



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION, DOCUMENT

Wales Whelk Advisory Group meeting: 2 November 2023

Notes of the meeting held on 2 November 2023.

First published: 5 July 2024

Last updated: 5 July 2024

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Present

Julian Bray, Domestic Fisheries Policy and Management, Welsh Government – Chair (JB)

Tim Bowman Davies, Fisher (TBD)

Jim Evans, Welsh Fisherman's Association (JE)

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

Harry Owen, Southwestern Fish Producer Organisation (HO)

Michelle Billing, Fisheries Policy & Management, Welsh Government (MB)

Matthew Sayer, Senior Policy Analyst, Fisheries Science, Welsh Government (MS)

Bethan Jones, Fisheries Division, Welsh Government (BJ)

Apologies:

Carl Davies, Fisher (CD)

Kevin Denman, Fisher & Southwest Wales Fishing Communities (KD)

1. Welcome, Introduction & Matters Arising

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.

ACTION: Minutes to be published on website.

2. 2023- 2024 Permit period update

MB gave a summary of the 2023-24 permit period to date.

There was a steady start to the season with landings generally below profile.

Possible contributing factors to the slow start:

- Changes to fishing activity of 2 vessels may account for some of the decrease in landings – one not fishing in Welsh waters at the moment, another shifted to potting for prawns/lobster.
- Lower number of permit holders.
- July – poor weather limiting effort.

A spell of good weather in May and June perhaps have helped to push catch totals up near/just over profile.

Final October figures are not yet available provisional figure is 222 tonnes. Profile to end of September is set at 75% of the ACL. Currently 58.4% of the ACL has been taken.

The cumulative catch is behind profile probably due to a combination of impact of weather on fishing effort and lower number of permit holders.

Provisional October figures show a profiled ACL of 80.8% and 63.1% of the ACL has been achieved so far. Last year saw a calm winter and catch ended up at 95% of the ACL.

2023-24 Permit period summary (March 23 -Sept 23):

Annual catch limit (ACL) – 4,768 tonnes

– 1,983 tonnes remaining for the permit period

Actual total landings (tonnes) – 2,785

– Profiled total landings (tonnes) – 3570

Actual total landings % of ACL – 58.4%

→ Profiled total landings % of ACL – 74.9%

Value of total landings – £3,487,420

→ Average price per kilo - £1.25

→ Average price per tonne - £1,247

Number of permitted vessels – 45

3. Scientific status of whelk stocks survey 2023

NH provided an overview of the annual survey of whelk in Welsh waters that took place in September 2023.

The summary report and recommendations can be found at <https://gov.wales/wales-whelk-length-based-indicator-assessment-2023>

CD raised prior to the meeting: "Great to hear that the stocks are stable but is it fair that a stock in Swansea Bay with a lower size at maturity than the rest of Wales is essentially closed to fishing. The same one size fits all approach to crab fisheries halved crab catches in the Conwy area overnight. Scientific data has proved that similar to the Swansea whelk this crab population matures at smaller sizes. Catches were promised to increase after a couple of years but never have. In fact the unnecessary increase in minimum size has contributed to the demise of local crab dressed and sold in the locality. Dressed crab is now shipped in from the east coast of England or Anglesey."

JB stated that this would be very difficult to implement and enforce and was not under consideration at the moment.

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4. ACL and MCL - permit period 2024-25 and changes to permit conditions

MB gave a summary of conditions for the 2024-25 permit period. The ACL for permit period 2023-24 was 4,768 tonnes. This was based on 2022 whelk stock survey. The baseline ACL is intended as a ceiling and not a target. So far this year 2,785 tonnes landed and 1,983 tonnes remain of ACL for November to February.

Stock survey indicates that the ACL does not require changing for the 2024-25 period and there is no evidence to support a further buffer being applied to the ACL at this time. Similarly, there will be no increase in the ACL at this time.

The MCL for permit period 2024-25 is set at 50 tonnes for March 2024. WG landing statistics do not suggest progression towards the ACL has been too rapid and there is little concern about overshooting the limit.

5. Whelk permit fee - permit period 2024-25

BJ explained the background to the fee and explained that the 2023/24 permit fee at £285 was based on half the scientific survey costs and reminded members that the aim is to achieve full cost recovery within 5 years (i.e., permit period 2027/28) whilst at the same time seeking efficiencies to reduce costs.

The annual scientific survey cost rose from £53,500 in 2022 to £70,000 in 2023 due to inflation and other pressures. At the same time, the number of permits issued for the 2023/24 permit period fell from 93 to 45 as many of those who joined the fishery to get a 'track record' did not buy a permit.

The three potential options identified by Welsh Government were outlined based

on:

- £70,000 cost of the scientific status of whelk stocks survey September 2023.
- 45 permits issued in the permit period 2023-24.

CD raised prior to the meeting: "Personally I'm comfortable with contributing to the cost of surveys each year. However more than £300/year will then have considerable weight on the decision for smaller operations/polyvalent boats wishing to whelk fish on a smaller scale/part-time or as part of a polyvalent licence. Have you considered charging on a sliding scale, proportional to the amount of use each licence attracts?"

You also need to consider what happens if lobster, crab and prawn are permitted and any further tandem charges are put in place to cover stock surveys for these species. Polyvalent boats, which are generally smaller vessels may have to be considered differently."

CD's points were noted.

Option 1: No change

Fee remains the same as 2022/23, i.e., £285

Option 2: Using the same calculation method as 2022/23 with current data

If the permit fee was calculated as 50% of £70,000 divided by 43 the cost per permit in 2024-25 cost would be £814

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Option 3: Using the same calculation method with both 2022 and 2023 data

Scientific survey costs in 2022 and 2023, i.e., £53,500 + £70,000 = £123,500

Permits issued in 2022/23 and 2023/24, i.e., 94 + 43 = 137 permits

50% of £123,500 divided by 137 permits, the fee would be = £451

HO stated that industry needed to fund the ongoing cost of stock surveys to underpin the fishery management. A discussion of these options followed and as such two additional options were put forward. Option 4 was suggested by JE.

Option 4: Flat fee permit with volume increments

A flat fee of £285 for every vessel, and a fixed sum charged per kilogram caught as levy style payment collected retrospectively.

Based on 1p per kg levy and flat fee of £285 per vessel 86% of survey cost would be recovered.

Option 5 arose during discussions as being feasible and a short-term solution so option 4 could be considered.

Option 5: Inflationary increase

The current inflation rate is 6.7% (Bank of England 1/11/2023). An inflationary rise would result in permit fee of £304, this would take cost recovery to 20% of survey cost and is equivalent to 24% of the average price of a tonne of whelk.

BJ stated that until the new digital permitting system was in place it was unlikely that option 4 would be possible for the 24-25 permit period. The feasibility of this option for future years would be considered along with its application to other permitted fisheries.

ACTION: All 5 options to be present to The Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd.

6. Consultation on permit fee and methodology for calculating it, ACL and MCL

All options would be put forward to The Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd to make a decision, prior to the two-week informal consultation. Stakeholders will be written to with details of the informal consultation and will have 2 weeks to respond.

The window to apply for permits for the 2024-25 permit period will be opened on 1 December 2023.

ACTION: two week informal consultation to be carried out prior to the opening of the application window.

7. Any Other Business

CD asked prior to 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 this so we know exactly what proportion of the 'Welsh' catch is derived from Welsh waters."

ACTION: This will be taken away as an action to investigate by Welsh Government.

Meeting closed at 17:30

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