**PAPER 2**

**WCRIFG Creel Limits Work Group Meeting**

**17 December 2019**

**MEETING NOTES**

**Attendees:** Stuart Bell (MS),Diane Buchanan (MS), Femke de Boer (SWFPA),Tommy Finn (CFA), Alasdair Hughson (SSDA), Andrew Lochhead (Ind), June Lochhead (Ind), Alastair McNeill (Chair), Malcolm Morrison (MNWFA), Elaine Whyte (CFA)

**VC: (1) Oban -** John MacAlister (JMcA/SWFPA), Allan MacLean (MFA)**,** Nick Turnbull (MFA)

**(2) Stornoway –** Duncan MacInnes (WIFA)

**Telephone**: John Hermse (SA)

**Apologies:** Kirsty Dearing (SNH), Alastair Sinclair (SCAD), Alistair Philp (NWRFA)

**Introduction**

During 2019 various WCRIFG Subcommittee members raised the issue of creel numbers. There are concerns that in some areas, waters are becoming saturated with deployed creels. While members raised the topic as an issue, potential solutions were less clear. For example, depending on the species being targeted by creelers, a maximum suggested number of creels varies from 300 -1000. Also, some parties suggested limiting numbers by vessel size, others by crew numbers per vessels and other proposals were made. Whilst it is clear there are issues and management measures are most probably needed, no resolution to deal with all scenarios was apparent. When raised at the WCRIFG Management Committee meeting in August, it was agreed that the subject might benefit from discussion by a smaller Work Group.

Any recommendations/outcomes of the Work Group meeting will be report to the January meeting of the WCRIFG Management Committee.

**Discussion**

The Chair read the attached paper submitted by Alistair Philp, (NWRFA) in support of creel limits at the outset of the discussions. The paper was largely welcomed and supported by work group members.

The following key areas were identified:

* + Development of a mechanism to restrict effort
  + How best to restrict number of vessels
  + How to inform regulation of creel numbers
  + The role of national statutory legislation
  + RIFG role in setting creel limit
  + Local management measures
  + The ‘spirit’ of CFP Article 17

The debate was opened to work group members and the following points were noted:

* A moratorium on number of boats was discussed, as was a cap on licence capacity – the latter is already in effect with no new licences being created in Scotland. Members supported a moratorium on fleet growth to allow time for science to catch up and real management measures are developed before the inevitable crash happens. It was noted that there are in the region of 200 ‘hip pocket’ licence entitlements currently in existence in Scotland and not placed on a fishing vessel.
* The role of Marine Scotland science was discussed, including the fact that if Scottish Government scientific assets are not used within our country then the resultant vacuum is filled by other scientific organisations with their own agendas. There was general agreement that MS Science need to be explicitly directed to achieve best science at source.
* Creel numbers have been limited as part of the WCRIFG Mull pilot project to 300 creels maximum per vessel.
* There are a vast number of pots within 1 mile in the Clyde
* One proposal that has been considered is 150 crab and lobster pots per man to a maximum of 450 pots per boat. 350 prawn creels per man to a maximum of 1050 creels per boat.
* The Western Isles had considered a per man limit, but that this would be unenforceable legally, perhaps worth checking with him. The Western Isles alternatives was by boat size. It was noted that if the per man system was unenforceable, we would still want to see something close to the numbers we suggested as max (1050 or around that number).
* There is too much gear on the seabed. It must be reduced by all parties, that is to say current and future effort must be managed and reduced more effectively.
* The RIFG influence should stretch out to 12nm.
* Mention was made of new starts and if there should be a stop to this, even for a limited period. Some memenrs were reluctant to see a complete stop to new starts entering creel fishing entirely as its normally the first start for young fishermen. A fairer limit system across the board for current and future fishermen was advocated as a better option.
* Our devolved powers relate to our status as a Coastal State – out to 200 miles
* Do we wish the RIFG network to be aligned with our National Marine Plan – i.e. out to 12nm? Where local marine planning partnerships currently exist, RIFG remit extends to 12nm
* Given the far-reaching migratory nature of crab we should take a broader, national view of this species.
* Use of escape panels should be made a legal requirement.
* Baselining of creel effort may be a problem, because, what fisherman would wish others to know the number of creels he was really using?
* Any actions to limit creel numbers at present will depend on voluntary measures and likely to apply to local groups

**Actions**

1. RIFG members wishing to propose measures for creel capping in WCRIFG waters should bring these for consideration to a future work group meeting.
2. A further work group meeting will be held if proposed creel capping measures are submitted to the RIFG Chair.

Paper Submitted by AP (NWRFA)

CREEL management at a National & RIFG level

SCFF advocates for better managing the creel sectors activities round the Scottish coastline (especially nearshore). This should include a mechanism to restrict the amount of creel effort in specific geographical areas like within MPA’s and other discrete local areas where expansion of creel numbers being deployed either undermines the competitiveness of the local fleet or brings creel fishers activities into conflict (cross or inter sectorial) or undermines environmental management objectives.

Matters requiring consideration are;

1. How do we limit the number of vessels deploying creels at a National, regional (IFG) and Local level.

2. How do we best regulate the amount of creels individual vessels may be entitled to deploy and where should an individual vessel be entitled to deploy those creels.

On the first question, control is not possible via limits on creel numbers alone. The amount of vessels entitled to access the fishery is also a crucial factor. This is especially true where there are two or more methods of targeting a stock ie nephrops trawl/creel. We believe until such a time as the nearshore is better regulated and managed there should be a moratorium on expansion of the size of the creel sector, ie no new creel vessels.

On the second question, we believe this should be capped as per findings of Creel Effort Study (scot gov 2017) at 1600 maximum, within nearshore e.g. within 3 miles of land, where according to gear conflict task force the vast majority of creels are presently deployed and the vast majority of gear conflict occurs.

The purpose is to ensure effort reflects local circumstances, being able to cap or otherwise regulate creel effort within MPA’s is an obvious example. Being able to cap or better regulate creel fisheries where significant levels of gear conflict exist. Where priority marine features not otherwise protected by MPA’s exist, like herring spawning grounds, mearl beds etc. And those areas where local fishers and management agencies believe there is a requirement for better local fisheries management.

Any regulation should always seek to comply with Art 17 of the CFP and give preferential access on the basis of environmental, social and economic performance of the sector/s being managed. This implies restricting access to a local fishery to maintain viability of the existing fishers or excluding some gears from specific areas may be a requirement in the competent management of creel effort.

At a National level

• 1. We think consideration should be given to a national statutory legislation for the purposes of ensuring any limits on creel effort apply to all vessels fishing in Scottish water. And that the amount of vessels entitled to access the fishery is temporarily capped at 2019 levels.

• 2. We advocate that IFG’s should be able to set maximum creel limits per vessel fishing within their waters (this allows for regional variations at IFG level).

• 3. We think mechanisms should be developed for local discrete areas to be managed by local management groups. Something akin to that proposed to be piloted in the Inner Sound.

We think consideration should be given to having a lower limit nearshore such that the least mobile and smallest vessels get an element of preferential access and are protected to some degree in accordance with the spirit of Art 17 CFP.

At a RIFG level

We specifically advocate for and request consideration be given to adopting at the soonest opportunity within the IFG a 1600 creel per vessel maximum limit within 3 miles of land. This would mean those vessels wishing to deploy more than 1600 creels would have to deploy any amount above 1600 outside 3 miles.

We also request the IFG give consideration to making formal representations in all the above matters to Marine Scotland in order that we contribute to encouraging Marine Scotland to consider those issues that are more National in nature and or outwith the competencies of the IFG