

Terms of Reference

Years 1 & 2 – Brown Crab, Eastern Central North Sea Offshore, Fisheries Improvement Work Plan

November 2024

Introduction

Interested parties met at Schiphol 5th June 2024 to discuss the potential of setting up a fisheries improvement project (FIP) for brown crab (*Cancer pagurus*) in the Eastern part of the Central North Sea, drawing on the findings from the MSC pre-assessment and action plan carried out by Poseidon Consultants. Attendees informally committed to working together to improve the sustainability of crab fishing in the area. This commitment was subsequently formalised between the key catching sector operators in Schiphol on the 14th November 2024, demonstrated by the signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

These terms of reference for the ECNS brown crab FIP clarify the scope, intent and the immediate steps outlined in Table 1. The MOU has been circulated along with these terms of reference to all parties for signing.

Table 1. Eastern Central North Sea brown crab FIP implementation steps

FIP step	Timeframe
Step 1: Scoping and MSC pre-assessment (conduct against MSC standard v3)	Completed
Step 2: Activities for years 1 and 2 agreed	Agreed 14 th Nov
Step 3: MOU signed by all interested parties	Early December
Step 4: Key documents uploaded on SAGBs website	Early December
Step 5: Official launch of FIP	December 2024
Step 6: FIP PR activities	Early 2025
Step 7: FIP activities start in align with the action plan	2025 onwards

Scope of the FIP

The overall objective of the FIP will be to improve the environmental performance of the fishery in line with the requirements of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC).

The 'Unit of Assessment' for the FIP will comprise the brown crab stock in ICES Division 4b (Central North Sea Crab Fishery Unit). The offshore crab fishery in the Eastern North Sea is outside 12 nautical miles, but within the EEZs of EU Member States Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, with all operating under the CFP. The initial client group will consist of 12 vivier vessels operating under UK (7), Irish (3), and Polish (2) flags (see Annex 1 for details). These vessels all use pots (either creels or inkwell pots). This initial definition and focus for the 'Unit of Assessment' and improvement doesn't preclude potential expansion subject to agreement by the FIP steering committee.

Currently (Q4-2024) the key markets of interest in the FIP are UK based. However, this does not preclude market actors from other countries joining at some stage. Given the geographic scope of the FIP, success will be dependent on developing a harvest strategy that is agreed by all fishery stakeholders and by Danish, Dutch, and German fisheries management authorities.

For the first two years the FIP will be hosted and budget administered by SAGB. At the end of year 2 a decision will be made on whether to enter the MSC-ITM programme and work towards eventual MSC certification.

Stakeholder roles

Steering committee members have agreed funding to cover the initial start-up costs for the FIP and year 1 and year 2 activities. The FIP work plan will be agreed and overseen by the steering group committee (Table 2), with support from a technical advisor (Poseidon Ltd) and project manager (AC Marine Ltd). The steering committee (SC) will be chaired by David Markham and a co-chair position is currently vacant.

Table 2. FIP steering committee members

Organisation	Proposed role	Main contact
Blue Sea / NESI	Chair	David Markham (affiliated with NESI as a consultant)
Blue Sea Fishing Co	SC member	Damian Chapman
Brown and Bright	SC member	Paul Brown
Hitramat	SC member	Helge Myrseth, Edgar Sypalis
Macduff	SC member	Andrew Brown
McBride Fishing Company	SC member	Hugh McBride
Ocean Fleet	SC member	George West
Sea Farms	SC member	Sarah Hussey, Louis Cattini
Sainsburys	SC member	David Parker

The role of the project manager will be to co-ordinate the FIP activities, administration and reporting. The steering committee members and project manager would also co-ordinate engagement with additional stakeholders listed (but not limited to) in Table 3. These additional stakeholders will have essential roles in the FIP at various points defined in the action plan (see 'action plan' spreadsheet).

Table 3. Other key stakeholders. TBC – to be confirmed during FIP outreach activities

Organisation	Proposed role	Main contact(s)
Poseidon	Technical advisor	Rod Cappell
AC Marine Ltd	Project management, administrative contact	Alex Caveen
CEFAS	Stock assessment	Ewen Bell, Ros McIntyre
Danish Fisheries Agency		TBC
Danish Nature Agency		TBC
DEFRA	Policy advice, facilitate engagement with other country governments	Helen Hunter
DTU Aqua	Danish fisheries science agency	TBC
Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture	German fisheries management agency	TBC
German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation		TBC
ICES WGcrab		TBC
Institute for Marine Resources and Ecosystem Studies	Netherlands fisheries science agency	TBC
Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality	Netherlands fisheries management agency	TBC

Organisation	Proposed role	Main contact(s)
MSC	Standard owner	Lisa Bennett, George Clark
North Sea Advisory Council		TBC
SAGB	Website, and budget holder	David Jarrad
Seafish	Technical advice	Lewis Tattersall, Bill Lart, James Lamb
Thünen Institute	German fisheries science agency	TBC
WWF		Clarus Chu

2025 / 26 activities and deliverables

The key FIP activities for Years 1 and 2 are outlined below, please see the action plan spreadsheet for further details:

1.1 Stock data and assessment:

- Fisheries dependent data gathering from all vessels in scope of the FIP
- Develop data sharing and confidentiality agreement
- Initial processing of data by Seafish
- Meeting(s) with CEFAS to discuss most appropriate assessment technique (effort based, or length based assessment)
- Seafish to develop sampling protocol to share with fishing operators
- Consult with fisheries scientists in Netherlands, Denmark, Germany
- Present data at ICES WGcrab meeting

1.2 Stock boundaries:

- Provide scientific rationale for treating the CNS brown crab (west and east components) as a single stock, or separating the ECNS component

2.1 Develop HCRs that are responsive to the state of the stock:

- Present on different types of harvest strategy that have been successfully implemented in other brown crab fisheries
- Discuss the feasibility of different types of management measure in the context of the ECNS fishery
- Different harvest strategy options developed for discussion
- Engagement with fisheries science and management authorities in UK, Netherlands, Denmark and Germany (and flag countries; Ireland, Norway, Poland)

3.1 Provide a full catch profile:

- Full catch profile to be provided by operators using sample reference strings

3.2 Collate information on bait species

- Fishing operators to provide information on bait quantities and types of species

3.3 Produce information on ghost gear management

- Develop standing operating procedure for ghost gear

3.4 Produce a non-retention policy for shark species

- Produce a non-retention policy for shark species

4.1 Location of fishing activity in relation to sensitive habitats

- Fishing operators to provide AIS data so activity can be mapped

- Overlay fishing activity data over EUNIS seafloor habitat data, Seafish to check with Kingfisher to see if they could help with this, including closed areas, wind farm construction sites, and Natura sites would also be informative

5.1 Develop a fishery management plan for ECNS brown crab

- Links to Action 2.1, activities will likely comprise of continued stakeholder engagement and meetings in years 1 and 2

Annex 1 – vessels in scope of the FIP

Blue Sea Fishing Company (UK company)					
<i>Boat Name</i>	<i>Registered</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>GT</i>	<i>Pot Type</i>	<i>Landing ports</i>
Amadeus	UK	24		Ink Well	Eemshaven
				*with escape hatches	
Brown and Bright (UK Company)					
<i>Boat Name</i>		<i>Length</i>	<i>GT</i>	<i>Pot Type</i>	<i>Landing ports</i>
Amberlisa	UK	19		Creels	Eemshaven
Ebonnie	UK	16		Creels	Eemshaven
La Creole	UK	16		Creels	Eemshaven
HeatherK	UK	15		Creels	Eemshaven
MacBride (Republic of Ireland Co)					
<i>Boat Name</i>		<i>Length</i>	<i>GT</i>	<i>Pot Type</i>	<i>Landing ports</i>
Peadar Elaine	IE	25.5	280	Creels	Eemshaven
Heather Jane	IE	25.5	280	Creels	Eemshaven
Amy Jane	IE	20	162	Creels	Eemshaven
Hitramat (Norwegian Co)					
<i>Boat Name</i>		<i>Length</i>	<i>GT</i>	<i>Pot Type</i>	<i>Landing ports</i>
WLA 222 (was Evan Emma)	PL	21		Creels	Hvide Sande
Noronya	PL	19		Creels	Hvide Sande
Ocean Fleet (Netherlands Co)					
<i>Boat Name</i>		<i>Length</i>	<i>GT</i>	<i>Pot Type</i>	<i>Landing ports</i>
Dayagelle	UK	17		Creels	Hvide Sande
Our Hazel	UK	19		Creels	Hvide Sande