



**North Western
Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
18th October 2011
Report to Technical, Science & Byelaws sub-Committee**

Agenda Item: 9

TAG Meeting 6th October 2011

I attended my first TAG meeting in London on Thursday 6th October.

The Technical Advisory Group was formed after the 2009 SFC / CEFAS Science Day. The purpose of this community is to allow for an exchange of information pertaining to science and technology between IFCAs so improving cooperation and consistency between organisations at a technical officer level. As well as IFCA members of TAG, the group welcomes nominated representation from CEFAS, Defra, Natural England & the Environment Agency. The TAG Communities of Practice web forum also serves nominated members of TAG from the Channel Isles and the Isle of Man.

Representatives from all the other IFCAs (except Scilly Isles) were in attendance, along with reps from Natural England, WAG, MMO, CEFAS and Defra.

There was a very full agenda with healthy discussion, which I found particularly useful in terms of gaining a view of how other IFCAs were approaching some of the issues facing us all in our first year of existence.

It would take me too long to give a summary of all the items covered and therefore if there is anything that members would like more details on then please contact me. However I would like to give a brief overview of the most pertinent issues discussed.

1) Feedback from TAG Presentation to the Chief Officers Group (prior to 1st April 2011)

- TAG had given a presentation to the COG about its work since 2009
- COs were very impressed with the work of TAG
- COs advised TAG to continue to build on the relationships established between IFCA science and research officers
- some of TAG's work will be informed by workstream flowing through to it from the COG

2) MMO – Presentation by Patricia Almada (head of science) on data and evidence priorities of the IFCAs and the MMO in the context of marine planning

- marine planning is an MMO priority
- best available science for evidence
- MMO: small team – 8 but hoping to increase it to 12

- recognise this is a massive challenge to all and need to work in partnership
- MMO have produced a Strategic Evidence Plan and are now commissioning targeted work
- will be commissioning work on fisheries
- phased programme of work – need to communicate with partners at all stages
- a workshop taking place on 21st October re: habitat mapping – it is all happening disparately at the moment and needs a coherent approach
- working with Defra’s Evidence programme to help prioritise research for large scale integrated research
- evidence sharing – data sharing agreement between MMO and IFCA’s – 7th October – Stephen Bolt. Will share all data conditional on legal restrictions.

3) MEDIN Fisheries DAC – update on outcomes of work conducted earlier in year to assess the extent and quality of SFC/IFCA data and metadata with a view to forming part of a Marine Fisheries DAC (Data Archive Centre) under MEDIN (Marine Environmental Data and Information Network)

- For some time now, IFCA TAG members have been involved in a project by MEDIN to create a Marine Fisheries DAC.
- Before IFCA data holdings can be part of a DAC they need to reach certain standards, most importantly in respect of their metadata.
- Earlier this year funding was provided by MEDIN for an assessment of the extent and status of SFC/IFCA data holdings. The primary aims were to identify what work would be necessary to enable the inclusion of relevant “historic” SFC/IFCA datasets in any Marine Fisheries DAC and to develop a protocol/SOP to ensure future data and metadata are collected and recorded to MEDIN standards.
- The work referred to above was carried out by officers from the Data Archive for Seabed Species and Habitats (DASSH) who already act as a Marine DAC for MEDIN. The full report into the exercise is available in draft form on the IFCA Communities of Practice website but general recommendations are below.
- Subsequent discussions with DASSH officers regarding the reports findings suggest that the work required in respect of archiving, digitising and creating metadata records for the most important datasets is achievable and worthwhile.
- DASSH also feel that an SOP for the recording of new datasets and their metadata is another relatively easily achievable goal.
- In addition to the report findings was a suggestion by DASSH that, as well as looking at how IFCA’s make their own data available to a wider audience, they also consider how they might access what is available through MEDIN to support and expand their evidence base for management decisions.

- MEDIN have advised that the IFCA's should consider bidding for funding from them, through DASSH, for further work.
- A bid is being made to MEDIN to fund work on digitising and archiving important datasets, creating SOPs for the creation of metadata records for existing and new datasets and investigating what IFCA's can get out of MEDIN in terms of access to datasets held by other institutions and organisations.

4) Research Plans and how IFCA's are tackling them (Annual and Strategic Plans)

Efforts have been made to try and develop guidance on how to layout and develop IFCA research plans and reports in such a way that they can be easily shared and understood. A generic format of headings and size of document had been previously suggested. A discussion was held on progress made re: planning and the usefulness of the guidance.

Some IFCA's are further ahead with their research documents than others, while some are approaching the issue by writing a 5 year Strategic Research plan. It was generally felt that an Annual Plan for the next year was not too arduous a task. Some are taking a top-down view while others a bottom-up approach. The question over the 5 year plan is how this ties in with the Sustainable Fisheries Review, which presumably has to be done first in order to inform the Authority of where to direct its research and science resources.

The advantage of a longer term plan is its ability to identify gaps within the Authority and resourcing needs. An example will be posted on TAG CoP website to aid others in progressing this work.

It was proposed to hold a TAG Science Report workshop in December with invitees from Defra, CEFAS and MMO.

5) Using strategic projects like Navigating the Future to help develop management plans.

This item may help to inform the NWIFCA's work on the Sustainable Fisheries Review Project. Two separate processes had been used by three different SFC/IFCA's to assess their district's fisheries.

SEA (Strategic Environmental Assessment) – North East SFC

Navigating the Future (Sussex SFC pilot and Kent & Essex IFCA)

Pros and cons of each were discussed. They both provide the same outcomes but through different processes. Interestingly, each out-sourced the work to consultancies.

There had been a proposal for SAGB (Shellfish Association of Great Britain) to run with NtF on a national level which would have cost each IFCA around £20,000. This has now been put on hold. It cost Sussex SFC £40-60,000 which shows that a co-ordinated national approach would be much more cost effective, using one consultancy and a consistent approach.

Apparently Mike Kaiser from Bangor University is putting in a bid to EFF for a Wales project.

MMO are interested in a national proposal.

6) Joint Training Opportunities

Previous TAG meetings identified 5 key areas of interest for the group (habitat mapping, fishing activity mapping and analysis, effects of fishing, stock assessment, and industry / public engagement) with fisheries activity mapping and habitat mapping identified as the 2 major areas.

Specific areas of training for scientific staff were identified:

- GIS specialist training for specific staff
- GIS general understanding for larger number of staff
- Specialist habitat mapping skills with underwater video cameras
- Specialist habitat mapping skills with remote sensing equipment
- Developing project management skills
- General knowledge and understanding of principles of international and national conservation for large number of staff
- General knowledge and understanding of principles of MCZs as a conservation tool
- Marine sampling and marine surveying

Suggestion to also look at joint training with Defra, Cefas, MMO, EA and NE especially in relation to GIS training and habitat mapping.

Need a skills audit of TAG members and then take this to COG for approval.

7) CEFAS mapping inshore fishing effort

During 2009/10 Cefas and the Sea Fisheries Committees worked together to collate the fishing vessel sightings data collected between 2007 and 2009. This work resulted in the development of a series of national data layers illustrating the distribution and intensity of inshore fishing activities. The project also introduced standardised data recording and provided GIS training and GIS tools to the IFCA's.

The project was considered hugely successful in terms of its outputs, but also in demonstrating how IFCA's can work together and the benefits this brings to the IFCA's, as well as other Government organisations. It has been uploaded on to MMO Marine Planning Portal, and used by EA for WFD.

The need for information on the location and intensity of fishing activities both in inshore and offshore areas has not gone away and there is likely to be a continued need for such data. This has also been recognised by the IFCA TAG as one of the priority areas of collaboration. In addition to benefits for IFCA's, the data is also hugely important to national bodies such as the MMO for marine planning or to undertake future assessments under WFD and MSFD. In recognition of the importance of this work Defra have asked Cefas to develop a project proposal building on the previous work and relationships:

- Work with IFCA's to develop national inshore fishing activity data layers for 2010, 2011 and 2012;
- Explore temporal changes in the location and intensity of fishing activities between 2007 and 2012 (behaviour and external influence); and
- Further explore and develop the Zone of Influence concept, defining the spatial extent of fishing activities around coastal ports (see page 79 onwards in <http://www.cefas.defra.gov.uk/media/462444/mepf%2008%20p73%20final%20report.pdf>).

Request to the IFCA TAG

Cefas are seeking support from IFCAs to continue this collaborative work analysing the data collected by IFCAs. IFCAs would provide their sightings data to Cefas for analysis, and Cefas will provide outputs to IFCAs and continue to assist the development of IFCAs capability in this field.

Need Chief Officers support to continue – TAG does not have mandate to make these decisions.

8) Research into Bait Collection

With the introduction of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, under section 153, “bait” became classed as a “sea fisheries resource” and as such fell under the remit of the IFCAs. This means that for the first time, the collection of bait can now be regulated and managed through appropriate fisheries legislation. In light of this, the Southern IFCA has been conducting an investigation into bait collection within the district with the aim to introduce management measures that can monitor and effectively maintain bait collection at sustainable levels, taking account of both environmental impacts and socio-economic factors.

There are large numbers of people involved in bait collection including commercial and personal collectors, recreational anglers, angling and tackle shops and tourists meaning that any regulation of bait collection needs serious consideration of the socio-economic impacts that any potential management measures might have.

The collection of bait however, in particular the collection of *Nereis virens* (ragworm) and *Arenicola marina* (lugworm), the two most popular bait species in the UK, is a highly contentious issue with concerns building ever since the 1970s. There are a number of suggested impacts of bait collection on the surrounding habitat including impacts on target and non-target species, the physical characteristics of the sediment and, perhaps the most widely researched, wading and over-wintering bird populations.

Legal Status of Bait Collection

The legal status with regard to bait collection is complicated, the Southern IFCA has received advice from our legal team regarding this matter, and the main points of interest are outlined below:

- Rag and Lug worm are not held to be fish (determined from *Anderson vs Alnwick DC* and *Adair vs National Trust*)
- Digging for worms on the foreshore is a common law right exercisable by the public at large over land which is under the ownership of others (confirmed by *Anderson vs Alnwick DC* and *Adair vs National Trust*)
- But this right to dig is subject to the following restrictions:
 - The right is ancillary to the public right to fish (a common law right) from tidal waters around the UK
 - The right can therefore only be exercised by a person who wishes to make use himself of the bait that has been dug
 - The right does therefore not extend to digging for commercial purposes.

Therefore a landowner can prevent digging for commercial purposes unless commercial digging can become the subject of a private right based on immemorial custom and usage.

The right of IFCA's to manage bait collection is covered in sections 153(1), 153(10) and 153(12) of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. Under section 155 IFCA's can make byelaws "for the purpose of performing the duty imposed by section 153". But there is no requirement that you obtain the consent of anyone with common law rights before restricting that activity through a byelaw.

IFCA byelaws can therefore without consent regulate bait digging as ancillary to fishing on the foreshore.

Sarah Birchenough of the Southern IFCA is conducting a part-time PhD with aims including:

- to continue dialogue between IFCA's and other organisations regarding bait collection in different areas, potential management measures and options for future research with the aim of having a common approach to bait collection regulation;
- to discuss the possibility of a distinction between personal and commercial activity, and the form this would take, which could be common across IFCA districts. The importance of this is linked to the desire to avoid displacement from one authority district to the next.

9) Sea Angling 2012 Update

A presentation was given by Kieran Hyder from CEFAS on the Sea Angling 2012 project. This matter is discussed under a separate item on the TSB agenda.

10) IFCA's collecting young fish data in the future.

Dave Righton from CEFAS gave a presentation about the possibilities of IFCA's continuing a 30 year dataset begun in 1981, of monitoring small and young fish (ie. those that escape commercial nets).

Most surveying had been conducted on east and south coast but some had been carried out in Morecambe Bay in the 1990s.

Findings show there has been a decline in species diversity from north to south – richer communities are found in the south. The change has been consistent over time. Cold blooded species are becoming less abundant. There are changes in fish sizes too.

Valuable baseline data for future surveys of inshore waters, of interest to and in relation to IFCA's. Regional differences in the changes observed in abundance of some species, and in the way that the community responded important for assessing Good Environmental Status. Future analysis of the human impacts on inshore fish communities and species could focus on smaller regions for local impacts like dredging or construction.

Some species have been identified as useful indicators of change particularly climate change. The report is on the Defra website.

Eastern IFCA are looking at a feasibility study EIFCA continuing the sites that are within their district (or the possibility of running a smaller scale program).

There are no meetings planned for the Small Fish Working Group, so it is probably worth looking closer at the survey requirements to determine whether financially and logistically we can individually take over the surveys that are within our districts.

If it appears it is feasible for us to continue the project, it might then be worth holding a meeting to explore ways of combining this work and whatever plans we have to contributing towards the WFD. At a glance the two seem to be quite different in their methods and requirements. There might be benefit to IFCA's, however, to run fish survey programs that would be able to contribute elements to both the YFS and WFD.

11) Cockle Mortality

Kent and Essex IFCA have been concerned about mass cockle mortalities in the Wash and Burry Inlet. Although much research is being carried out into the mortalities, no conclusions have yet been reached as to the cause. The IFCA has been working with Cefas since 2009 to analyse the condition of the Thames cockles.

As well as working closely with the industry on this issue, KEIFCA officers have been keeping a watching brief for any tell-tale signs of mass cockle mortalities in the Thames fishery whilst undertaking quarterly cockle surveys. As part of this process, KEIFCA officers are investigating the possibility of sending regular samples to CEFAS for histological testing. At the time of writing a quotation is imminent following confirmation of details but the cost is significant at around £700 per sample of 30 cockles.

Due to fears that boats working the Thames cockle fishery would also have worked in the Wash and could potentially act as a carrier of an unknown and potentially harmful parasite or disease, having assessed all options, the final solution was to not open the areas outside of the Regulating Order in 2011.

In the light of these developments and the serious implications for fisheries management, K&EIFCA opened a discussion about the possibility of arranging a workshop with all interested parties where these issues can be discussed in detail.

Scientific & Morecambe Bay Fishery Order Officer
14th October 2011