



Agenda Item B6

By: Chief Fishery Officer

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority – 29 November 2016

Subject: **THORNBACK RAY MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

Classification Unrestricted

Summary:

This paper will provide Members with the progress made in trying to develop specific Thornback Ray management

Recommendation:

Members are asked to **APPROVE** the following:

- Sending the letter in Appendix 1 to the Fishing Associations in the District, collating the replies and sending the letters to the Minister
- Continued involvement with the Interreg (SUMARiS) grant application

Update on progress with Defra

Following the last Authority meeting officers have contacted Defra and CEFAS expressing the issues identified at the last Authority meeting. The feedback received was that they were very much aware of the issues surrounding thornback rays and the skates and rays quota as a whole. The advice which came from these discussions was that raising this issue with the Minister in January 2017 after the November and December 2016 EU council meetings would be more effective. It was also identified that a reflection of the fishing industries concerns on this issue would help make a stronger case. To this end we have drafted a letter to the fishing associations in the KEIFCA district (Appendix 1) and will look to send a KEIFCA letter supported by local fishing industries letters in December 2016.

Interreg (SUMARiS) grant application

The second action undertaken since the meeting, has been to try and actively work with other likeminded organisations to change the current skates and rays management situation. After discussions with other fisheries groups in France, Belgium and the Netherlands the issues are the same across the North Sea and Channel and as part of this the French are looking to develop a regional European approach through an Interreg (SUMARiS) - Sustainable management of rays and skates project lead by Organisation de Producteurs à la Pêche from Nord in France. The main objective of the SUMARiS project is to improve the management system for rays and skates fishery in the two seas area (Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel) working with a range of partners (French, English, Dutch and Belgium).

Aims of the project

In order to be sustainable, both ecologically and economically, the management strategy must be evidence based and benefit from the best available knowledge. Thus SUMARiS groups the expertise from five fisheries professional organisations and three research institutes from the four countries of the two seas zone in order to:

- Provide the panel with the most appropriate joint management scenarios. The researchers would benchmark the available, but dispersed methodologies and knowledge in order to build the best available management options and provide recommendations to the professional organisations. Completed by stocks and survival rate evidence, these options would allow professional organisations to choose the most suitable scenario and transform it to the cross border management strategy.
- Provide an accurate data on rays and skates stocks by species in the East Channel and South North Sea area. The research centres and professional organisations put together existing data regarding the rays and skates stocks evaluation in the area, identify data gaps, and design a protocol for the experimental fisheries campaigns allowing to collect the missing data.
- Provide an accurate data on the survival rate for rays and skates by species. It would allow defining the management measures regarding the bycatch of rays and skates and adapt the requirements given by the joint management strategy. The protocol of the survival tests is known by some of the project partners and will be shared and implemented with the less experienced partners. It will be carried out by fishermen and researchers during the experimental fisheries campaigns.
- Implement the experimental fisheries campaigns collecting the stocks and survival rate data. The five professional organisations will subcontract the fishermen fleet in order to carry out the tests together. The fleet coming from all over the four countries will be mobilized to cover the area and provide accurate data through a statistically representative number of campaigns.

- Create a joint database knowing exactly the different species of rays that can be found in the INTERREG 2 Seas area. It will be easy to update and based on stocks and survival rate helping the fisheries professional organisations in their decision making regarding the joint management measures on the cross border level.
- Train the fishermen to accurately identify and handle the species of rays and skates. The identified catches will be registered according to the standard procedure and used to update the joint database. The capacity to handle correctly the unwanted catches of rays and skates will allow fishermen to release them alive and land mainly the correct sized adult fish. The fishermen (trained or not) will be equipped with an easy to use protected paper guide helping the quick identification on board.
- Adopt a joint management strategy. Finally, the professional organisations will define the suitable strategic framework relying on the up to date joint database.
- Each partner shall take part in one or several activities. These activities are going to be organized in Work Packages and planned in time in parallel or consequent order in order to better optimize the three year period foreseen by the project.

Proposed project work packages that KEIFCA could be involved in

Project Output(s)	Specific Results
Joint cross border strategy for the management of rays and skates fisheries	The joint strategy will provide the framework for coherent management measures common to the area and will improve the rays and skates fisheries management practice
Completed rays and skates stocks shared database	Improve the visibility and coherence of the available data on the cross border level and ease the communication and decision making process
Training module regarding the identification and the handling of the catches by rays and skates species Survival rate test report	Deliver 10 trainings. Train 150 professionals (fishermen, fish auction experts, etc.) to identify and handle the fish correctly (facilitate the survival) Better exploit the rays and skates stocks while avoiding landing the unwanted catch. Maintain the fishing activity avoiding the choke species status.

The project is at the initial concept note stage and KEIFCA, CEFAS and SWFPO have expressed an interested in being a UK partner in the project. INTERREG projects are financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for 2014-2020 and are required to improve the effectiveness of regional policies and instruments. Projects need to build on the exchange of experiences among partners who are ideally responsible for the development of their local and regional policies. At present an initial budget of 2.5M Euros has been applied for

to fund the project. If the project passes the initial concept stage a more detailed budget would be developed.

Recommendation:

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Proposed letter to KEIFCA Fishermen's Associations

Over the last 10 years the management of thornback rays has been an on-going issue and over the years KEIFCA and local fishermen have written numerous letters to Defra and the Minister regarding developing more appropriate and responsive regional management. Although the Greater Thames Estuary is a focal point to the recruitment and breeding of thornback rays the stock is widely distributed in the southern North Sea and channel, which means that any management measures need to be thought of in a unilateral context, and although KEIFCA might have a role in management, a wider solution needs to be reached for management to be really sustainable.

Working with fishermen, CEFAS and Defra a range of regional management options have been discussed. Although discussions did indicate that the EU would support a regional approach in theory, it would require significant reassurances in the form of better data and proof that regional management would work. It also became apparent that even if a regional management system was developed quota would still form the backbone of any management proposal. One of the most disappointing aspects of all the effort over the last decade is that there is still no ICES management plan for thornback rays.

At the last KEIFCA meeting in September 2016 the Authority discussed this issue at length and agreed the following actions

1. Write to the Minister/Defra asking for:
 - a. a review of the current Skate and Ray TAC system and requesting a thornback ray specific TAC; and
 - b. a commitment and time scale to develop an ICES thornback ray management plan
2. Invite the minister to a meeting with local fishermen, Wm Morrison Supermarkets and CEFAS regarding the state of the thornback ray stocks and options for future management.

Collaboration from local fishing associations and individual local fishermen, in the form of a letter or an email, supporting the same actions would really help highlight the importance of this issue to Defra and help strengthen the need for action to be taken. In an effort to coordinate action if you send your letter for Defra to KEIFCA by 19th December we can collate all the responses and send them all to Defra in January 2017.