

NORTH EASTERN INSHORE FISHERIES AND CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

SCIENCE ADVISORY GROUP

19 August 2021

Present

Dr Stephen Axford (Chair)
Prof Mike Elliott
Dr Claire Fitzsimmons
Mr Paul Slater
Mr Michael Montgomerie
Mr Graham Collins
Ms Rebecca Lynam
Ms Emma Brown
Mr Paul Slater

Representing

MMO Appointee
MMO Appointee
MMO Appointee
MMO Appointee
MMO Appointee
MMO Appointee
MMO Appointee
Natural England
Environment Agency

Senior Environmental & Scientific Officer Tim Smith also attended the meeting.

The group met virtually via Teams. The meeting started at 09:30.

1. APOLOGIES

None stated.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 11 MARCH 2020

Prof Mike Elliot enquired if the planned Mariculture workshop as mentioned in the previous meeting minutes is still going ahead. Tim Smith explained that there has been recent development in the region, the Seaweed farm in Scarborough and various Oyster and restoration projects. The permits for mariculture are issued by the MMO (as marine licenses) and Crown Estate (as sea bed lease agreements). NEIFCA currently have no management in place to manage these activities. Other IFCA's have taken on the management of these activities but the NEIFCA has not made any decisions about this yet.

Resolved - That the minutes of the Science and Governance Working Group Meeting held on the 11 March 2020 be confirmed and signed as a correct record by the Chair.

3. OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE OF THE GROUP

A brief overview of the role and remit of the Science Advisory Group was given to inform new members. Given the prolonged break between meetings for the group much of the meeting was focussed on updating members on current priorities.

Resolved – That all new members were aware of the role of the Science Advisory Group.

4. ELECTION OF A NEW CHAIR

Resolved – MMO appointee Prof Mike Elliott has been unanimously elected as the new chair of the North Eastern Inshore and Conservation Authority Science Advisory Group.

5. STAFFING POSITION AND IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE SAG

Senior Environmental and Scientific Officer Tim Smith gave an update on staffing vacancies and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on NEIFCAs survey capacity. Vacant positions within the Environmental and Scientific team had been carried since June 2020. The NEIFCA has now completed the recruitment process and appointed two new members of staff for the Environmental and Scientific team, Samira Anand and Ralf Bublitz, expecting them to start by the end of September. MMO appointee Prof Mike Elliot asked about the planned work patterns in line with COVID-19 restrictions. Senior Environmental and Scientific Officer Tim Smith explained that in the beginning it will be mainly office based to get the team familiarised and up to speed and once the new staff have been issued with laptops there will be a hybrid approach with working from home at times.

Resolved – Members noted the report.

6. SCALLOP DREDGING RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT

An overview of the work undertaken in the development of the scallop dredge fishery was given by Senior Environmental and Scientific Officer Tim Smith. A draft Fishery Management Plan has been developed, however, this needs to be considered in light of the on-going development of national Fishery Management Plans as part of the new Fisheries Act.

Discussions were held regarding the frequency of habitat video data collection considering future evidence needs. It was agreed that video surveys would be carried out during alternate years so that analysis could be undertaken if required. Surveys would be undertaken during 2022. The target of 36 observer trips aboard permitted dredge vessels and the impact on staff resources was also discussed. Prof Mike Elliot suggested looking at the data from previous years and assessing the number of surveys required to retain confidence in the data collected. Members discussed the possibility of getting students from the University of Hull doing the offshore sampling for their projects or as part of a module with Ralf Bublitz as the liaison.

Resolved – Members agreed that habitat video footage would be captured in 2022. Members agreed that the number of surveys should be reduced once Tim Smith has looked at the previous data.

Actions – Video surveys should be added to the 2022/23 survey plan. Review number of observer trips needed to retain confidence in bycatch and stock data.

7. NATIONAL WORKSTREAMS

Senior Environmental & Scientific Officer Tim Smith explained that the development of Fisheries Management Plans has been put on hold given announcements surrounding national Fisheries Management Plans. At this time it is not clear what the format of the plans or what the role of the IFCAs in their development will be. An update was given to members on engagement in the process to date including representation at the Crab and Lobster science group, which sits under the Shellfish Industry Advisory Group being hosted by Seafish.

Resolved – Members agreed to endorse Tim Smith's work if needed and to support on guidance to where his time is best spent in this development process for the FMPs.

8. IFCA TAG – METRIC AND REPORTING DEVELOPMENT

Senior Environmental & Scientific Officer Tim Smith updated members on the metric and reporting development work begun by the AIFCA. This is in response to perceived challenges in

communicating the work and the value of the IFCAs in fisheries management, evidence collection and novel research to DEFRA. A ‘Theory of change’ model is being promoted as an appropriate framework to achieve these objectives. Funding has been secured by the AIFCA to develop this workstream.

Resolved – Members agreed that there is a need for more publicity of IFCA’s work e.g. maps for different activities, more visible accessibility for the data the IFCA is collecting and increased presence at important meetings

9. IFCA/MMO SIGHTINGS PROJECT, CATCH REPORTING

Completed Marine Protected Area assessments highlighted a need for better vessel monitoring and catch recording systems to adequately manage fisheries within the NEIFCA district. The introduction of an Automatic Identification System bylaw had been rejected by central government on grounds of duplication with the planned national Inshore Vessel Monitoring System project. An urgent need for information related to inshore fisheries has been identified by Defra, who have tasked the MMO with undertaking an update of the National Inshore Fishing Data Layer which was produced by analysis of IFCA sightings data. The IFCA TAG and AIFCA are aiding the MMO in this task.

Members were informed that the national under 10m catch reporting app was operational but not yet fully enforced. The system does not require band of capture to be reported by fishers, which would distinguish catches made within the NEIFCA district. This issue has been raised with the MMO in multiple forums and may be addressed in the future. A permit specific catch return system is currently being developed by an external supplier. This new database will also act as a replacement for the current FLARE system used for permits. This will be integrated with the new website currently being developed.

Resolved – Members noted the report. Members requested that the State of the Fisheries report be updated.

10. SPURN EELGRASS BYELAW REVIEW

Senior Environmental and Scientific Officer Tim Smith advised that the eelgrass protection area at Spurn Point was in need of revision given the continued recorded presence of the species outside the boundary defined within the Humber Fishing Byelaw.

Resolved – Members agreed that a revised byelaw should be presented.

11. BAIT DIGGING AND SHORE COLLECTION – FISHGIG

Senior Environmental and Scientific Officer Tim Smith explained considerations surrounding the management of recreational and bait collection activities within the district, particularly at Bran Sands in the Tees Estuary. A joint IFCA working group had been established to develop a management guidance document for use by IFCA Authorities.

Resolved – Members noted the report.

12. SEA BASS

Senior Environmental and Scientific Officer Tim Smith informed members that the shore net fishery had started again. Catch returns would be collected as in previous years however no further work was planned.

IFCA is not planning any actions for the Sea Bass fisheries. The shore netting fishermen have started again and there doesn’t seem to be any need for research as it is a long-established fishery. Only catch return data will be collected.

Resolved – Members noted the report.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- Feeding back on the NE regional fisheries management plan workshop
- Establishing an email group and re-activating dropbox

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

TBC

The meeting closed at 12:47