

Success Criteria: 4,5 and 6

By: Chief IFC Officer

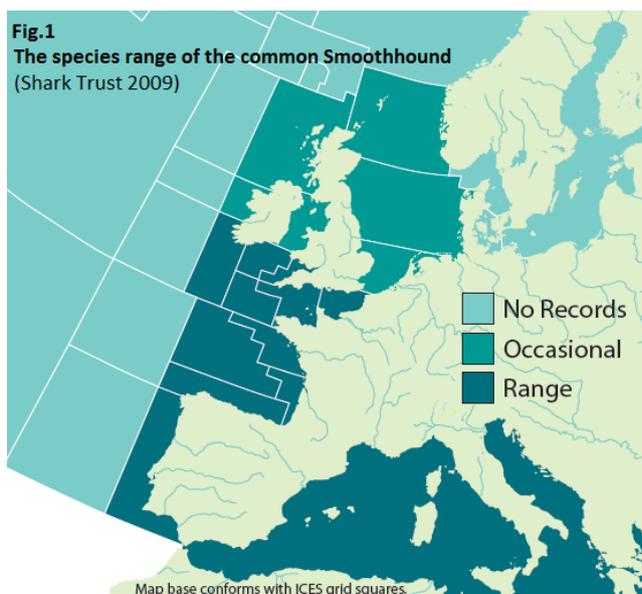
To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation
Authority – 4 September 2014

Subject: **SMOOTHHOUND STOCKS**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: to address local angling concerns regarding the sustainable
exploitation of Smoothhound stocks

Background



Smoothhounds are a slender bodied shark which usually grows to around 1.2m, inhabits waters usually from 5m to 50m in depth, and primarily feeds on crustaceans, cephalopods and small bony fish. Smoothhounds are mainly targeted by recreational sea anglers on both private and charter vessels where it is seen as a good sport fish with the majority of catches being released. The range of the Common Smoothhound is significant (Fig.1) and covers large parts of the northeast Atlantic from the British Isles the Canary Isles, including the Mediterranean Sea.

EU report on Smoothhounds

At an EU level the Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF) is responsible for providing assessments and advice on the state of the stocks of sharks, skates, and rays throughout the ICES area. Advice is normally provided on a two year cycle. Assessments are carried out on stocks and fisheries from the Arctic to the Azores. In their current 2014 report (ICES WGEF REPORT 2014) they have submitted a draft paper on the Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. The report brings together limited survey data and the text below has been taken from the report.

Survey trends

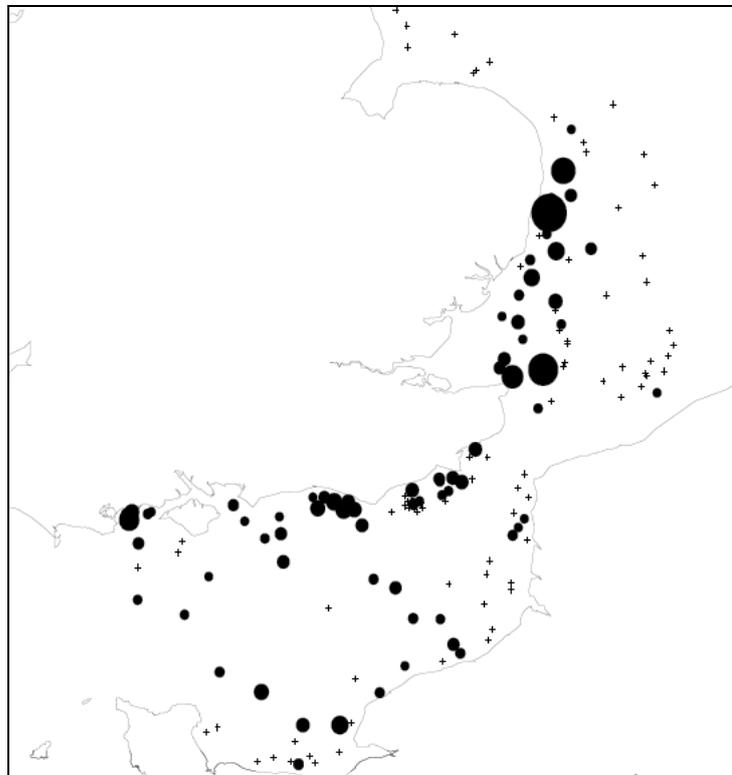


Fig.2 Distribution and relative abundance of smooth-hounds in the UK (BTS-Q3) IVc, VIId 4 m beam trawl survey area. Source: Ellis (2010 WD).

- Trends in many of the fisheries-independent surveys have shown an increase in smoothhounds in recent years.
- The UK (England and Wales) beam trawl survey of the Irish Sea catches reasonable numbers of smooth-hounds.
- The UK (England and Wales) beam trawl survey of the southern North Sea and eastern English Channel catches lower numbers. The trend in abundance of smooth-hounds was increasing, and they were also being

observed in an increasing proportion of hauls until 2011. However, in the last two years, the trend in abundance has dropped slightly from 0.84 (2007–2011) to 0.5 individuals per hour, this is still stable at the level seen prior to the 2008–2011 peak.

- A further UK (England and Wales) beam trawl survey of the western English Channel also encounters smooth-hounds in good numbers.

Landings

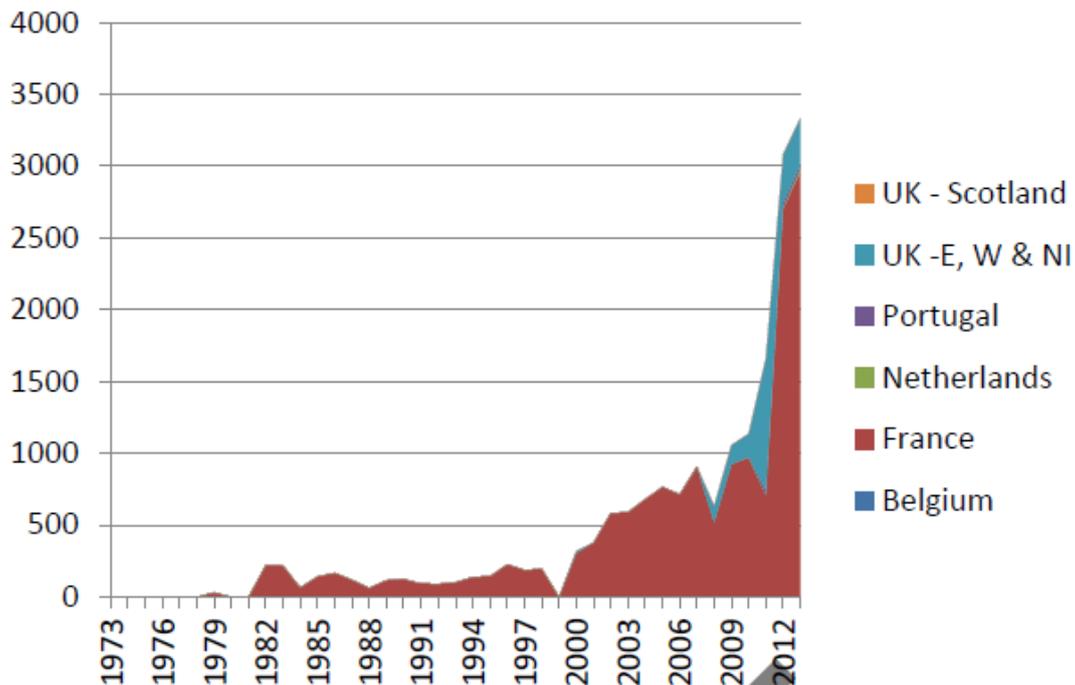


Fig.3 Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic. Working Group estimates of *Mustelus spp.* landings by country, 1973–2013. Data are considered underestimates.

No accurate estimates of catch are available, as many nations that land smooth-hounds report an unknown proportion of landings in aggregated landings categories (e.g. dogfish and hounds). Declared landings are increasing. The main nations exploiting smooth-hounds are France and England, and the English Channel and southern North Sea are important fishing grounds. Information from the fishing industry suggests that the increased landings of smooth-hounds are partly to supply market demand for 'dogfish' given the current restrictions on spurdog.

Management considerations

Smooth-hounds appear to be increasing in relative abundance in trawl surveys, and also in commercial landings data. Given the potential expansion in fisheries for smooth-hounds, further work to understand the dynamics of this stock is required.

It should be noted that smooth-hounds taken by beam trawl and Nephrops trawl were composed primarily of juveniles and subadults (<70 cm), and these were nearly all discarded, as were smooth-hounds <50 cm in the otter trawl fishery. Discard mortality is not known, and nor is the proportion of recruits that may survive to maturity and marketable size. However, discard survivability within this family is quite variable. Further study on the mortality and survival rates of juveniles in these fisheries are needed to evaluate impacts on recruitment.

Smooth-hounds are also an important target species in some areas for recreational fisheries; though there are insufficient data to examine the relative economic importance of these fisheries, or the degree of mortality.

ICES Advice applicable

ICES first provided advice for this stock in 2012, stating that "Based on ICES approach to data-limited stocks, ICES advises that catches should be reduced by 4%. Because the data for catches of smooth-hounds are not fully documented and considered highly unreliable (due to the historical use of generic landings categories), ICES is not in a position to quantify the result".

Local concerns

Local angling boat skippers have raised serious concerns regarding the Smoothhound populations in our district (Appendix 1), and are worried that catches of a potentially vulnerable species are steadily declining. Local angling skippers rely heavily on targeting Smoothhound generally in capture release fisheries and are very concerned that a significant increase in commercial landings could significantly impact this stock.

Members are asked to **DISCUSS** and make **RECOMENDATIONS**

References

DRAFT - ICES WGEF REPORT 2014 - ICES ADVISORY COMMITTEE - ICES CM 2014/ACOM:19. Report of the Working Group on Elasmobranch Fishes (WGEF) 17–26 June 2014. Smooth-hounds in the Northeast Atlantic (pg. 559 – 582)