

SSC Species Diversification W.G. Meeting Minutes

Attendees: total of 17, comprising SSC members and non-member advisers.

Chair and Secretariat: ClientEarth

Location: Food and Drink Federation, 6 Catherine Street, London WC2B 5JJ.

Date & time: 20 June 2011, 10am – 3pm.

Agenda Item 1:

1. Began with three presentations:

- Introduction to the SSC and overview of what 'species diversification' is all about.
- The 'Fishing for the Markets' project: results, data collection, future work and role of SSC.
- The brand perspective on underutilised species - what sells and what is practical?

2. Issues arising from the presentations were as follows:

- Clarified that the members of the SSC are currently retailers / suppliers/ brands of seafood, but in the future it is hoped to include food service and fishmeal sectors. Non-member advisors do not make decisions, because ultimately they will not be implementing the code, but they have equal input to developing the proposals, through the working groups.
- The current working groups are addressing seafood labelling and species diversification, but there is remit in the SSC aims for other working groups in future.
- Discussed the 'commercial designations' for fish species in the UK. Consumers do not like the name and look of certain species; sometimes names are influenced by regional customs and practice. DEFRA have not conducted studies on the effect of fish name changes on consumer behaviour. Some members cautioned that name changes may result in market manipulation. Several names for the same fish can be confusing for the consumer, for example Pangasius / basa/ river cobbler. Thus there is potential of the SSC members to agree on one name for a new species entering the market to avoid the problems that pangasius introduction has caused and to have maximum impact on the consumer.
- 'Exotic' species are not suitable for mass market producers
- The marketing 'hook' does not necessarily have to be the name (can also use, for example, a nutritional 'hook', e.g. omega 3 oils as a health benefit).

Retailers/suppliers need all the information on the species to help them identify the 'hook'

Agenda Item 2: Data Collection

3. Stated that discard data could be recorded in existing log books and used in government scientific assessments if it was consistent (e.g. taken once a week, in similar area, using similar gear, using standard fish identification chart, etc).

Suggested that the SSC could use its leverage to require that source fishers collect data, however, the questions were asked: what is the incentive for fishermen to do this extra work? Would it conflict with potential laws on discards? Would the release of this potentially confidential information put off fishers from supplying it? Is there funding for a body to collate this information?

4. Stated that the Data Collection Regulation already requires certain data to be collected, and that countries will need to develop increased capacity to collect information anyway as certain information will need to be collected to help fulfil GES under the MSFD.
5. Some felt that fishers were not worried about confidentiality issues with this data; others felt that fishers were worried about prosecution by submitting information. It was felt that action prior to the CFP was what the SSC wanted and there was no point waiting for a discard ban that may or may not happen.
6. It was suggested that Seafish Science may be able to look at the data needs, what data could be collected and become the interface between the supply and demand. EFF could be used to help fund data collation.
7. Wider CFP issues were briefly discussed in relation to total catch management and it was noted that trials in respect of catch quota and CCTV monitoring in the North Sea showed promising initial results, with evidence of reduced discards and potential for improved catch data recording. Mentioned the Scottish Conservation Credits Scheme and DEFRA funded schemes.
8. Generally agreed that the main issue with supplying underutilised species is consistency of supply: this includes logistics and the fragmented market (i.e. not having enough of a supply at large processing centres) and seasonality (i.e. not having enough supply 52 weeks a year). Various other factors that may decrease availability were mentioned, such as bad weather, fish quality, lack of non-target species being caught, etc. Electronic markets and improved infrastructure are needed to help increase the use of such species.
9. CEFAS are looking at where the discards would have been caught and landed, as this information is important when looking to develop markets, particularly if the reformed CFP includes a landing obligation
10. Suggested that product rotation may help some retailers to market species that were more seasonal, but large producers / brands needed large volumes all year round. It was felt that SSC members would only have influence on fishers collecting data only where there was a large and consistent supply.

11. Mentioned that there had been Seafish discussion that additional data could be collected as a certification requirement under their Responsible Fishing Scheme (RFS). However, some stated they would expect resistance to this from RFS certified vessels; therefore it may be better as an additional module. It was also noted that many under-10m vessels do not even have electronic log books. It was felt that there would be less resistance to data collection as part of the RFS in mixed fisheries; accordingly, data collection via RFS would be easier in this context.
12. Agreed that it is critical to obtain data first and then move on to management issues.
13. Considered alternative methods of recording. The use of photographs and Smartphone GPS tracking applications would not be appropriate for some boats because some have constant streams of fish coming on board.
14. Stated that retailers do not have direct relationships with the catchers. Therefore, retailers may support and encourage data collection, but not require it. Expectations should be managed across all sectors on the potential use of the data.

Agenda Item 3: SSC Influence on Management Measures

15. Discussed encouraging the use of more selective gear as a priority. Stated that this group is about the use of 'inadvertently caught fish' that would otherwise be discarded and the use of selective gear, as part of the solution to eliminating discards and achieving sustainable fisheries. There must, however, be a balance between selectivity and bycatch. The issue of escape-mortality with more selective gear was also mentioned.
16. Suggested that criteria for management might include minimum market size, closed spawning areas, seasonal fishing, etc. Suggested that this could not be done without the data first. Stated that the starting point should be to assess the inevitable bycatch in the existing commercial fisheries, and then work out whether it is worth actively developing a targeted fishery for the bycatch species. Also some felt that it was counter-intuitive impose measures such as Minimum Landing/Market size to utilising all species that were caught.
17. It was stated that the starting point should be to get the fishery management right (e.g. address the level of bycatch); then decide whether to create and promote a targeted fishery. The science must say that the bycatch fish stocks are plentiful first.
18. Potential new law requiring discards to be returned to the sea immediately mentioned - nobody heard of this; suggested it could be part of the fishing opportunity regulations or quota regulations or CFP reform. Suggested to check again with source.
19. Minimum landing size and minimum marketing size are not always the same thing. Agreed that the targeting of juvenile fish is wrong, but in certified fisheries that inadvertently catch some juvenile fish, it should be ok to keep (provided that survivability rate is scientifically low). The Fishmeal sector may take these catches; however, this is a commercial decision, not a question of sustainability. Minimum market sizes for unmanaged species are already agreed between suppliers and customers according to their needs (package size, etc.) and reviewed regularly.

20. Options might include pushing for better use of inadvertent bycatch from certified fisheries. Some cautioned against being too prescriptive about mixed fisheries. The focus should be on pushing fishery improvement projects (FIPs) and -certification of data deficient fisheries and the bycatch of mixed fisheries.
21. P.O.s should be encouraged to seek FIPs (including data collection and catch retention of underutilised bycatch species), and ultimately certification of the fishery. Noted that P.O.s would ultimately fund certification and that can be very expensive. Others noted that the retailers/suppliers could and have paid for fishery certification, so not necessarily a barrier.
22. Suggested that there could be a policy that in a fishery with high bycatch, members could still buy target species from that fishery but should ensure that the (non-quota) bycatch is used for some purpose, for example if it is too small for human consumption it should be used for fishmeal or other channels (e.g. pot bait).
23. Overall, in a mixed fishery that is well managed/certified, the group would want to best utilise the bycatch. Minimum marking size may limit best use of the bycatch. However, if science says it is no longer well managed, the fishery will have to change. Specifics can come later, if initial utilisation is a success, and fisheries start to target the underutilised species, then TACs and other management measures should be set in line with scientific advice and environmental consequences should be mitigated against.

Agenda Item 4: Types of unwanted species

24. Discussion on the use, practicalities and suitability of various underutilised species mentioned in the 'Fishing for the Markets' report:
 - Red Gurnard – yes this is being used. To sell as a whole fish is challenging; some issues surrounding the availability and size of the fillets. Larger fillets are more practical-sold as steaks. Need to cut V shape fillet to avoid pin bones, however, this adds to the cost.
 - Red Mullet is plentiful good foodservice market.
 - Flounder – some retailers sell imported flounder, issue with UK flounder is the consistency of supply.
 - Grey Gurnard – not attractive and scaly .armoured plates make it impractical to use. However potential use in soups/stews.
 - Pouting – this can be sold fairly easily and well. It is a cheap alternative to whiting. It is landed gutted across a range of sizes. However issues with parasites (worms). Does not have large flakes of flesh like cod.
 - Small John Dory – sizing issues; large specimens sell well as an expensive, specialist fish. There is no human consumption market for very small ones (low yield), only fishmeal use.
 - Dab – recently introduced by some retailers and doing well, particularly when coated. Very small ones are underutilised. The commercial reality size is a lot smaller than what is expected by retailers from suppliers. Good for starters in food

service. Taste reports are positive. Speculated that markets around the world are bigger for dab.

- Tub gurnard – mainly used as pot bait, could be used in soups / pies in food service.

25. Similar discussion regarding underutilised shellfish mentioned in the 'Fishing for the Markets' report:

- Brown Shrimp and Northern Prawns - widely available and there is a UK interest in buying these.
- Queenies - Manx fishery is about to go through MSC certification.
- Cuttlefish - plentiful in the South-west of England. The majority are exported to Italy/Eastern Europe. Needs to be cleaned / bleached. Small ones are discards (questions surrounding the survivability of cuttlefish; feasibility study recommended). Freshness is important, must be processed quickly. Some degree of skill involved in preparation.
- Squid - can be easily sold.
- Mussels – members questioned why this was on the DEFRA list. Clarified that it was there as there was a potential for market expansion.
- Spidercrab - has demand in France. It is expensive to prepare, it has a brittle shell, difficult to pick the and the yield is low. Also supply is not constant.

26. For all underutilised fish, it has to be better that the fishmeal sector uses it rather than to discard, provided the fish is inadvertently caught. Some cautioned that when dealing with fish that is not meant for human consumption (e.g. landfill or anaerobic digestion), a different set of rules and regulations apply.

27. The aim should be to identify significant underutilised catches that can be processed. Only a few would be worthwhile from a retail viewpoint, for example, gurnard, pouting, dab (small ones), and cuttlefish (non-exhaustive list). These fish should be marketed on their own merits, not as substitutes for existing commercial species.

Agenda Item 5: SSC Influence on Use of Unwanted Species

28. The key is to encourage consumers to have a wider repertoire.

29. Suggested promotion options could include inviting chefs / journalists to write articles, recipes, seasonality ideas, health benefit idea, etc.

30. Hesitancy to run promotions unless there could be a guaranteed supply.

31. Stated that the 'eat two fish a week' health promotion already exists: this can be capitalised on when introducing new species, using health benefits as the hook some packaging states that the portion constitutes one of the Recommended Weekly Allowance.

32. Discussed the use of ration cards, posters, placemats, beer mats and recipe cards. However, all these attract mainly informed customers; therefore it would be preaching to the converted. The price is the main factor for less adventurous consumers.
33. The use of celebrity chefs must sustain interest in underutilised species; otherwise the result would only be spikes in sales.
34. Mentioned that promotions used at counters normally draw the best customer attention.
35. It is important to sell the fish in the appropriate format for the consumer
36. It is important to first obtain the data on discards, fishery by fishery. Then it should be decided whether the maximum value is being extracted. The commercial approach is, unfortunately, the other way round (normally find out what the consumer wants first). However, this is a basic food wastage issue that must be tackled and the industry can help.
37. CEFAS are already looking into how the appropriate data can be shared (what species, what ports, what sizes, etc.) and will want views from SSC members on how to display in a user friendly format.
38. This working group will need to involve foodservice and fishmeal sector SSC members to have the most impact.