

Agenda item B8

By: Chief IFC Officer

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation
Authority – 23 May 2017

Subject: Thornback Ray – SUMARiS project

Classification **Unrestricted**

Summary:

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

Recommendations:

Members are asked to **AGREE** to:

- (i) continued involvement with the Interreg (SUMARiS) project ; and
- (ii) the associated KEIFCA resource commitment of £10,000 to the project from the research fund and a total of 166 officer days over the next 3 years to the SUMARiS bid.

Background

As discussed at previous meetings KEIFCA have been trying to move forward the management of Thornback Rays for over the last ten years and 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. This leads to the conclusion that although KEIFCA might have a role in management, a wider solution needs to be reached for management to be sustainable.

KEIFCA have worked constructively with local fishermen on previous CEFAS lead national projects (Shark By-watch and Shark By-watch II) and although these

projects were successful the conclusions suggested, again, that to move management forward a multi-nation cross-border solution was the only real option available. In the light of this the SUMARiS project and partnership is the next logical step in progressing Thornback Ray management and working with fishermen, research bodies and regulators within a wider international management framework.

The SUMARiS project

Following an initial discussion at the last Authority meeting outlining the Interreg (SUMARiS) grant application the Vice-Chairman and the Chief Officer attended a SUMARiS partnership meeting in Lille on 8th March. The meeting was attended by representatives from the fishing industry and science community from England, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The meeting discussed the key elements of the project, how the project could be delivered and who would lead specific sections. Following this meeting the project activities were structured with six Work Packages (WP) to be collaboratively delivered by six partners and two observer partners.

SUMARiS project outline

- **WP 1 - Project Management**
- **WP 2 – Communication**
- **WP 3 - Build Fishery Knowledge**

Compile a rays and skates stocks shared database. This will help improve and build a more reliable knowledge base for rays and skates to help make more informed species specific stock decisions.

3.1. Shaping the management tool

- Pooling the existing data together
- Validation of the specifications for the database
- Validation of the data gaps and ways of harmonisation

3.2. Fisheries campaigns

Fisheries campaigns engaging fishermen vessels with professional observers on-board for data gathering and captures for the survival tests rates.

Onboard:

- Species identification
- Sex identification
- Reflexes check-up
- Tagging or a way to attest the vivacity

3.3. Data gathering

- Spatial distribution based on collected data including the fisheries campaigns
- Validation of the results by the EU scientific community:
- Bycatch (species composition, numbers, weight, length, gear types, reconstructing historical landing/catches per specie)
 - SA methods for DLS; MSY estimates-proxies
 - Biological data (growth, maturity, Reproduction habitat)

- 3.4. Updating of the management tool (database)
- Filling the data gaps
 - Training of the partners how to use and complete the database

3.5. Exchange program for the fishermen

A program of visits

- for the demonstration of the survival tests?

• **WP 4 – Help develop understanding of ray and skate survival**

Help gather data that helps answer outstanding questions about the survivorship of thornback ray species after they have been caught in fishing gear

- 4.1. Survival protocol
- Definition of “high survival”
 - validation of the survival rate tests protocol specifying what vessels, which country, differentiation between small scale and large scale fisheries

4.2. Tests in controlled environment

Following the fisheries campaigns the captured rays will be brought to the controlled environment in ILVO or Nausicaa. The scientists will apply the protocol while measuring the survival rate

• **WP 5 – Roll out a joint cross-border training programme for species identification and handling.**

Developing a common training programme for English, French and Belgium fishermen helping to standardise the identification and the best practice for handling/ returning to sea of different rays and skates species

5.1. Common code of conduct (selection, optimal handling, etc.)

- 5.2. Common tools for the optimal on board operations
- Identification of rays
 - Handling

5.3. Training sessions for the active fisheries professionals

Train fishermen (crew and skipper) and auction staff

• **WP 6 - Develop a shared cross-border management strategy**

Using an MoU and a code of conduct agreement different management options can be developed and could help provide a template for future cross boarder management.

- 6.1. Stakeholder consultation
- Validation of the stakeholder list (professional level, other than North Sea RAC)
 - Working group on the local level for the stakeholders Improving dialogue between fishermen and scientists

6.2. Design of the joint management strategy

- Joint management strategy methodology
- Long term governance

6.3. Evaluation of management strategies

- Cost-benefit analysis for alternatives assessment and Social impact

and discussion on scenarios

6.4. Joint management strategy setting

- Definition of the concrete management action based on the joint database

Contributing to the project

In trying to work within the different priorities and structures of different countries the project took time to come together and faced a lot of challenges in securing resource and backing from the different bodies involved. One of the stipulations of the project is that there is an English partner. Although CEFAS support the project and strongly backed it they do not have the extra resource to become a project partner, and after several discussions, are contributing to the project as an observer.

In the light of this it became apparent that for the project to go ahead KEIFCA needed to take more of a lead role and shape the project. To this end KEIFCA, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, committed £10,000 to the project (from the research fund) and just over 50 day's officer time per year for the next three years. By making this contribution to the project KEIFCA could have access to match funding of just under £90,000 for the project as well as feed into and influence (project work packages above) a joint project spend of over €1.5M. It is hoped that by contributing local knowledge, skills and experience into such a project with like-minded organisations that the key obstacles that have hindered progress for the last decade can eventually be overcome and potentially new more responsive and collaborative ways of managing thornback ray stocks can be developed on a regional seas level.

The project has been discussed with some key members of the local fishing industry and they whole heartedly support the project. There was also the feeling that the project not only helps address key KEIFCA duties but it will help build a better working relationship with the local fishing industry as well as ensuring that real fishermen's data from the KEIFCA district is being used in national and international decision making.

As with any grant funding, application it is not guarantee of success and the Interreg funding stream is very competitive. It will take about 3 months for a decision to be made.

Recommendation:

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