



Marine
Management
Organisation

Southwest crawfish industry workshop: 13 February 2024

Meeting notes and outcomes



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Rationale and purpose of workshop

Over the last five years crawfish (*Palinurus spp*) landings have increased rapidly. The fishing season has expanded into the winter months, and the fleet profile has changed, with increased landings from the larger fleet vessels and there has been notable increase effort from the netting sector. These changes are apparent from the available data and from observations from fishers and local IFCA (Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities) and MMO (Marine Management Organisation) personnel.

Crawfish are included in the [crab and lobster fisheries management plan](#) and long-term management measures will be enacted through this mechanism. However, fishers determined that short-term measures were immediately needed to ensure that the fishery is sustainable in the short and long term.

Following stakeholder engagement in October 2023 the minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) was increased from 95 mm to 110 mm and a seasonal closure was introduced, prohibiting the landing of crawfish from 5 February 2024 to 30 April 2024.

A further meeting with industry was arranged for 13 February 2024 with local fishers, fishing associations, charities and both local and national government. This meeting was to discuss the current issues and propose further options for management in the short and medium term. This meeting was hybrid, held in The Centre, Newlyn and online via Microsoft Teams.

Material produced for the meeting is available in the annex. This includes an agenda and a slide pack which was shared in the meeting with participants to aid discussions.

The aims of the workshop were as follows:

- Discuss the current management measures of increased crawfish MCRS and the rationale behind the current closure.
- Discuss 2023 fishery landing data.
- Discuss the options for a 2024-2025 closure.
- Explore options for managing the southwest crawfish fishery in short and medium term.
- Maximise consensus on way forward and next steps.

Attendees

Approximately 40 people attended in person with a further 20 online.

The workshop was independently facilitated by Wilson Sheriff. Government representatives attended from MMO, DEFRA (Department of food and rural affairs), Seafish, CEFAS (Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science), Natural England, Cornwall IFCA, Isles of Scilly IFCA, Devon and Severn IFCA. Fisheries representatives attended from Harvey & sons, Rowes Fishing, and Cornish Fish Producer Organisation. There were also many individual fishers in attendance.

Current management measures

The current management measures were briefly discussed to help illustrate the regulatory landscape of the fishery.

Vessels currently working in the fishery are subject to:

- A shellfish entitlement on the fishing vessel licence allows vessel to land more than 5 lobster/crawfish and 25 crabs a day.
- The Lobster and Crawfish order that prohibits all vessels from retaining and landing of V- notched, mutilated, and berried lobsters and crawfish.
- MCRS increase from 95 mm to 110 mm which came into force on 1 January 2024 in ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Seas) sub area 7.
- The crawfish fishery closure in place from 5 February to 30 April 2024 in ICES sub area 7.

Landings data and evidence

The landings data from 2023 was presented to the meeting, the full slide pack is available in the annex.

Landings data from 2023 in ICES sub area 7 shows a 78% increase from 54 tons in 2022 to 93 tons in 2023. There was slight increase in the number of vessels landing crawfish, from 204 vessels in 2022 to 212 vessels in 2023¹. The amount of netting in 2023 has also increased from 63% of landings attributed to netting in 2022 to 83% in 2023.

Currently there are no plans to carry out a full stock assessment. It is understood that there are evidence gaps that need to be addressed. MMO are aware that Devon and Severn, Cornwall, and the Isles of Scilly IFCA have some historic and current crawfish survey programs. It was also discussed that the CFPO have also collated some species size data. The species size data will help indicate the stock health.

Output of the discussion sessions

A further discussion was held to explore other measures that are available to manage the fishery.

With regards to the current closure and whether there was support for future winter closures, specific comments people mentioned were:

- There were concerns that the current closure was not what most of the fishers wanted, and there were requests for the current closure period to be extended.
- The closure of the pollack fishery will force fishers into looking into opportunities and the early opening of the crawfish fishery will give the fishers opportunity putting extra pressure on the fishery when the fish are in poor condition.
- A closure from 1 November 2024 to 31 May 2025 was widely supported, with support also for a closure to become an annual event until further evidence would prompt a review of the closure.
- A long closure would protect the female crawfish when they are in poor condition.
- The shellfish fishery switches from crawfish to brown crab in November and December.

¹ Please note this figure includes all vessels using all gears in ICES sub area 7

- There were concerns that there are limited opportunities for the inshore fleet and there may be displacement into other fisheries which is not sustainable.
- A query was raised if a bycatch allowance of crawfish during the closure could be included, as this would allow for the fishers to take advantage of the occasional catching but deter targeting.
- It was also expressed that the 2024-2025 closure consultation should be concluded as soon as possible.

A discussion on other potential management measures was also held, specific comments people mentioned were:

- The fishery needs a fast intervention of management measures to stop the cyclical population crash.
- Permits to control the number of vessels working in the fishery was supported.
- Mesh size restrictions were also supported as the larger the mesh, the larger the crawfish that is captured.
- There were mixed views regarding catch limits and how they could be apportioned fairly within the fishery.
- An MCRS increase to 120 mm also received mixed views, however it was thought that it could be supported by the fishery if it were introduced incrementally over several years.
- There were also mixed views on spatial restriction for vessel size.
- It was acknowledged that one single mechanism would not be sufficient to curtail the effort and control the fishery.
- Decommissioning of the inshore fleet was spoken about as a solution to take the pressure off the inshore fishery as fishermen move from one fishery to another looking for opportunities.
- A captive breeding program was discussed, it was acknowledged that the larval stages of crawfish are complex and breeding programs for different species could not cohabit one space.

Next steps:

MMO explained the options for to implement voluntary and statutory management measures. This included licence conditions, byelaws and statutory instruments.

MMO propose to:

- Run a consultation for the 2024 - 2025 closure, with an additional question regarding whether the closure should become annual until further evidence prompts a review. This consultation aims to be published in March 2024, with the outcome published in summer 2024.
- Work with the fishing industry to produce a tutorial video on how to handle crawfish in the correct manner to reduce damage and increase the chance of survival if discarded.
- Work with the IFCA's and industry to aid collation and investigation of available size data and reference it to landings data.
- Investigate further the other management measures which were discussed, with MMO acknowledging the concerns for urgent action to protect the fishery.

Annex

Agenda for 13 February 2024 meeting:

Topic	Timing
1. Introductions and aims of the workshop. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions & reason for attending workshop. • Aims of the workshop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review management in place, evidence for assessing effectiveness of measures and 2023 data ○ Discussion of potential options for management measures in 2024-25 ○ Next steps 	12:00 – 12:20
2. Current management measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of MCRS increase and seasonal closure. • Evidence for assessing effectiveness of measures and 2023 data. 	12:20 – 13:15
Break	13:15 – 13:35
3. Options for future measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore potential management options and group discussion on proposed solutions and consequences of those solutions (intended and unintended) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Seasonal closure ○ Potential options raised by stakeholders. ○ Impacts on other shellfisheries and future management 	13:35 – 15:00
4. What are the next steps? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MMO outline processes for voluntary and statutory management options. • Group to determine next steps. 	15:00– 15:30
5. Summary, Q and A, and wrap up	15:30 – 16:00

A slide pack which was handed out during the meeting to aid discussions:

Section 1 – The current regulation and landing data



Current MMO Crawfish Management Measures

Measure	Applicable to?	Rationale
Shellfish Entitlement	Limits vessels without shellfish entitlement to catch and land 25 Crabs and 5 Lobsters/crawfish a day.	Limits the number of vessels that can fish for an unlimited amount of shellfish
The Lobster and Crawfish Order 2017, 2000 (amended by Fisheries Act 2020, art 4)	Prohibits the retaining and landing of mutilated /v-notched/berried lobster and crawfish	To protect females and productive brood stock.
Increased MCRS	The MCRS for Crawfish in ICES subarea 7, has increased from 95mm – 110mm	Harmonises MCRS with IFCA & reduces risk of mis-reporting Supports spawning stock biomass and stock recovery.
Seasonal Closure	Crawfish fishery closed in ICES subarea 7, from Feb 5 – April 30 2024.	Protect breeding and spawning Support future stock growth Reduce risk of high mortality

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Current Evidence

MMO data:

Landings data from electronic logbooks for the 12 m and over
Landings data from paper logbooks for the 10 m and over – 12 m
Catch app data for the under 10 m fleet
Sales notes data

IFCA data:

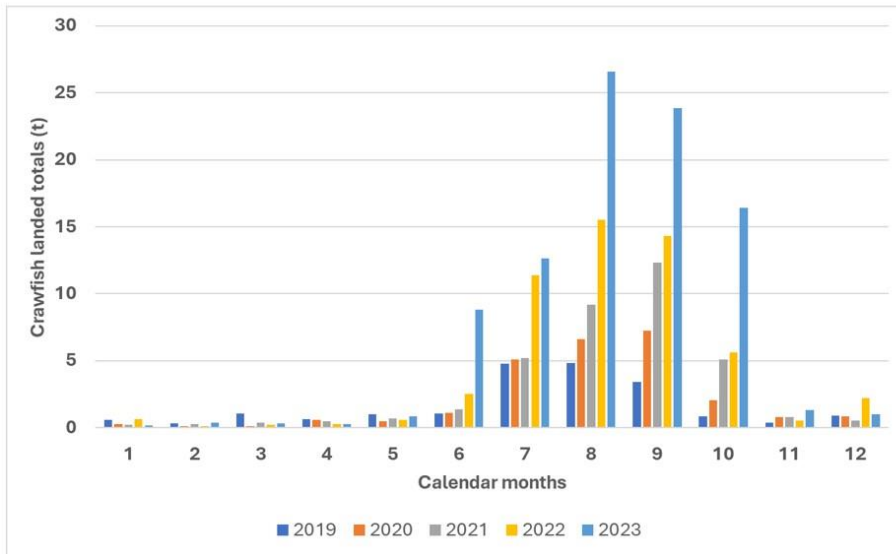
Monthly shellfish returns on the Cornwall IFCA shellfish permit (pots & nets)
Self-sampling in Cornwall IFCA area
Isles of Scilly IFCA sampling regime
Catch data (2015-2019) Devon and Severn IFCA

Other sources:

Academia/research projects.
Neighbouring fisheries in Eire and Brittany.

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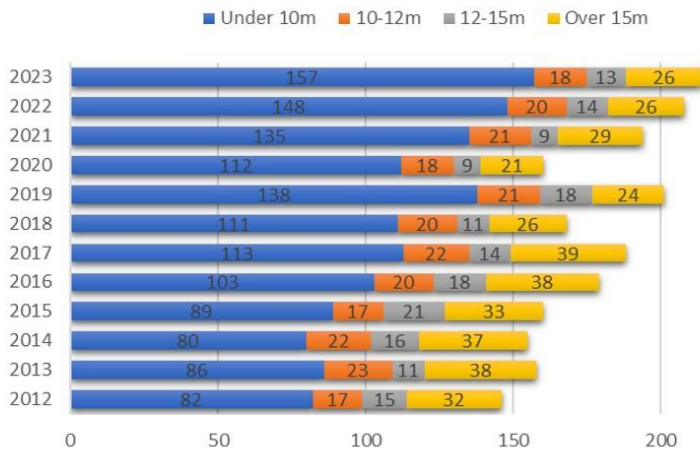
2019 - 2023 Landing data



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Fleet dynamics

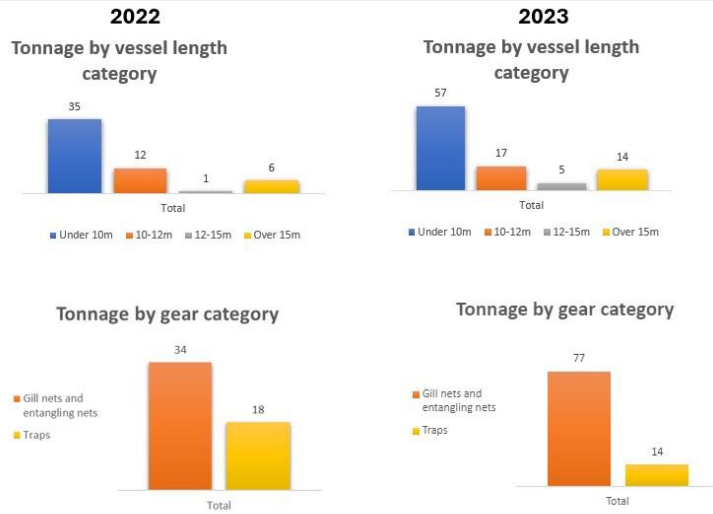
Number of vessels by year



Vessel length	2022	2023
All	0.26	0.43
<10m	0.24	0.36
>10m	0.32	0.64

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2022 & 2023 landings by vessel length and gear type



- **Landings by vessel length and gear type**
- The fishery dynamic has changed considerably over the 10 years from 2012- 2022.
- In 2012 pot and trap fishing methods were equally accounted for (50/50) in all landings.
- In 2023 netting accounted for 83% of all crawfish landings, compared with 63% in 2022.

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Evidence

What evidence gaps are there and who can help collect this?

Impact of MCRS increase and seasonal closure?

Evidence gaps ?

- Length data
- Crawfish biology e.g. spawning, movement
- Population size/stock assessment

Who can help collect this data? What data? How?

- Fishermen
- Producer Organisations/Fishing associations
- Markets/Auction houses/processors
- Government e.g. IFCA's/other countries etc.

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Section 2 future options for future management measures.



Seasonal closure for 24/25?

- The 2023 response was overwhelming support, would this still be the case as the overall fisheries opportunities have changed in 2024?
- Closure area – ICES area 7? Or outside of 6 nm or 12 nm?
- Closure for all gear? Or specific gear e.g. nets?
- Closure for both sexes or only females?
- Closure length? 1 Nov – 31 May? Shorter? Exclude Christmas?
- Annual closure?

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Future management measures suggested in the closure consultation feedback

Input controls – limits fishing activity through controls of fishing effort:

- **Vessel number restrictions** e.g. permits
- **Vessel restrictions** e.g. vessel size /length/engine power
- **Gear limitations** e.g. pot limits/net limits/mesh size/soak times
- **Spatial/temporal restrictions** e.g. seasonal closure, days at sea

Output controls – limits amount of stock that can be caught and landed:

- **Catch Limits** e.g. annual catch limit
- **Size limits** e.g. maximum size, 120 mm MCRS
- **Recreational and Voluntary** e.g. Recreational accountability/recording/best practice guides/better recording
- Anything else?

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Future management measures – questions and considerations

- How will the measure work?
- Will it take a long time to administer?
- Will it close the fishery to new entrants?
- Will it help the stock and wider environment?
- Will it help the fishing and coastal community?
- Transferable/non-transferable, will it add false value to vessel/licenses?
- Is it enforceable?
- Does it favour one sector over another?
- Will it increase the value of the fishery?
- Will it encourage best practice?
- Does it create a fair and level fishery across all boundaries?
- Will it help gather better data?
- Is it easy for fishermen to understand/carry out?

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Impacts on other shellfisheries and future management

Crab and Lobster FMP

Crawfish included in FMP. Initial management measures proposed as part of a package to be considered and developed further.

– Harmonisation of lobster and crawfish MCRS

– Pilot finer scale management measures in selected fisheries:

Western English Channel CFU (Southwest brown crab)

Northumberland and Durham lobster LFU

Yorkshire Humber LFU

These proposals are still being developed, and there is scope to include crawfish

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Implementation tools

Voluntary

- Flexible timeframes
- Not legally binding

Licence conditions

- Flexible, doesn't require statutory consultation
- If include EU vessels should give + 45 days' notice.

Statutory Instruments

- Changes to EU retained and UK legislation.
- Time frame up to 2 years.
- 2024 is an election year and there could be further delays in legislative process.

Byelaws

- IFCA and MMO byelaws, can be regional or national
- Can take 1+ year to implement

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Next steps

Collate and review existing evidence and data e.g. outcomes from workshop, FMP consultation



Determine potential options for management



Industry engagement e.g. call for evidence, roadshow, consultation, working/industry group



Further refinement of management options if needed



Formal consultation on management options



Review responses, decide on appropriate way forward, publish decision and implement management if required



Review effectiveness of management and if achieving desired outcome

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