

Clean Catch UK: Joint Action to Reduce Wildlife Bycatch

Report for the Cetacean Local Focus Group Meeting



Meeting Date and Time: 4 March 2022, 10:00-13:00

Location: Alverton Hotel, Truro

Summary Points

General

- Stuart Hetherington (Cefas) provided an update to fishermen who were not present at the previous Cetacean LFG meeting regarding the formation of the CCUK project. He explained that the work of the LFG sits under the CCUK umbrella, which aims to bring together bycatch work across all species under one name.

Cetacean bycatch mitigation study

- A written summary of the progress of the cetacean bycatch mitigation study, from the port of Mevagissey, had been provided to all members via email for discussion. Discussion on the study covered progress of the research activity, the minimum study duration remaining, and the group's perspectives on possible next steps. It was emphasised that the purpose of the study was to identify if use of pingers and lights, and their combination, to prevent cetacean bycatch is **practical, robust and effective**.
- A finalised data set had been prepared for 18 months of the study, including 224 hauls of paired treatment and control nets from 28 December 2019 to 15 July 2021. Electronic Monitoring (EM) was used to validate the bycatch information reported by skippers. Bycatch data from the study was discussed, along with input from fishermen on how practical they found the pingers and lights to use.
- Next steps for the study were discussed, in light of the results presented. Options included:
 - Continuing the current study design, running until at least the end of May 2022, and most likely beyond.
 - Refining and continuing the existing approach by increasing the number of vessels involved, and potentially removing lights from the study as well as one of the pinger options being trialled.
 - Stopping and changing the Bycatch Reduction Technology (BRT) to a Passive Acoustic Reflector (PAR), for example, in lieu of lights and pingers.
- Those present agreed that the study should continue in its current format, in order to extract maximum value from the work to-date. However, following feedback from skippers on the practical challenges of using the lights within the trial, it was also agreed that Cefas would explore options for reducing the burden of deploying the lights – considering the purchase and supply of dedicated nets with lights pre-attached, to reduce time spent switching between BRT each month. The study may continue for up to a further 12 months beyond May 2022 and may involve more vessels (if possible) to increase the sample size.

- This feedback would be brought to the next meeting of the CCUK National Steering Group for discussion on the 22nd March 2022.

Passive Acoustic Reflector (PAR) development

- Al Davies, Arribada, provided an update on the development and production of PARs. A call for participation in a trial of the PARs had been issued, and 15 vessels (11 under-10s, and 4 over-10s) had responded that they would be willing to use the devices on their gear. Maria Wild, Cefas, was ascertaining final details of the static nets used by volunteer participants, in order to provide relevant information to the engineering team before production.
- Static nets with PARs attached would be deployed alongside control nets to understand the effectiveness of PARs as a BRT. The 4 over-10 vessels that had volunteered to trial the PARs are legally mandated to use pingers on their nets – this prompted an earlier discussion as to whether a derogation for the removal of these pingers should be sought in order to trial the PARs exclusively, or whether the PARs should be trialled alongside the pingers (on differing sections of the net).
- The proposal for the trial, including the potential derogation, would be taken to a future meeting of the CCUK National Steering Group for discussion. It was noted that this discussion should include ethical considerations of removing the pingers, to the vessels' sustainability credentials (e.g. Marine Stewardship Council accreditation) and also the effect of this on fishing activity outside of UK waters.
- Fishermen trialling the PARs will be required to log information of their fishing activity via the CCUK self-reporting bycatch app. It was agreed by those present to start trialling a small batch of PARs, with a potential start-date of the end of April 2022. Considerations around whether production of a 'retrofit version' of the PAR would be useful would be explored after commencement of the trials.
- A 'four channel' acoustic monitoring system, developed by the University of St Andrews, was highlighted as a potential tool for boosting the statistical significance of the PAR trial – by monitoring differences in cetacean activity alongside the control and treatment nets. An action was taken to explore this option.

C-POD deployment update

- One C-POD had been removed from those deployed in Mevagissey and St Austell bay due to sufficient overlap in detection range of the other C-PODS. Lots of engagement had been undertaken locally around the use of the pods, and the rationale behind their placement was well understood by local fishermen. On the request of local fishermen, a 6-month update on deployment of the pods would be provided at the Mevagissey Fishermen's Association meeting, as well as at the LFG.

CCUK app

- An update to the functioning of the CCUK app would be complete shortly, and skippers would see this update within weeks of the meeting.

Alternative gears workshop announcement

- Cefas and Defra notified participants of an in-person, multi-day workshop on the subject of potential alternatives to gillnet fishing as a way to expand the wildlife bycatch reduction toolkit. The workshop was to be held 22-24 March 2022 in Plymouth, and all participants at the LFG were invited to attend.

Skippers' feedback and future meetings

- Fishermen raised concerns about a focus on 'talking over doing' and expressed a preference for fewer formal meetings, and more small, informal quayside updates – built around practical action within the studies / trials. It was agreed that the next LFG meeting would not be scheduled until there was something 'concrete' to report on.

Full Schedule of Actions

#	ACTION	Responsibility
1	Pending decision by the NSG, refine and continue the existing cetacean bycatch mitigation study, using pingers and lights, to gather more definitive data.	Cefas, Fishermen
2	Explore options for reducing the burden of using lights within the cetacean bycatch mitigation study.	Cefas
3	Explore options to increase the financial incentive for participation in the cetacean bycatch mitigation study, to increase the sample size.	Cefas
4	Finalise the PARs study approach through discussion with the NSG and commence the PARs study as soon as possible.	Cefas
5	Explore options for enhanced acoustic monitoring within PARs study, using a system developed by the University of St Andrews.	Cefas, Al Kingston
6	Cefas to provide updates on C-POD deployment in Mevagissey and St Austell Bay to the Mevagissey Fishermen's Association, as well as at LFG meetings.	Cefas
7	LFG meetings to be scheduled only when there are 'concrete' updates to be shared. Preference for smaller, local meetings with skippers to be observed in future stakeholder engagement around the LFG.	Cefas, Defra, MWC