The project will be studying black bream, starry smooth hound, tope and undulate ray in Dorset, the Solent and the Isle of Wight. The tagging process will use PIT tags where tagged fish can be scanned to determine if a tag is present, but it is easier to determine if a fish is tagged from visual inspection which is more difficult with other types of acoustic tags.

A preliminary plan of the receiver array was presented with the receivers in Dorset aiming to monitor black bream and a gateway of receivers in the Solent from the mainland to the Isle of Wight aiming to monitor elasmobranch species. Local anglers have been spoken to and have helped develop the receiver positions.

The project aims to look at site fidelity of black bream, i.e., do they use the same nests year on year or different nesting sites. Additional aims include to look at whether movement is influenced by any other factors and whether catch and release has any influence on movement patterns. It is recognised that population numbers for black bream are unknown, and this project aims to collect more data to help towards this question.

The Angling Trust are also involved in the project to help with engagement and communication. The aim is to feedback results from the project as quickly as possible to the angling community with workshops to be arranged in Dorset and the Solent to discuss the respective species. The first workshop on black bream in Dorset is aiming to be held at the end of May to provide an introduction to the project. The speakers asked Members of the group for input on the best time and location to hold this meeting. The recommendation from Members was to have an evening meeting during the week and Chris Holloway indicated he would be able to help find a suitable location.

Members asked whether the project was going to feed into the proposed Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) on black bream. It was stated that Defra was keen for funded research to lead into the FMP process. With the black bream FMP proposed for the 2023-2025 round of FMPs, the timeline would be appropriate for outputs from this

project to feed into that process. Members commented that undulate ray may also feature in a future FMP.

It was questioned how the information collected through the project would be handled and what elements could be kept confidential. There were concerns that by publicising data on black bream movements it may allow for more specific targeting at certain times of year by the commercial sector, increasing the impact on the species. It was outlined that the acoustic technology rarely provides specific information about sites which is not already generally known, i.e., in terms of nesting locations. The technology is not a GPS tag therefore the location of the fish is only known when it comes into the range of the receivers, the positions of which have been informed already by local fishers based on knowledge of bream presence. The project is aiming to ask questions more around the timing of when fish are accessing these wider areas and whether fish return year on year. It was stated that if there are any specific locations which are felt to be confidential, a conversation could be had about how to present that information in the project outputs. One of the Members raised that the tracking won't be for all black bream, only a subsection of the population and that the commercial risk for targeting is low as black bream are not usually a target species, the main interest is for the charter vessel fleet.

The speakers thanked Members for a useful discussion.

#### **4. Southern IFCA Updates/Ongoing Items**

Sarah Birchenough provided Members with an update from Southern IFCA.

The proposed Southern IFCA Net Fishing Byelaw and Pot Fishing Byelaw remain in the MMO Quality Assurance phase. There is no timeline at present for when these byelaws will pass to the next phase for consideration by the Secretary of State.

The Annual Plan for 2023-2024 and associated team strategies for the Research and Policy Team and the Compliance and Enforcement Team have been developed and were shared with Members of the Southern IFC Authority at their meeting in March where they were agreed. The plans have been sent to Defra and will be made available on the Southern IFCA website in due course. The Annual Plan outlines Horizon Goals for each of the teams which are then translated into clear outcomes and focused delivery priorities in each of the team strategies. The RPT Plan outlines that one of the Horizon Goals in the review of Minimum Conservation Reference Sizes (MCRS) which will be progressing through the coming year.

For Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs), it is anticipated that there will be formal consultations in the summer on the frontrunner plans. The Southern IFCA now has a Project Officer for FMPs who will be engaging with each of the FMPs and providing updates to the Southern IFC Authority and stakeholders. The dedicated webpage on the Southern IFCA website for FMPs is being updated with all relevant information for stakeholders and will be utilised to provide any updated on formal consultations when the dates become known ([Fisheries Management Plans : Southern IFCA \(southern-ifca.gov.uk\)](https://www.southern-ifca.gov.uk)). A question was asked about the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel Mixed Flatfish FMP and whether it covered the Southern IFCA district. It was confirmed that that particular FMP extended into ICES rectangle VIIId which covers the

eastern half of the Southern IFCA district and therefore the Southern IFCA would be involved in engagement for that FMP and provide updates to stakeholders. Currently, engagement opportunities in 2023 for this FMP are under review with consideration of the FMP lead moving from being Defra to being the MMO. The email address [FlatFishFMP@defra.gov.uk](mailto:FlatFishFMP@defra.gov.uk) can be used by stakeholders wishing to register an interest in future engagement on this FMP.

An update was also provided on the Poole Harbour oil spill incident which occurred in late March. Southern IFCA have been working with partner agencies to provide support and are in the process of helping to deliver a sampling program for shellfish in the Harbour to inform aquaculture and wild harvest fisheries. Fishing and/or netting for fish in Poole Harbour was able to resume from Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> April with those fishing advised to avoid any areas of the Harbour which were evidently contaminated with oil (spill site) and advice that any fish found to be dead, dying or visibly contaminated with oil residues should not be consumed or marketed. Southern IFCA continue to engage in this process with partner organisations.

## **5. Additional Requested Items**

### **a) Highly Protected Marine Areas**

An update was provided that there are currently three pilot site HPMA's being considered by Defra, with two of the original five sites proposed having been removed from the process. There are currently no proposed pilot sites within the Southern IFCA district.

### **b) Porbeagle Sharks**

A question was asked on the current status of porbeagle sharks. From the information available from the Shark Trust, Members were informed that the targeting of this species is prohibited along with retention and transshipping. Discarding of the species is permitted but there are no legal catches for this species.

### **c) Undulate Rays**

An issue was raised by one of the Members that recreational catches (on the basis of catch and release) of undulate ray in the eastern Solent have declined following the lifting of the commercial ban on this species. The average size of any undulate ray which are caught has also decreased from an average of 15lb per fish with some 20lb fish caught to the heaviest fish being caught being at 12lb following the lifting of the commercial ban.

Members of the group indicated that they had observed a similar pattern with the size decreasing over the last three years. It was noted that the same pattern had not been observed by the Charter fleet but that this could be a function of different fishing areas. It was commented that no undulate ray had been caught in the Poole area yet this year whereas it would be expected to have seen a few by now. Prior

to the Pandemic, angling clubs had written to the Angling Trust to ask that the specimen weight be increased from 14lb to 16.5lb due to large numbers of ~14lb rays being caught. It is now rare to catch an undulate ray at that weight. The University of Plymouth stated that the Angling for Sustainability Project would be looking at undulate ray and that whilst the focus would be in the Solent for this species there could be some benefit to tagging some Dorset individuals on the basis of this discussion.

## **6. Any Other Business**

None.

## **7. Date of the Next Meeting**

To be confirmed.