



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

# Ministerial Advisory Group for Welsh Fisheries meeting: 24 April 2023

Minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2023.

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# Attendees

**Group:** Gareth Cunningham (GC), Carl Davies (CD), Kevin Denman (KD), Natalie Hold (NH), John O'Connor (JOC), Lewis Tattersal (LT), Alan Winstone (AW),

**Welsh Government:** Gareth Bevington (GB)(Chair), Julian Bray (JB), Mark Stafford (MS), Rob Floyd (RF), Alun Mortimer (notes)

**Apologies:** Emily Williams, Colin Charman, Mark Gray, Lynn Gilmore, Nerys Edwards, Colin MacDonald

# Agenda

- 1 Welcome and WG updates - 10:30 – 10:40
- 2 Terms of Reference (ToR) update and previous meeting notes (Docs 1 and 2) - 10:40 – 10:50
- 3 Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) (Docs 3 & 4) - 10:50 – 11:20
- 4 Pacific Oysters Discussion Paper (Doc 5) - 11:20 – 11:45
- 5 Whelk Fishery 2022/23 (Doc 6) - 11:45 – 12:00
- 6 Cockle Fishery Management (verbal update) - 12:00 – 12:05
- 7 Allocation Policy for Additional Quota 2023 - 12:05 – 12:25
- 8 AOB 12:25 – 12:30.

# Papers

Doc 1: Notes and actions from MAGWF 2022 Meeting 2 (24-11-2022)

Doc 2: Updated Terms of Reference (ToR) document

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Doc 3: Bass Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) for England and Wales  
Doc 4: King Scallop Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) for Wales and England  
Doc 5: Pacific Oysters  
Doc 6: Whelk Fishery Permit Period 2022-23: MAGWF update March 2023  
Doc 7: Allocation Policy for Additional Quota 2023

## 1 Welcome and WG updates

GB started the meeting by welcoming the group and apologising for having to reschedule this meeting (originally for 23 March 2023). Introductions to attendees who are deputising or new to the group.

The Retained EU Law Bill (REUL) has been in the news recently but there has been no formal change to the UKG approach notified to WG.

2023 UK-EU fisheries negotiations concluded in December 2022. The group will have seen the written communications on this topic. The relevant legislation was passed by the UKG with WG consent. Quota management discussed in this meeting.

## 2 Terms of Reference (ToR) update and previous meeting notes (Docs 1 and 2)

GB invited comments on the updated ToR. The following requests were made and agreed:

- Amend ToR to specify that MAGWF will work to Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs).
- Amend ToR so that the presumption for shared documents is that they can

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be shared externally rather than not to be shared beyond membership organisations.

- Further tweaks can be made to wording as necessary.

## **Action 1: update ToR as above**

The meeting notes were agreed to be an accurate record. A question was raised regarding an action to share information related to the production of the JFS. GB confirmed that there is no document to share describing WG priorities for the making of the JFS.

Questions were raised about the absence of a WG strategy for fisheries. GB confirmed that the Minister has decided not to commission a comprehensive strategy for this sector for the time being. However, it was agreed that this topic should be discussed further.

**Action 2: schedule discussion on strategic direction for Welsh fisheries.**

## **3 Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) (Docs 3 & 4)**

JB provided an update, presented the papers (shared with group in advance) and led the discussion on the two FMPs being developed for Bass and Scallops.

The point was made that this is a completely new process to everyone.

JB confirmed that new management measures will be subject to consultation even after legislation but that legislation will be consistent with the relevant FMP.

It was noted that FMPs are for wild catch fisheries only not aquaculture.

A query was raised about whether catch limits could be set regionally following the FMP and new legislation. JB advised that cannot confirm this at present but it is unlikely to be one catch limit for England and Wales for joint FMPs. The aim is to integrate scientific data into management processes and the more detailed data, the more specific catch limits can be.

Concern was expressed that for joint FMPs, English interests would prevail in legislation. JB confirmed the Welsh Government has jurisdiction for making the regulations relating to Wales so this shouldn't be the case.

Black market activity was raised as having the potential to skew catch recording figures. JB advised that control and enforcement observation aims to tackle this and by its nature, black market activity is difficult to account for.

Members provided some insight into commercial activity in South Wales and highlighted the importance of Bass to local fishers, commercial and recreational. These points have been raised with the FMP engagement undertaken by Policy Lab. JB encouraged all interested parties to continue feeding into the process.

Concern was raised over the [digital/virtual] remoteness of the engagement for, and specifically the drafting of, the Bass FMP. JB acknowledged it is a very different approach to past examples and the Scallop FMP but it is worth trialling different methods to see what works.

## 4 Pacific Oysters Discussion Paper (Doc 5)

AW presented a paper to raise issues related to the cultivation of Pacific Oysters in Welsh waters and led a discussion on policy approaches. This is the first paper from a member of the group.

AW highlighted a few points from the paper:

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- There are opportunities and risks of attempting to increasing production, prevent the spread of feral populations or naturalising the species in Wales.
- Approach taken by UKG for England, while somewhat arbitrary (dividing line at 52 degrees North) will impact Wales.
- Two long-standing Pacific Oyster production sites in Wales and others under consideration but paused due to uncertainty.
- There is a lot of scientific information available on this topic which would be helpful for policy making.
- Over next 60-80 years it is likely that increasing sea temperatures will make it possible for wild populations to spawn and become self-sustaining. This can cause problematic reefs to form. Once established, they become impossible to remove.
- If the policy were to mitigate spread of wild populations, one method would be to use triploid oysters but there is only one hatchery in Guernsey where they are available in the UK jurisdiction.

GB – WG does not have a policy on approach to managing Pacific Oysters in Welsh waters and we're keen to hear the groups views.

The following points were raised:

- If they were established and controlled fisheries, that might help manage them.
- We seem to be regenerating native oysters, is one better than the other?
- A line at 52 degrees on a map where above is restricted and below is permitted is arbitrary and does not allow for location specific decisions. A Wales specific policy on this issue is important.
- Whether or not it is sensible to produce Pacific Oyster in any given location should depend on an assessment for each prospective site.
- On South coast of England, it looks like they're throwing money at eradicating Pacific Oysters near MPAs for little benefit.
- Where there are restoration plans [for native oysters], they might not be the best places.

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- Bangor University academics might have more detailed answer on when the tipping points for the various development stages occur before Pacific Oysters are established.
- Stakeholders in the industry are looking for clarity on a way forward. This would help as it is affecting investment.
- Does not appear that disease [in particular bonamia/bonamiosis] is an issue because only healthy oysters can be introduced.
- Could we consider a sub-group for developing a policy on Pacific Oysters [as per ToR]? Several members indicated they would be interested in contributing to such a group.

GB – Thank you AW for the paper and all for the discussion. It is unlikely that we will be able to take this forward in the short term given other pressures but it is something we will consider. Any decision for how to proceed will be for the Minister.

**Action 3: Welsh Government to consider policy on Pacific Oysters.**

## 5 Whelk Fishery 2022/23 (Doc 6)

JB provided an update on Whelk fishery management and invited questions from the group. Key points:

- Whelks are one of Wales' most valuable fisheries.
- New regime created by Whelk Order implemented on 1 March 2022 to facilitate adaptive management and maintain the sustainability of the fishery.
- Permits were free for the first year to assess take up. 55 of the 98 permits issued were used. It is likely that the 43 that were issued but not used were to create some kind of 'track record'. The charge of a permit for 2023 is £285 and this seems to have put a stopped. A track record is not required to apply for a permit.

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- Info online about how we manage the fishery.
- Annual catch limit (ACL) down 10% in 2023 compared to 2022 based on scientific advice. Also have a monthly catch limit (MCL). Expect MCL limit will go down because of the ACL decrease. Mild weather meant catches increased towards end of the year but that was ok because of the low catch at start of the year.
- Info online about how we manage the fishery.
- This is a good example of how co-management has helped to deliver. Seems to have been accepted relatively well by the industry in the first year.
- Not seeing the whelk die-off in Wales that has been observed in Kent. It is believed that this is due to temperature rises in a shallow water.
- Always worth contributing to consultations. In this case it was an option suggested by consultation respondent that was developed.

## 6 Cockle Fishery Management (verbal update)

JB provided an update on Cockle management, which will be changing to be more similar to Whelk. Some cockle beds are currently always open but this will change so beds will be closed unless opened. The new regime could have adaptative measures down to the individual cockle bed. WG had a good response to consultation and have a draft order. The intention is to set up a cockle management advisory group as has been done for whelks.

## 7 Allocation Policy for Additional Quota 2023 (Doc 7)

MS presented a paper and answered questions on the Welsh Government approach to additional quota following EU exit and terms of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA). Key points from discussion:

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- The Welsh Government negotiated an exception to the previous arrangement for additional quota because it did not work for Welsh fishers. Final determination on stocks is in the paper. Additional quota will now be held by WG and distributed on an expression of interest basis.
- This approach requires some paperwork in terms of changing licences and making an application to express interest in additional quota. WG hopes to see activity and development in some areas of the Welsh sector which haven't seen for some time.
- There was a plea from stakeholders to keep additional quota application process simple as Wales has had diminishing share of quota relative to England since 2012. English and Belgian boats have been landing tons of Sole into Holyhead for example.
- MS confirmed that WG intend to work with stakeholders to develop this further.
- Consensus that new approach is an improvement.
- Industry is seeing a gradual but positive effect of additional quota. More trawlers seen in Swansea. Taking time to build because starting from low base.
- Key species is sole. Plaice quota figure is healthy but not seeing the catch – that's why not seeing it in the catch recording figures. Seeing the emergence of fishing of long ignored stocks.
- Need to keep advertising the opportunity to encourage people to switch.
- If vessels are being adapted, the MCA want to get involved to check safety.

Question on a separate topic. Defra are looking at introducing low quota for Albacore (Tuna). There will be hefty observer costs attached to the quota. What is WG approach going forward?

MS confirmed that it is not clear how any quota might be divided between fisheries administrations but Tuna stocks are held at UK level for all of the UK and there are ICCAT conditions to comply with.

GB – Pace of this issue is moving fast in UKG. This is a topic for discussion at a

future meeting.

**Action 4: consider a discussion on approach to tuna quota for future meeting.**

## 8 AOB

Various points were raised as AOB including:

- Can we share Seafish report on sea fish and aquaculture – so members know challenges.
- Spatial squeeze: there is a consultation specific to Wales' MCZs live now which ends 12 May for awareness.
- MCA related things – medical examinations are a particular issue at the minute. Expecting a report on this.
- Home office decision to implement s53 of Nationality and Borders Act will create issues. Predominantly elsewhere. One vessel in Wales has 4 crew from skilled worker visas.
- Would like to have more fishermen to this group.
- Revenue based grants are no good for helping vessels meet net zero
- Question regarding the approach to buried hen lobsters
- Catch recording – archaic method filling in forms for under 10 metre vessels. Over 10 can use their smart phones.

GB – Discussions ongoing regarding the visa issue. Settled on group membership for now. Can Table MCA report as a future item. Other points we'll have to take forward.

Meeting closed 12:43.

# Actions

- 1 Update ToR – several minor changes as per notes (WG) - completed
- 2 Schedule discussion on strategic direction for Welsh fisheries at next MAGWF meeting (WG) - completed
- 3 Consider Welsh Government policy and approach on Pacific Oysters (WG/ All) - ongoing
- 4 Consider discussion on Tuna at future MAGWF meeting (WG) - completed.

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