

# Sustainable Seafood Coalition (SSC) Members' meeting minutes

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**Date/location:** 11 February 2016, Food and Drink Federation, London, WC2B 5JJ

**Number of attendees:** 12 members (including 3 ClientEarth staff acting as facilitator, secretariat, and minute taker), and 6 external participants.

## Summary of agreed points

- A page on the SSC website dedicated to resources on FIPs would be useful to centralise information in one place.
- Secretariat participation in Project UK Advisory Committee would be useful to feed information to the rest of the group, and members are encouraged to participate on an individual level. The secretariat could also support collaboration on existing FIPs by helping with organising meetings.
- There is interest in engaging in Project UK FIP regional steering groups, but other options for participating could be explored with MSC (e.g. in kind support).
- The secretariat will contact ICES to find out whether specification on fishery dependent data collection is already being addressed. The SSC's engagement at EU level is on hold for now.
- Members will continue to contribute to the list of focus species and FIP activity, which the secretariat will maintain. This will include keeping track of details on which member is involved in what. The list will be anonymised and published on the SSC website.
- Useful for secretariat to update on SSC at the Seafish common language group (as used to happen regularly during the development of the codes).

## Purpose of the members' meeting

At the last SSC meeting on 24 November 2015, members identified five objectives in relation to improvement projects: acting as a vehicle for collaboration and information sharing; engaging with the catching sector; clarifying existing sources of, and access to information; improving access to funding for improvements; and working together on improvement projects. This meeting was to bring relevant expertise to the discussion, and continue exploring collaborative engagement on improvement projects.

## Item 1: Summary of presentations

Five external stakeholders were invited to speak about their experience in relation to engaging with the catching sector on data collection, and engaging in fishery improvement projects.

**Jim Masters, Executive Director, Fishing into the Future (FitF)**

- FitF aims to make fishers part of the solution to sustainability by leveraging their experience, through training on fisheries science to build fishers' capacity to engage in debate; science-industry collaboration, including by supporting scientists and fishers develop data collection protocols; and highlighting best practice. By gaining operating knowledge of fisheries science, fishers will contribute to the sustainability of the industry. FitF is also engaged in Project UK (detail below).
- FitF encourages the SSC's engagement through information sharing on supply chain needs, gaps and trends, including information on data deficient stocks, stocks prioritised for future sourcing, and factors setting the agenda for sustainability decisions. Advisory and financial support to improvement projects is encouraged.

**Stuart Hetherington, Marine Biologist, Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas)**

- Cefas is collaborating with fishers to gather fishery-dependent data on data deficient species, such as shark, skates and rays, relying on participation from fishers whilst at sea. This is an alternative, but complementary approach to fishery-independent scientific research surveys with fishing gears that do not optimally sample shark, skates and rays and not necessarily surveying commercial fishing grounds. Benefits include rapid and real-time data collection made possible by fishers who regularly encounter the study species.
- This effort stems from the existing challenges faced by the fishing sector: poor or insufficient data leads to a precautionary management approach from fishery managers, which can lead to low quotas and a loss of income. In turn, this can create frustration among fishers and reinforce the resistance to working with scientists, resulting in prolonged unpopular management measures.
- However, continued mistrust of, or inconsistency in, data collected by fishers makes it challenging for scientists to use it. There is a need to focus on collecting data that provides answers that help all stakeholders. Shark By-Watch UK was highlighted as an example of collaboration between Cefas and the catch sector. It resulted in the production of a real-time spurdog by-catch reporting tool. Fishers can use this to avoid spurdog, which is a zero TAC species.

**Chloe North, Fisheries Outreach Officer, Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)**

- Project UK: partnership including MSC, Seafish, FitF. Second phase of Project Inshore, which pre-assessed the state of English inshore fisheries using MSC standard as a proxy, and identified six fishery improvement projects (FIPs) and commercial partners. These FIPs are grouped in three regions: North Sea mixed flatfish fishery (plaice and lemon sole), Channel scallop and monkfish, South West shellfish (brown crab and lobster). Each funder has donated £15,000 over 3 years.
- Project UK will fully assess those six fisheries to identify improvements and move them towards MSC certification; conduct wide-scale pre-assessments across the

UK, including offshore fisheries; and identify additional potential FIPs. The idea is to create a 'conveyer-belt' of FIPs, based on collaboration and precompetitive partnerships. Funding is expected from bid to European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), currently in early stages, which will support the work streams.

- The Project UK Advisory Committee is potentially open to more members. The next meeting in April is to discuss the scope of the EMFF bid.

#### **Mike Park, Chief Executive, Scottish White Fish Producers Association (SWFPA)**

- The obligation to land all catches under reformed Common Fisheries Policy, in particular low quota 'choke' species, is a major concern for industry despite tools to facilitate compliance (e.g. de minimis exemptions).
- Industry is seeking to find solutions to this shift in legal requirements (the landing obligation) and full compliance will take time. For the most successful and fastest changes, there must be an economic benefit to the fishers that makes good business sense.
- Members of SWFPA are engaged in several improvements to help avoid choke species. For example, in the Nephrops fishery, reducing the net height from 6ft to 2ft resulted in much lower fin-fish bycatch, which had the additional benefit of improving the quality of the catch. In another project, a heat map of high 'choke' species in the North Sea indicates areas to avoid fishing. Finally, by using a vessel that reports all catch data as a scientific control, the results can be compared with data provided by all other fishers. As obvious discrepancies with their landings data will show up in the resulting analysis this incentivises more accurate reporting rather than using other measures such as on board observers.

#### **Max Levine, Senior Associate, California Environmental Associates**

- FIPs aim to facilitate industry compliance with existing laws. As in the UK, data collection is also a big issue. Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP) organises supplier roundtables focused on particular commodities in a specific region (e.g. North West Atlantic cod) to provide guidance and leverage influence of multiple suppliers. Buyers drive engagement on sustainable seafood in US, particularly retailers, but food service now also working on pre-competitive standards.
- Summary of efforts in the US and North America: SFP is the main organisation that drives FIPs in the US. The Sustainability Incubator also manages 2-3 FIPs. Sea Pact is an industry-run group of independent distributors providing funds for FIPs. The Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions is creating a global directory of FIPs (Global Improvement Directory) expected to be launched in mid-2016, so that stakeholders can track FIP progress.

#### **Discussion and comments**

- Trust is essential for successful fishery-dependent data collection. The type of data the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) needs is not always clear, and there is uncertainty among fishers of how data is used. There is an opportunity to bridge the gap so that data becomes useful for all stakeholders. Solid data is critical to success of the landing obligation, and also to ensure it goes hand in hand with maintaining income for fishers.

- Best practice principles can encourage data collection, but protocols differ by boat and gear, so there is no one-size-fits-all guideline.
- Observer coverage is generally low and there is no legal requirement to carry observers or have cameras on vessel. Financial rewards for reporting data on bycatch and discards would be a strong incentive, but other benefits can act as incentives too, such as tools to manage issues that pose a threat to fishing income (e.g. 'choke' species).
- To address the data gap, educating fishers on fisheries management is crucial, as is improving gear selectivity and encouraging information sharing between fishers (e.g. on which 'choke' species they encounter, and where, to better avoid them).

## Item 2: Priorities and opportunities

The group discussed possible avenues SSC engagement against the agreed objectives.

### Discussion and comments

#### Acting as a vehicle to collaborate and share information

- Wider participation by members is encouraged in Project UK's Advisory Committee, but as a practical solution perhaps the secretariat could participate and update the wider SSC group. Not all members can afford the contribution set by MSC (£5,000 per year) but would be interested in engaging in FIP regional steering groups.
- There is a lot of scattered information available on FIPs. Several members highlighted Nephrops as a priority species for improvement, recently downgraded by the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) in two fisheries of particular importance to one member. Two members are in discussions with MCS to set up a roundtable on Nephrops. SFP can help facilitate FIPs, but no longer runs them.
- The group reviewed the benefit of the list of focus species that we started at the last meeting. Having more transparent information on who does what is the essence of the SSC, and more collaboration is needed on FIPs. The full membership needs to agree on having details of FIP activity released to other members, but this would preferably be kept internal to the SSC. However, a public facing overview would be useful to have on the website, to encourage collaboration across stakeholders.

#### Engaging with the catching sector

- One member suggested the secretariat can begin engaging with catching sector via Seafish, FitF and producer organisations, and update members. However this may create the perception that the secretariat is acting on its own rather than as a neutral coordinator for the group.
- The SSC website could be a window to present members' individual sourcing practices, via updated members' pages, quotes and links to sourcing policies.
- The group discussed how to highlight joint endorsements of particular schemes (such as the Responsible Fishing Scheme-RFS) or key aspects of sourcing policies. The secretariat clarified that the SSC cannot unilaterally endorse any particular

scheme, but the SSC website could highlight requirements in the sourcing policies of any given member (e.g. X requires all UK vessels to be RFS certified by 2017).

- The group discussed nominations for a 'sustainability hero' to jointly promote positive initiatives by fishers. These would need to be informative and not promote any given member, nor indicate the SSC as a group endorsing a specific scheme.

### **Improving access to information and clarifying scientists' data requirements**

- Members discussed possible ways to collect more data, but clarity on the type of data required by scientists is lacking. ICES may be a good entry point as it is commissioned by the European Commission to provide it with scientific advice, but the data they need, and the extent to which fisher-provided data is used, is unclear. Influencing the Commission to request clarifications from ICES could be a way forward. There is an opportunity for the SSC to engage at EU level on the data collection issue, leveraging the secretariat's experience with the Commission. However, as the UK is only one member state, collaboration would be needed with organisations in other countries.
- This would be a big project which would require further discussion with more members and evaluate whether it is something the SSC should get involved in. Starting such a project at the UK level may be more sensible. As a first step however, we need to find out more from ICES's requirements.

### **Agreed:**

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- There is interest in engaging in Project UK FIP regional steering groups, but other options for participating could be explored with MSC (e.g. in kind support).
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### **Actions:**

- Members to inform secretariat on FIP activity for list of focus species.
- Members to review member pages on the SSC website and provide updates to the secretariat, including any statements from sourcing policies they wish to include.

- Secretariat to contact MSC to potentially join Project UK Advisory Committee, and keep members updated where relevant.
- Secretariat to set up dedicated page on the SSC website, and begin gathering information on FIP activities in the UK.
- Secretariat to ask members if they feel comfortable sharing information on their specific engagement in FIPs when circulating minutes.
- Secretariat to contact ICES to clarify the kind of fishery-dependent data that would be useful for producing scientific advice to the European Commission in case they have a solution already.
- Secretariat to offer updates on the SSC at relevant Seafish meetings.
- Secretariat to ask members to propose nominations for a 'Sustainability Hero', to promote positive initiatives in catching sector via the SSC website.
- Secretariat to send reports on US FIPs shared by Max Levine to all members.

### Item 3: Any other business

- The SSC panel at the 2016 SeaWeb Seafood Summit received positive feedback. Thanks to Young's Seafood, Icelandic Seachill and Harbour Lights for participating.
- We are continuing to work with Seafish to align the Risk Assessment for Sourcing Seafood (RASS) tool with sourcing code risk outcomes. Once an outline is established, it will be shared with other members for input. If successful, this could mean RASS could be a simple way for members' to complete their risk assessments as required under the SSC sourcing code.
- Hard copies of guidance are available. Members should inform secretariat if they would like to receive some. All new members will receive it.
- SFP is using the SSC sourcing code to show partners in the US what the UK supply chain has agreed. We would like to film short videos or have written case studies from members on how the SSC code(s) benefit their businesses.
- Members were asked to share Spanish contacts to support scoping of the Spanish market, as well as any UK business contacts with potential membership interest.
- The secretariat has been asked to present the SSC at the Business and Biodiversity Forum of the CBD COP 13 (Cancun, Mexico, December 4-17 2016).

#### Action:

- Members to inform secretariat if they want posted hard copies of the guidance.
- Secretariat to raise idea of producing short videos/case studies.
- Secretariat to schedule next meeting at later date, expected to be in July.