



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Wales Whelk Advisory Group meeting: 4 July 2024

Notes of the meeting held on 4 July 2024.

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Present

Bethan Jones, Fisheries Division, Welsh Government (BJ) – Chair (JB)
Jim Evans, Welsh Fisherman's Association (JE)
Natalie Hold, Sustainable Fisheries Wales, School of Ocean Sciences, Bangor University (NH)
Charlotte Colvin, Researcher, Bangor University (CC)
Chloe North, Western Fish Producer Organisation (CN)
Carl Davies, Fisherman (CD)
Tim Bowman Davies, Fisherman (TBD)
Kevin Denman, Fisher & Communities (KD)
Mark Merrick, processor, AM Seafoods (MM)
Tim Croucher, Shore based Enforcement team, Welsh Government (TC)
Matthew Sayer, Senior Policy Analyst, Fisheries Science, Welsh Government (MS)
Lisa Roberts-Clarke, Fisheries Division, Welsh Government (LRC)

1. Welcome, introduction and matters arising

Chair welcomed all to the meeting, and introductions were made to the first meeting of 2024. BJ confirmed a second meeting of the group would take place later in the autumn. The agenda would cover:

- 2024-25 permit period update
- status of whelk stocks survey
- AOB - Welsh vs English whelk on same trip (CD)

2. 2024- 2025 permit period update

BJ provided an overview of the 2024-25 permit period and landings of whelk from March to date. Data from the MMO for June had not been analysed due to problems with the catch recording system.

From the available data, BJ confirmed the following:

- amount taken is well under profile and there were no concerns
- 3,282 tonnes left for the annual catch limit
- Prices for whelk were £1.34 compared to £1.25 per kilo in 2023/24
- 41 whelk permits for 2024/25. Peak activity 29 in April. 42 applications were made but 1 cancelled

3. Scientific status of whelk stocks survey 2023

NH presented an overview of the scientific status in the Wales whelk fishery review 2023.

Overall, the number of landings were down in number from 2018 and considered in line with the longer-term management of the fishery. The Welsh whelk stocks were shown to be a healthy stock.

The 2023 survey included 5 fishers from a range of locations in south Wales, Swansea, Cardigan, Caernarfon, NE Anglesey, and Colwyn Bay. Swansea Bay however was an area where not much fishing had recently occurred.

The survey noted the drainage holes for the whelk were smaller. The use of riddles to sort the catch were used to allow smaller whelk to drop through. The total shell length was analysed and found to vary in size between locations. The

soak time used for the pots was 48 hours. The results showed there were a good number of large spawning whelk in the population for Welsh stocks.

Environmental factors noted the presence of sea fleas covering whelk pots and bait, poor visibility reduced the amount of fishing and hot weather in September 2023 had seen water temperature increase. For management of the Welsh stock in 2024-25 the annual catch limit did not require to be changed.

Questions from the group included discussion about whether any modelling of the impact of water temperature on the fishery had been done.

NH confirmed Bangor University were carrying out work and hoped to have data by the end of the year. Temperatures above 18 – 19 degrees show the whelk stopped feeding. Locations such as Jersey had seen their seasonal summer fishery stop. Die off occurred in water between 21 – 22 degrees.

JE commented on the returning undersized whelk Annual Catch Limit (ACL).

NH confirmed work being carried out by Herriot-Watt University would look at the way whelk are riddled, as there seemed an indication there could be an impact on whelk mortality. Also, she would like to carry out further assessments, but in the meantime was confident there was no need to change the ACL.

JE raised the issue of the locations used in the survey and the gap in data located around St David's head and a discussion whether the stock should be managed differently. NH pointed out the cost implied could become expensive but there could be the potential for a scientific survey. JE believed that point was something for Welsh Government to consider.

CD confirmed the effect of pots on the selectivity of the catch had been seen in Conwy where changes had been made to gear. NH discussed the mortality issues when using static or rotary.

CC shared the article published in the North American Journal of Fisheries

Management with the group which covered the gear selectivity being key to the long-term sustainability of the stock.

Estimating gear selectivity and population composition of common whelks *Buccinum undatum* from tagging experiments and comparative gear trials (wiley.com)

KD explained the situation in Swansea Bay. The introduction of the Minimum Landing Size (MLS) for whelk resulted in the decline of a fishery there and it was unlikely to return. In its time Swansea had been successful. However, the whelk in that location was always smaller.

BJ queried whether there could be demand for smaller sized whelk. MM confirmed there was. **Action: BJ to discuss further with NH about possibility of further sampling in Swansea Bay, depending on resources. This item would be included in the next meeting.**

JE asked about invasive non-native species has been seen in the fishery and whether Slipper Limpit (*Crepidula fornicata*) had spread. CC confirmed it had been and Bangor University engage with Natural Resources Wales. Slipper limpit needed to be monitored and prevented from spreading further. Further discussion was needed to address this.

4. Any other business

CD asked ahead of the meeting 'Please can you present at the next meeting, the amount of whelk, landed, that are classed as Welsh whelk but are actually English whelk due to vessels working in both Welsh and English waters during the same trip. It would be useful to know, so we know exactly what proportion of the 'Welsh' catch is derived from Welsh waters.'

BJ noted only 1 vessel per month catching between 40 – 50 tonnes. Comparison of Catch returns and Sales Notes for March, April and May had been done.

CD explained the permit conditions directed fishers to fill in their permit return by 12:00 at the last day of the month, even if they have not fished. The timing and compliance with the conditions was difficult. Fishers must record all their whelk as Welsh.

Concern was raised about this discrepancy especially if approaching the limit of the ACL. NH confirmed she had data on fishing patterns and effort and time spent, which could be reviewed. NH confirmed to look at VMS data and assess this further. CN agreed that was an issue for one of their vessels which meant a change to fishing patterns.

Minutes of last WWAG meeting were approved and will be published to the whelk web pages. **ACTION: Minutes to be published on website.**

Next meeting expected to be in early November.

Meeting closed at 16:50.

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