



Agenda Item No. B7

By: Chief Fishery Officer
To: Kent and Essex IFCA – 29 November 2019
Subject: **SUMARiS update**
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

This paper will provide Members with a summary of work undertaken to date by the partners involved in the SUMARiS (Sustainable Management of Skates and Rays) project

Recommendations:

Members are asked to **NOTE** this report

Background:

Since the last update in January the project has really started to gather pace especially as the components of the different workstreams are starting to produce results. The second yearly review meeting was held in Ostend in October and overall the project is on track. However, it is only now in the rollout phase of the project that the work load in some of the workstreams (work packages) really starts increasing.

WP1- Fishery Knowledge

This work package attempts to address some of the data deficiencies in the current skate and ray stock assessments.

- *Atlas of the distribution of rays and skates.* The atlas looks to review and compile all of the available data collected by countries fishing for skates and rays in the southern North Sea (IVc) and the eastern channel (VIId) into charts. Although a hard copy has been produced, the real step forward is that computer code has been

written so that new data can be easily added, and charts easily updated - Completed by Laurent Dubroca, working in Ifremer, December 2018.

- *Research into the biology and life-history of skates and rays.* Ifremer (French government research department) and ILVO (Belgian government research department) and worked together on three areas of basic research, which will help ICES in developing more confident stock assessments.

- the common protocol of rays and skates ageing.
- the image database of maturity staging and ageing of skates and rays.
- the age, length and sexual maturity keys applicable to feed in the assessment of skate and ray stocks.

Considerable progress has been made and the initial results have been shared within the SUMARiS partners. The results are also being shared with the ICES skates and rays working group in November.

- *Fishermens survey campaign.* Fishing vessels from France and Belgium as well as the KEIFCA district are all using the same survey method to record their catches of skates and rays on over 90 observer days, covering ICES areas 7d and 4c, and using three different gear types typically used by their fishermen. About 75% of the surveys are now complete and there is a push to finish the last surveys before the cut-off point of 15 January 2020. KEIFCA has completed 10 of their 12 planned trips. The survey method developed by the project has been used by a number of other EU projects and has become the common standard across the EU.

- *Compiling and analysing the fisheries campaign data using a shared database.* FROM Nord (French partner) and their IT-supplier finished developing a shared web-based database in September 2018. The web-based database means that information can be quickly used and analysed. The coding and framework of the database is now also being used on other EU fisheries projects.

- The Report on different scenario of stock-assessment to enhance a sustainable socio-economic management. This component of the project is being led by Ifremer and over the next 6 months it is hoped that the results from the initial components of the project will help establish a toolbox to manage all skate and rays species, with a particular focus on thornback rays.

WP2- Survival rate tests

The full Landing Obligation (discards ban) came into force on 1 January 2019 and now legally requires vessels to land all of their catch in an attempt to reduce discarding. However, Joint Recommendations for high survivability exemption for skates and rays were submitted in May 2018 and an exemption awarded on a temporary basis until 31 December 2021 (exemption for cuckoo ray until 31 December 2019), conditional on delivery of a road map submitted to the EU Commission by the 31 October 2019. As part of gaining a high survivability exemption for 3 years there was the expectation that experiments to assess the survivability of skates and rays would be undertaken.

Work package 2 of the SUMARiS project looks to help gather evidence to answer this question, with French and Belgian vessels bringing skates and rays that had been caught at sea back to the lab for 30 days to monitor their medium-term survival. In conjunction with this and the fishermen's survey campaign also carried out, a rapid survivorship test onboard the fishing boats was undertaken as the catch was sorted on the deck.

So far 1324 survival tests have been carried out on board and on 134 rays that have been brought back to the lab and monitored for longer term survivorship. This information will not only help provide evidence and a comparison for a wide range of skate and ray species but also between fishing gears. It is hoped that analysis might also help identify important factors that help increase survivorship.

WP3- Training

One of the significant gaps impeding the future management of skates and rays as individual stocks is confidence in correct identification of individual skate and ray species. To address this, and to promote simple ways of increasing survivorship on board fishing boats, the SUMARiS project has developed species identification training and guides as well as a best handling guide. The training package has been produced in the three languages of the different partner countries and is being rolled out over the next 3 months.

WP4- Joint Strategy

Building on the evidence and engagement developed by the other work packages, the joint strategy work package looks to engage with a wide range of stakeholders to review potential management options and develop future management proposals. KEIFCA have led part of this process and have completed to date:

- Compiled SUMARiS stakeholder database
- Written local context baseline (literature review, summary of fishing fleets and review of management measures)
- Held international management conference in Canterbury
- Developed management options papers (attached as Appendix A for Member's information)

As the project enters its final stages the group are currently in the process of organising a wrap-up event in Boulogne on the 29-30 April 2020. As part of the event there will be a tour of and a reception event at the Nausicaá aquarium.

Interreg 2 Seas Grant Funding

Members will recall that this project is subject to an Interreg grant process. To date a total of €103,942 has been spent on this project of which 60% has been, or is in the process of being, repaid to the IFCA; a total of €62,365. We are expecting to spend a further €69,927 of which €41,956 will be claimed from Interreg.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to **NOTE** this report