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Welsh Government

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MEETING

Wales Whelk Advisory Group meeting: 2 November 2022

Notes of meeting held virtually on Wednesday 02 November 2022, 4pm to 5pm.

First published: 2 November 2022

Last updated: 2 November 2022

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Present

Julian Bray, Domestic Fisheries Policy and Management, Welsh Government - Chair

Tim Bowman Davies, Fisher

Colin Charman, Natural Resources Wales

Carl Davies, Fisher

Kevin Denman, Fisher & Southwest Wales Fishing Communities

Jim Evans, Welsh Fisherman's Association

Natalie Hold, Sustainable Fisheries Wales, School of Ocean Sciences, Bangor University

Stuart Jones, Fisher

Kevin Moore, Fisher Chloe North, Southwestern Fish Producer Organisation

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Tim Croucher, Head of Shore Based Fisheries Operation, Welsh Government

Matthew Sayer, Senior Policy Analyst, Fisheries Science, Welsh Government

Andy Bradick, Fishery Manager, Welsh Government

1. Welcome and Apologies

Chair welcomed all to the meeting, and introductions were made. Minutes of last WWAG meeting were approved and will be published to the whelk web pages. Terms of Reference finalised with one amendment (JE: Section 1.2 should refer to whelk fishery management in Wales) and will be published to the whelk web pages.

Apologies were received from: Mark Merrick, AM Seafoods – Buyer/Processor.

2. Whelk permit fee - permit period 2023-24

Andy explained that all proposals relating to the 2023-24 permit were subject to Ministerial approval. Andy clarified the rationale behind the introduction of a permit fee was to recover the costs for fishery management, administration and stock assessment surveys. Enforcement activities will not be included. This is in line with the principles of Managing Welsh Public Money (2016) and will help provide good quality data to underpin adaptive management of the fishery. Andy outlined the method used to calculate the proposed fee of £285. There was no fee for the current permit period (2022-23) as Welsh Government (WG) needed to understand the costs, which at this stage are still not fully known.

For the next permit period (2023-24) WG will look to recover the known costs of the whelk stock survey of £53,500. Mindful of the impacts of the pandemic/ economic climate/fuel prices/reduced demand for whelk, WG propose to recover 50% of these costs, with the aim of full cost recovery in 5 years whilst seeking efficiencies to minimise costs to the fisher in parallel.

The permit fee was calculated as 50% of £53,500 divided by 94 permits issued in 2022-23.

A demonstration of the secure online payment process using GOV.UK Pay followed. Proposals were outlined for the requirement to pay the permit fee within 21 days of receiving a payment request and the option to obtain a full refund within 14 days of payment if the permit is unused.

Comments:

JE: Have you thought about charging a levy rather than a fee?

KD: A permit fee may impact vessels fishing across different fisheries and perhaps only whelking 3-4 months in a permit period. May discourage diversity especially in smaller vessels.

CD: (Via email after meeting) Concern that in future may be permit fee for other fisheries and all these will add up to a sizeable sum for a small vessel. If an easier path to polyvalency, is to be an option for the Welsh inshore fleet, in times where there is such flux of species in different areas, we must be mindful of annual cumulative charges for different fisheries. A levy maybe a fairer way of distributing the costs.

Response:

JB: (After meeting) The new WG whelk management system is still at a relatively early stage and, as discussed in the meeting, the Welsh Government will make every effort to keep the permit fee at a reasonable level. Should the Welsh Government seek to introduce permit fees for other fisheries in the future they would also have to be reasonable/ rational and subject to a 12- week public consultation to enable stakeholders to raise any concerns.

3. Scientific status of whelk stocks survey

Natalie provided an overview of the annual survey of whelk in Welsh waters that took place in September 2022. Five sites, distributed across Wales, were surveyed. Size data for whelk along with four size-based stock status indicators and reference points were used to assess the status of stocks in Welsh waters.

The summary report and recommendations can be found here:

<https://gov.wales/wales-whelk-length-based-indicator-assessment-2022>

<https://gov.wales/wales-whelk-length-based-indicator-assessment-2022>

Comments:

KD: The current MLS has resulted in a small number of vessels in Swansea Bay taking reduced catches of whelk because of the small size of whelk in this area.

NH: Confirmed whelk in this area were smaller and pointed out whelks nearby were of a normal size and the reason for the difference was not known.

Response:

JB: WG recognise the issue, however, at this stage creating separate regulations for such a small area would be impractical for enforcement purposes and undermine wider management.

4. ACL & initial MCL - permit period 2023-24

Andy recapped, the Annual Catch Limit (ACL) is the total amount of whelk which can be taken by all permitted vessels during a permit period, and its purpose is to conserve whelk stock and ensure a sustainable fishery.

The ACL will be set using a baseline of **5,298** tonnes (the average of the total landings into Welsh ports over the reference period 2015-19) which should be considered a ceiling rather than a target.

In the current permit period (2022-23) the baseline figure of 5,298 tonnes was used and after 8 months **3,494** tonnes have been landed and **1,804** tonnes remain for the following 4 months. The expectation is that by the end of the

current permit period, total catches will not exceed the ACL.

The proposal for the next permit period (2023-24) is that the baseline ACL will be reduced or 'buffered' by 10% to **4,768** tonnes, in line with ICES advice for a data poor fishery. This reduction is based on the results of the whelk stock survey which highlighted some uncertainty about the health of whelk stocks.

The Flexible Monthly Catch Limit (MCL) is the maximum amount of whelk each permitted vessel can take per month, the purpose being to ensure the ACL is not exceeded and fishing is spread across the permit period.

In the current permit period (2022-23) an MCL of 50 tonnes per vessel has not been varied during the first 8 months of the permit period. Only on 9 occasions did vessels land more than 75% of their MCL.

As a result of the need to introduce a 10% buffer/reduction to the ACL in the next permit period and continued late submission of catch returns from some fishers (making it difficult to adaptively manage the fishery) there is still a need to maintain a relatively precautionary approach. Therefore, the Welsh Government is proposing the initial MCL for the next permit period (2023-24) in March 2023 will remain at 50 tonnes.

Comments:

CN: Have you considered a limit of 100 tonnes for two months to assist the larger nomadic vessels?

Response:

JB: Yes, we have considered this. In light of the continued need to maintain a precautionary approach and concerns this might reduce our control of

exploitation we will continue to apply limits to single months.

Comments:

(Context to below comment: Because of difficulties with enforcement, WG assume if a vessel fishes inside and outside Welsh Zone on the same trip, all whelk landed is taken from the Welsh zone and is deducted from the vessels MCL and the fishery ACL.)

CD: (After meeting) WG have to make sure these virtual landings are a) not significantly drawing down the actual quota available for capture by permit holders and b) are taken into account so that the science is not blurred.

AB: (After meeting) Only a small proportion of permitted vessels could contribute to any 'virtual landings' and, to date, the monitoring of these vessels suggests the quantities are small.

5. Whelk permit conditions proposal - permit period 2023-24

Andy explained that the proposal is to remove one permit condition that detailed the period for which the permit was valid, as this information was already maintained on the permit itself. There are no proposed additional permit conditions.

6. Consultation on permit changes

Andy outlined that a targeted consultation would begin in November for two weeks covering all the proposals discussed in this meeting. Including:

- Permit fee and its calculation
- ACL & initial flexible MCL
- Permit condition amendments

7. AOB

CD: Was it necessary for fishers to fill in a separate catch record for the whelk fishery with other catch recording systems already in existence.

NH: Scientists have asked for changes in some of the landings data capture systems to improve data quality, but progress has been slow.

JB: The whelk catch return provides valuable data to enable management of the fishery. WG are aware of the issue and have, along with others, requested changes although, with so many competing priorities in this field, no changes have been made to date

The Chair then drew the meeting to a close.

Actions

Action 1: Final amendment to Terms of Reference - AB

Action 2: Publish Terms of Reference and notes of previous WWAG meeting to the WG whelk pages. <https://gov.wales/whelk-fishery> (<https://gov.wales/whelk-fishery>) - AB

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