Report for the second meeting of the Clean Catch National Advisory Board – 24 June 2025

Online

Overview

- This report details discussions and outcomes of the meeting of the Clean Catch National Advisory Board (NAB) held 24 June 2025, and follow-up discussion and outcomes.
- Meeting aims were:
    - To provide the NAB with updates on: Defra bycatch policy, generally and for seabirds; progress with conducting the pinger trial; progress with setting up the new EEFPO North Sea trial; and plans for the bycatch best practice guides.
    - For the NAB to advise on: the feasibility, benefits, and challenges of the potential management options for addressing harbour porpoise bycatch as identified by the MMO; aspects of seabird behaviour and interactions, and aspects of measuring the effectiveness of mitigation measures, to consider when designing the EEFPO North Sea trial; and potential ways to ensure the usefulness of the planned bycatch best practice guides.
- Comments by NAB members are not attributed.
- Accompanying meeting slides can be found here.

Outcomes

- The NAB **noted** and discussed the updates.
- The NAB discussed and **provided advice** in relation to the items on the MMO, the EEFPO North Sea trial, and the bycatch best practice guides.
- The Clean Catch consortium team will **discuss** how to improve the approach to and design of these meetings going forward and action accordingly, in response to feedback received from a NAB member.

In attendance

NAB members:

- Andrew Pascoe (fisherman)
- Al Kingston (University of St. Andrews)
- Ali Hood (The Shark Trust)
- Bianca Cisternino (WDC)
- Brigid Finlayson (Defra) – NAB Chair
- Dale Rodmell (EEFPO)
- Jean Duggan (standing in for Bernadette Butfield) (RSPB)
- Mike Roach (standing in for Mike Cohen) (NFFO)
- Rebecca Allen (Seal Research Trust)
- Rebecca Lyall (Project UK / MSC)
- Russell Leaper (IFAW)
- Ruth Williams (The Wildlife Trusts)

Clean Catch consortium team / Programme Governance Board:

- Aadil Siddiqi (ZSL)
- Alasdair Davies (Arribada Initiative)
- Alessandra Bielli (Cefas)
- Ben Tutt-Leppard (Arribada Initiative)
- Chantal Lyons (Mindfully Wired)
- Emily Roebuck (Cefas)
- Emma Kelman (Defra)
- Joanna Murray (Cefas)
- Katrina Ryan (Mindfully Wired)
- Milly Oakley (MMOC)
- Rebecca Austin (ZSL)
- Vicki Castro-Spokes (Defra) – Chair of the NAB June meeting

External presenters:

- Charlie Wiseman (MMO)
- Ellie Falconer (MMO)
- Eilidh Siegal (MMO)

Apologies were received from Brendan Godley (University of Exeter), David Warwick (Seafish), Emma Plotnek (FITF), and Per Berggren (Newcastle University). The meeting recording was shared with these members in confidence for a limited period.

Job titles and affiliations for all NAB members can be found on the Clean Catch website.

Meeting proceedings

1. Defra policy updates & seabird bycatch plans – Brigid Finlayson (NAB Chair)

Presentation summary:

- Current bycatch evidence projects (funded by Defra and/or Devolved Governments) are ongoing, including the Bycatch Monitoring Programme (BMP), Insight360, the UK Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme (CSIP), and the Regional Bycatch Risk Prioritisation Framework (RBRPF). The Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI) continues to be the guiding framework.
- The RBRPF will enable strategic policy decisions to be made on addressing bycatch of different taxa through bycatch implementation plans. The aim is to publish the RBRFP's outputs in March 2026.
- Departmental resource constraints mean that the focus this year will be an action plan for seabirds, with Defra convening a new seabird bycatch working group which first met on 23 June 2025. There are several policy drivers including strategic compensation measures for offshore wind activities regarding seabird impacts, OSPAR, and FMP evidence gaps.

NAB questions and comments:

- Where does the evidence on seabird bycatch come from?
    - *Response:* This is from several sources including JNCC reports such as the Seabird Plan of Action (ME6024, JNCC), and a recent report on seabird bycatch mitigation by a Defra fellow. In essence, the available evidence draws on a combination of observer data from the BMP and literature reviews of bycatch, hotspots, and mitigation to date. There is strong confidence in the monitoring data, and known data gaps are being

addressed. The evidence portfolio excludes data from recent wind farm schemes in the Southwest.

- Defra noted the need to consider and mitigate against the risk of unintended consequences in developing programmes on bycatch mitigation and offshore wind compensation.
- How will implementation of the seabird bycatch action plan be funded, beyond the public purse?
    - *Response:* This could involve a range of options, e.g. the Fisheries and Seafood Scheme (FaSS) fund. However, funding options will need to be informed by connections between bycatch and other policy areas such as REM and FMPs, and by mitigation options.
- The experience of attending the new seabird working group is that it was good to have so many people in the room willing to engage and share knowledge. Despite the complex topic, there was some consensus around the fact that enough evidence is available to develop a plan at this point. It will be important now to set out the timelines for this process, when task and finish groups will be established, exactly what their objectives will be and how the relationship between the task and finish groups and the working group will work. It will also be crucial for the task and finish groups to develop SMART goals and actions, and to ensure there is a link with other policy areas such as ESCaRP, the FMPs, and REM policy, both to avoid duplication and to establish routes for implementation of the action plan.

2. MMO STAGE 4 MPA: Fishing impacts in English harbour porpoise MPAs – Charlie Wiseman, Eilidh Siegal, and Ellie Falconer (MMO)

Presentation summary:

- The MMO is currently assessing fishing impacts on two harbour porpoise Marine Protected Areas (MPAs): the Bristol Channel Approaches MPA and the Southern North Sea MPA. This considers bycatch and other fishing-related impacts such as those to supporting habitat.
- The assessment process has involved a call for evidence on literature reviews called “impact evidence documents” (shared with the NAB in the pre-meeting papers); the MMO thanked anyone on the call who contributed to the call. The MMO have drafted a “Harbour Porpoise Bycatch Management Options” document, which reviews potential options for the MMO to manage bycatch of harbour porpoise from gillnets. Important evidence sources for this management options document included the Clean Catch Mitigation Hub, and the two Hauling Up Solutions workshop report.
    - *Post-meeting update:* The impact evidence documents and the Harbour Porpoise Bycatch Management Options document were published on 21

July 2025 at: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/managing-harbour-porpoise-bycatch-in-english-waters.

- Evidence indicates that for harbour porpoise bycatch, management may be needed at a broader spatial scale than individual MPAs, although the specifics differ for different regions.
- The MMO is currently focusing on gillnet bycatch over bottom otter trawls. Six broad mitigation options have been identified, although these need to be reviewed in terms of feasibility by stakeholders. The MMO is already planning in-person consultations with fishermen.
- NAB members were invited to send feedback by email in addition to during the call. The MMO will use input from the NAB and other stakeholders, and advice from statutory nature conservation bodies, to narrow down the range of management options by removing any that are not feasible. Following engagement on the management options, MMO will then complete the MPA site assessments and develop any necessary management options ahead of a future formal consultation.

NAB questions and comments:

- Fisheries management needs to be proportionate. This data appears to be at sea basin level and there is a risk of displacing fishing activity and compounding economic challenges facing UK fishermen. It is also unclear how measures will achieve the aim of no adverse effect, when there is uncertainty around what "no adverse effect" means.
    - *Response from the MMO:* To ensure proportionate management, different spatial approaches – and therefore different management options – may need to be applied for the two MPAs. Related to this is how vessel sizes would affect management options. However, there are data gaps at more local spatial and seasonal scales, and the MMO is keen for anecdotal and other evidence from NAB members, and for fishermen to help with identifying defined hotspots.
- Does the evidence on gear type break down into the type of gillnet?
    - *Response from the MMO*: Yes. Most bycatch comes from a few metiers, e.g. tangle and trammel nets.
- The results of metiers are expected. Tangle nets have more mesh and are used in shallower waters where porpoise feed.
- Is there a risk that apparent bycatch by otter trawls is the result of this gear picking up bycatch from gillnets?
    - *Response from another NAB member*: This is a good point. The general perception is that otter trawls are low risk as porpoises tend to avoid noisy gears; records of bycatch in demersal trawls in other countries could have been from carcasses being scooped up. Otter trawl estimates need to be viewed in the context in which they were produced.

- The thresholds presented seem to be low and conservative. There are other threshold approaches that will guarantee long-term sustainability of a population, such as potential biological removal (PBR) which is used in the USA. The EU/NE Atlantic region have no legally agreed threshold in place. Presenting a range of threshold values at this point would be useful in allowing people to view mortality estimates in relation to them; especially given there is no legal obligation to adopt a particular threshold.
    - *Response from the MMO*: The OSPAR Quality Status Report and the preceding ICES report used mPBR [a modified version of PBR] for the Celtic and Irish Sea, but the removals limit algorithm (RLA) for the North Sea. Our advice from the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies is that the current threshold we are using is the best available at the moment, but we will take on board the feedback that it is more precautionary.
- The OSPAR mPBR threshold is designed to meet objectives that the UK has signed up to, so adopting mPBR would help the UK to meet those objectives. But the thresholds should come with a note for how they have been derived.
- These thresholds will be applied at an assessment unit level, nearly all of which include waters from other countries; if other countries choose different thresholds, this will affect the UK's ability to meet reduction targets, due to mortality in other areas from other countries
    - *Response from the MMO*: We are aware of potential impact from other areas and countries. We aim to work with stakeholders (including from Devolved Governments and other countries) to share our thinking and approach to management.
- If there is a smaller area with a higher risk of bycatch at certain times of year, could you position larger pingers on buoys, rather than the fishermen having to maintain them? Porpoises tend to turn their sonar off more than dolphins do, so they cannot see the nets; pingers make them turn their sonar back on.
    - *Response from the MMO:* The document on management options which we are planning to share will cover the pros and cons of pingers. Any smaller pingers deployed on nets would need to be within hearing range of porpoises, while mitigating the risk of the "dinner bell" effect for seals.

Summary of feedback received via interactive whiteboard during item

Input was received on the feasibility, benefits and challenges of six broad management options for harbour porpoise bycatch:

1. Time-area closures.
2. Effort limitation.
3. Dynamic time-area closures.
4. Mandatory acoustic deterrent devices (ADDs) on all gillnets.
5. Voluntary changes to fishing practices.
6. Bycatch monitoring and reporting.

Input was also received on other management options and other evidence that could help with management decisions.

General themes raised on the six options included:

- Effectiveness of the management option for reducing bycatch, which may depend on identifying times/areas of high bycatch.
- Impacts on industry – economic impacts and spatial squeeze, effort displacement and gear switching.
- Cross-over with other legislation and restrictions, including Fisheries Act objectives (such as on food security) and wildlife licences.
- Considerations for implementation such as compliance and monitoring, with particular difficulties highlighted for dynamic-time area closures.
- Impacts/benefits of the management option on other species.
- Unintended impacts of ADDs such as noise disturbance, habitat displacement, funnel effect, and habituation.
- Uptake of voluntary options requires incentives and buy-in, but also provides an opportunity to have stronger relationships and shared ownership.
- Barriers to self-reporting and resources for independent monitoring (e.g. to analyse data).
- The benefits of monitoring including understanding effectiveness of other options and increased data and being part of a risk-based approach.
- Different views on spatial scales for implementing management and proportionality given uncertainties in bycatch data.

A further breakdown of feedback by option is given in Annex 1.

3. Pinger trial update – Alessandra Bielli (Cefas)

Presentation summary:

- An update was given on the progression of the trial of banana pingers with Cornish fishermen. 10 vessels are participating in the trial although fishing activity is contingent on season and weather conditions, meaning that at times, less data comes in. REM data detected four common dolphin bycatch events (before deployment of pingers).
- Practical challenges include: the fishermen needing time to attach the pingers; getting to grips with the Clean Catch self-reporting app; an inflexible licensing process (although this is now improving); variation in fishing activity; and a decrease in bycatch since the trial began, which is good but does mean the trial will need to go on for longer according to power analyses.

NAB questions and comments:

- We have discussed power analyses for several years now. In a previous meeting we suggested trying to get estimates of the confidence interval around any reduction in rate with pingers, which is the crucial question. Rather than just looking for statistical significance.
    - *Response from Clean Catch:* We are still using a 75% effect size. For confidence intervals, we do not have the data to do this analysis. But we will look at this when analysing the data.
- Will you be reporting on other species bycatch rates, in terms of effects of pingers, e.g. seals?
    - *Response from Clean Catch:* Pingers are designed for small cetaceans so this trial focuses only on them. However, with REM we are collecting information on many sensitive marine species. The app allows information on seal interactions and bycatch to be recorded.
- The app is encouraging fishermen to report bycatch to another platform. How do we ensure that data submitted to this feeds into existing legal requirements, e.g. MMO e-logs? There are legal requirements to report prohibited species plus catches over 50kg, which we should profile to the wider industry.
    - *Response from Clean Catch:* We stress to fishermen that the app data is not used for enforcement, otherwise they might not take part. The fishermen have sometimes suggested linking our app to the MMO one, to reduce the number of apps they have to use, and we have shared this feedback with the MMO. Currently the Clean Catch app has not been widely rolled out and has been tailored to collect data for the pinger trial for research purposes. Cefas flags to skippers in the trial that they still need to adhere to mandatory reporting requirements (both verbally and by providing copies of the Clean Catch Wildlife ID Guide), and they continue to use both apps. As part of its work on exploring barriers to reporting, Cefas is considering the issue around having multiple reporting processes and platforms, and would be happy to discuss this further with NAB members.
    - *Additional response from the MMO:* We are aware that the current mandatory bycatch reporting requirements need improving. Our Compliance team have recently updated our bycatch reporting mechanism to provide an online form to make collecting this information easier. They have also updated the gov.uk page on Marine Mammal Reporting Requirements with an FAQ section to encourage more reporting and highlight that no enforcement action will be taken in relation to the injury, mortality, or bycatch itself where the incident reported has occurred within the course of legal fishing practices. We flagged the feedback from skippers to incorporate bycatch reporting into the MMO Catch App with the Compliance team, but there are technical and regulatory issues with this which we may not be able to resolve. However,

it should be noted that discard recording is currently possible within the MMO Catch App (species code and weight legally). We are happy to talk more about this outside of the meeting if useful, to further explore opportunities to streamline mechanisms.

4. EEFPO North Sea Trial – Dale Rodmell (EEFPO), Emily Roebuck (Cefas), Aadil Siddiqi (ZSL)

Presentation summary:

- Dale Rodmell gave background on the fishery and creation of the trial partnership, noting the EEFPO was pleased to be selected, enabling them to progress efforts they had already begun independently and to improve knowledge on risk factors for seabird bycatch.
- Dale added that this trial will differ from the pinger trial in that it will involve working with vessel owners rather than only individual fishermen. Different people in the fishery inevitably have different views and it is important to address any fears around drawing attention to a potential bycatch problem. The EEFPO is fully invested in the trial approach and in demonstrating that collaboration can work with science and management, whatever evidence does materialise.
- Aadil Siddiqi summarised engagement work to date with people to be involved in the trial, and shared high-level initial findings around seabird interactions and fishermen's attitudes towards the seabirds.
- Emily Roebuck summarised the planned co-design approach, which will iteratively address any obstacles that emerge; regular updates to fishermen and feedback-gathering from them will be essential. Some observer trips in conjunction with the BMP will be carried out this summer to gather data to help inform trial design. It currently appears that bycatch events are relatively rare, but more information is needed.

Feedback received via interactive whiteboard regarding the question 'What other behaviours or interactions should we focus on?'

- Suggestions regarding seabird behaviours were: sitting on the water; flying; diving and diving depth; dependency on fishing boats for prey, which can change foraging behaviour or increase dependency on fishing vessels; and, variations in behaviour based on time of day and season.
- Suggestions regarding seabird interactions were: proximity to and collisions with warps; interactions around the net (during shooting, towing, and hauling); offal discharge; variations in interactions based on time of day and season; and, other species interactions, i.e. likelihood of other species being around predicting other species bycatch.

- Suggestions regarding bycatch recording were: seabirds in the net; for REM, there is a need for agreements on how/with whom data will be shared (e.g. BMP, including data gathered on other taxa); tracking release of live seabirds to understand survivability rates; timing of bycatch incidents (e.g. during setting the net, hauling, or while the net is fishing); and, having cameras on the net when deployed.
- Suggestions regarding how to measure mitigation effects were: changes to the number of seabirds present and/or feeding when the mitigation device is in use; changes to seabird interactions with gear (such as proximity to the warps) when the mitigation device is in use; and, consider any impacts on other taxa.
- Other comments received: all taxa bycatch should be recorded to highlight action for future bycatch mitigation possibilities; power analysis is critical to experimental design; it may be interesting to quantify offal quantities with a view to assessing how this might be benefiting seabird populations; need to ensure input from wider stakeholders; and, what are the plans for wider rollout of effective mitigation measures, and what is the link to policy, fisheries management, etc?

NAB questions and comments during whiteboard session:

- We understood that the trial co-design would include other stakeholder groups such as NGOs. It would have been good to involve the NGOs in the vision.
    - *Response:* Clean Catch is currently focused on gathering information via observer trips and conversations with skippers, and building a relationship with those to be involved in the trial. After this, we will be in a position to bring in other stakeholders' expertise for trial design. This will be via the NAB as well as other elements of the Clean Catch governance structure including the planned Local Focus Group, and ad-hoc expert working groups as needed.
- Consider incentives and post-implementation benefits for fishers who engage in trials. An example of this not happening is the recreational tuna fishery – those who engaged with initial research gathering and best practice had no advantage when applying for licences when this was opened up.

5. Thinking ahead to the bycatch best practice guides – Chantal Lyons (Mindfully Wired)

Presentation summary:

- The bycatch best practice guides are a piece of forthcoming work by Clean Catch which derive from a recommendation from the 2022 Hauling Up Solutions 2 workshop. The focus and scope of the guides will be determined using results of

Clean Catch's forthcoming bycatch hotspots review and in collaboration with fishermen.

- Very initial input was sought from fishermen at the Cornish Local Focus Group in March 2025; there, the fishermen shared what they had found useful or not in existing resources, and the type of resource they would find valuable in future.
- The aim is to design the content and format of the guides to meet fishermen's needs while avoiding duplication of existing resources. This will be determined with fishermen, although NAB input was welcomed on insights from any past experiences in developing similar resources and reflections on the LFG fishermen's feedback.

Feedback received via interactive whiteboard:

- The LFG fishermen's feedback is all logical, and it is important to show that they have been listened to.
- Regarding experiences in developing similar resources (past or ongoing): think about when and how the fishermen will use the guide in terms of size, and if it is waterproof, ringbound, etc.; Cornwall IFCA have produced well-received, co-designed marine mammal entanglement codes and guides; if information needs to be updated, how will this be communicated to fishers? (Shark Trust QR codes allow for online documents to be updated); online versions versus physical guides to hold in your hand?; and, make clear how the resource will benefit conservation in general and the fishers themselves – this will motivate them to use the resource.
- Other comments: training courses for new fishers on ecology and bycatch; do an audit of resources before creating new ones; keep it very simple and learn from others on what works rather than spend time and money on new resources that won't be used; provide training along with any guides, in-person or a video you can link to which supports the use of the guide; and, training and guides should reinforce that bycatch reporting is required.

NAB questions and comments during whiteboard session:

- A key issue is that there are a lot of very good products that have been co-designed with industry, e.g. identifying, handling, reporting, and legal status for elasmobranchs and other taxa. It would make sense to bring them all together into a single compendium. E.g. Shark Trust have boiled their resources down to a QR sticker.
    - *Response from Clean Catch*: A priority for us to ensure we avoid duplicating existing resources and home in on the gaps. The fishermen suggested an online portal bringing together all these kinds of resources

as well as other, real-time information to help them meet regulations around quota etc.

6. Any other business

NAB comment:

- There has been a lot to cover in this online meeting, which has consequently left little chance for two-way discussion or input from attendees. It has been a useful update meeting but the 'Advisory' part of the NAB does not seem to be working very effectively with this format. We could have more frequent meetings, maybe focussed on specific areas so there is space on the agenda to allow adequate time for this discussion to happen?
    - *Response from Clean Catch*: Thank you for sharing these reflections – we will discuss how to improve the approach to and design of these meetings going forward.

Annex 1: Full breakdown of MMO whiteboard feedback

Topic	Summary of whiteboard sticky notes
Time-area closures	• Could reduce bycatch if it includes areas/times of predictably high bycatch. • As for other options, need to understand any other legislative or spatial restrictions. • Could benefit other taxa. • Need to identify important porpoise areas. • Economic impacts and spatial squeeze. • Effort displacement and gear switching. • Limited gillnet effort in the MPAs. • Needs monitoring.
Effort limitation	• Not expensive and simple to administer. • Already undertaken voluntarily (e.g. reducing soak time). • Could benefit other taxa. • Economic impacts if effort becomes economically unviable. • Effort displacement and gear switching (but displacement avoided if applied across Management Unit). • Could reduce bycatch levels. • Needs to be fairly implemented. • Uncertainties in current effort data. • Need to consider all Fisheries Act objectives, including food security.
Dynamic time-area closures	• Need to understand porpoise movements. • Consider scale of closure and why (due to animal density or bycatch). • More flexible and responsive to changes in porpoise density. • Less effects on industry. • Economic impacts if effort becomes economically unviable. • Difficult to implement – requires rapid reaction and communication, real-time assessment of bycatch, reporting compliance, and monitoring of closures.
Mandatory ADDs on all gillnets	• Mostly impacts <12 fleet which are more variable in effort. • Consider inside vs outside MPAs. • Could use as a dynamic reactionary tool to detect sudden bycatch or porpoise population presence. • Could target higher risk areas/times of year. • Effective for porpoise. • Wildlife licence derogation. • Economic costs and maintenance. • Needs monitoring of effectiveness and unintended consequences needed. • If used incorrectly can increase bycatch through funnel effect.

Topic	Summary of whiteboard sticky notes
	• Habitat displacement. • ADDs are short-term solution due to noise. • Habituation. • Impacts on other species.
Voluntary changes to fishing practices	• Uptake by fishers – requires incentives and buy-in (early success stories could help), but if low-cost and easy to implement, uptake may be good. • Already being implemented. • Could voluntary measures uptake provide exemption to other options? • Uncertain effectiveness and hard to evaluate effectiveness. • Could build stronger relationships, engage industry and create shared ownership. • Consider wider challenges for fisheries (e.g. offshore wind in areas of porpoise distribution).
Bycatch monitoring and reporting	Self-reporting: make reporting easier (add to current systems); promote the mandatory requirement; address hurdles; no benefits to fishers for honest reporting. Monitoring through REM and observers: consider resources to store and analyse REM data; issues with species ID from REM footage; costs for observers and video review. General benefits: improved bycatch evidence base to inform decisions and a risk-based approach; improved fishing activity data; improve bycatch assessments. Other: not option on its own but use with other options to understand their effectiveness (e.g. feasibility of passive acoustic reflectors); need to be whole-area scale.
Other management options	• More detailed monitoring of gillnet effort. • Evidence on porpoise behaviour that leads to bycatch. • GPS on nets for real-time entanglement alerts. • Monitoring system so if bycatch occurs can be released quickly. • Statutory changes to fishing practices (e.g. soak times). • Trial of pingers attached to buoys.
Comments on spatial scale of options	• Management should be larger unit rather than MPA scale (higher benefit to costs ratio). • Should be proportionate and non-discriminatory – given wide confidence intervals in bycatch estimates, how can unit-scale management be proportionate? • Management at MPA level isn't sufficient given bycatch levels.
Other evidence	• Impacts of management on other mobile species such as elasmobranchs. • BMP annual reports give metier and division scale estimates.

Topic	Summary of whiteboard sticky notes
	• Paper in review on UK bycatch shows seasonal and depth-based fluctuations.