

Clean Catch UK: Joint Action to Reduce Wildlife Bycatch Report for 1st Regional Working Group meeting

Meeting date and time: 24 January 2022, 10:00 - 14:30 (UTC)

Location: Online

Summary Points

- Members provided feedback on the draft **Terms of Reference** for the Group, which have been updated and [can be read here](#).
- Members discussed the suitability of modelling the RWG on the **USA's Take Reduction Teams**. It was noted that Take Reduction Teams focus on a specific, time-bound task - bringing mortality of a species below an exceeded threshold - whereas there are a variety of different bycatch issues for the RWG to address in the South-west. It was also suggested that Take Reduction Teams are significantly better resourced in comparison to the RWG.
- The **balance of RWG membership** was discussed, with members agreeing on the need for more industry representation, and the need to fill gaps in scientific knowledge to avoid bias toward particular species.
- An exercise was carried out on Mentimeter to gauge **members' initial perceptions** of the highest risk species and gear types, encourage discussion, and identify gaps in knowledge.
- A summary of the RWG's **three-step process** was presented: 1) use expert knowledge and existing information to identify priority species, fisheries and hotspots; 2) provide recommendations on bycatch mitigation measures; and 3) evaluate the effectiveness of these measures.
- Members stressed the need to **establish a framework** within which to carry out the prioritisation assessment. This could be based on a combination of Defra's Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (when published), and Natural England's 'Bycatch Mitigation Decision Tree'. This should include a matrix of the different variables that need to be considered when prioritising species and fisheries, and would provide a **consistent rationale** for decision making. Relevant variables that may be considered for the risk framework include: level of bycatch, local species abundance, IUCN status, availability of data, feasibility of mitigation options, and likelihood of bycatch being measurably reduced.
- An **industry priority** was to avoid availability bias or decisions based on individual expertise, noting that decisions could have significant economic or social impacts on the industry.



- It was agreed that a **draft framework for prioritisation of species be drawn up intersessionally**, by a subgroup of the RWG. This would be populated by the RWG in due course using expert knowledge and existing data sources, such as Seafish’s Ecological Risk Assessments, CCUK mitigation trials data, ICES WGBYC reports, the previous work of the UK’s Bycatch Focus Group, and the (awaiting publication) Cefas report: *‘Bycatch of Protected, Endangered and Threatened (PET) marine wildlife in the commercial fisheries, operating from the South-west of the UK’*.
- Clarity was sought on **policy priorities** - particularly around conservation at the population level, versus at an individual (welfare) level. Defra provided an overview of the Fisheries Act, Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI), and Marine Strategy. The RWG’s prioritisation assessment would need to be guided by this legislation.
- It was suggested that the RWG adopt Natural England’s **‘Bycatch Mitigation Decision-Tree’** approach, to assess every fishery in the South-west, rather than start by prioritising fisheries or identifying hotspots.
- Clarity was sought around the RWG’s role in **providing recommendations on bycatch mitigation** measures. Some members stressed the importance of using ‘all the tools in the box’, noting that, in some contexts, technical measures alone would not work. There was concern around the need to balance the protection of sensitive species with industry livelihoods and income.
- Members discussed approaches to **evaluation** and their **visions of success**. The RWG will support the delivery of the Ecosystem Objective in the UK Fisheries Act, which states that incidental catches of sensitive species are minimised and, where possible, eliminated. The RWG will work to develop **Bycatch Reduction Plans** that will outline targets and timeframes for bycatch reduction, achieved through a range of locally-suitable mitigation measures and cooperation and engagement with the fishing industry.
- Members discussed the need to agree on the **best-available datasets**, in order to guide the prioritisation, recommendation and evaluation work of the RWG. Debate centred around the level or coverage of monitoring fisheries observers, and the utility of industry self-reported data. Members agreed on the need for both.

Full schedule of actions

#	ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY
1	Amend Terms of Reference in line with members' feedback.	Mindfully Wired Communications
2	Invite Seafish South-west regional liaison officer to join RWG.	Cefas



3	NFFO to connect RWG with fishermen's associations across the South-west.	NFFO, Cefas
4	Membership of RWG to be reviewed regularly.	All
5	Small group of RWG members to meet intersessionally, to draw up an initial framework for the prioritisation assessment.	Various members, led by Cefas
6	Seafish's 'Ecological Risk Assessment' work to be shared with RWG members.	Al Kingston
7	Natural England's 'Bycatch Mitigation Decision Tree' framework to be shared with RWG members (in confidence).	Russell Leaper
8	Data from the two years of CCUK South-west trials to be shared with RWG members	Cefas