User consultation paper on UK Sea Fish Statistics (UKSFS) publication

Background

During the production of the UKSFS 2007 and 2008 publications a number of changes were made to the content of the publication and how it was produced. These changes included the removal or simplification of a number of particularly long and detailed tables. Although some tables were removed from the publication, they continue to be made available on the MMO’s website. In addition a number of charts and maps have been added to the publication to help make it more accessible and to help in the interpretation of information. These changes were based on informal comments from users of the publication. A survey was also sent out with the 2007 edition of the publication to gather more user feedback but the response rate was poor. As such a more structured user consultation was undertaken to gather fuller feedback on users’ experience of using the UKSFS and their views on the publications’ future.

The primary goal of this exercise was to help the Fisheries Statistics Unit (FSU) (now the Statistics and Analysis Unit) understand the use of the publication, whether users are getting the information they require and if they are happy with the quality of the statistics produced.

This exercise was also used to help establish if our user group were aware of official and national statistics and what these labels meant. Where users were not aware of these or did not know what they meant, they were given a brief description and explanation.

Methods

Due to the poor response rate of an earlier survey we decided to arrange a series of interviews with users from across the UKSFS user group. Twenty four users were consulted including governmental organisations – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Marine Management Organisation (MMO) headquarters and port offices, European Commission and Marine Scotland), media, sea fisheries committees and fish producer organisations (see Appendix B).

The user consultation was based on a semi-structured questionnaire design of eight open questions with a set of further follow on questions. This allowed the users the freedom to express their thoughts on the publication whilst also allowing us to delve into more detail as necessary (see Appendix A).

The interviews were carried out over a three week period during February 2010 and where possible were done face to face. A number of interviews however, were not able to be done face to face so these were carried out over the telephone. Each interview lasted for between 20 to 30 minutes.

The following paper breaks down the users’ responses by each of the eight major questions and highlights the key recommendations for future editions of the UKSFS.

The word ‘statistics’ is used throughout this paper to refer to statistics within both the hardcopy publication and the online Excel tables.

Participants in this consultation are referred to as ‘users’ throughout this document.
General comments

Initial comments from users were that the publication is good and that they are generally happy with it. Simon West (Defra) said it is ‘quite a good publication’ and is ‘vital in a fundamental sense’. Alan McCulla (Anglo North Irish Fish Producers’ Organisation (ANIFPO)) stated that ‘as a reference, it’s handy to have’.

A number of users said they liked the recent changes to the publication for example David Linke (Fishing News) said that he liked the changes in the publication from the 2006 version to the 2008 version and commented that ‘2006 was a dry publication’. Gary Taylor (Marine and Fisheries Agency (MFA)) commented that the publication ‘has improved over the years’ and is ‘definitely better and easier to follow’. Matt Elliott (Eurostat) felt that the UKSFS was an example of good practice in the production and publication of fisheries statistics.

**Question 1: How do users use UK Sea Fish Statistics?**
The majority, almost 60 per cent of respondents, used the UKSFS often while the rest of the users didn’t use the statistics very often or hardly used them at all.

When asked why they used UKSFS most users said that it acted as a reference or factual source of information of the fishing industry. A number of users from within government used the statistics as background evidence to check facts, provide briefings, refute statistics published elsewhere and to begin impact assessments. It was also commonly used to help answer public and industry queries and often government users would redirect these people to the online version of the publication.

A number of industry and local management users were more interested in local data and used the statistics to check figures for local ports. This information was used in planning and making management decisions, however in most cases the detail provided in UKSFS was insufficient for users needs.

Overall users liked the structure and presentation of the publication and stated that it contained the bulk of the information that they required. Where more detail was needed but not present in the publication, half of the users said that they were aware that they could contact the Fish Stats team and request this further detail.

Users generally found chapters 2 and 3 to be the most useful with tables 3.2 and 3.5 being particularly well used. The majority of users found that chapters 4 to 6 had useful information but did not have a need for this in their day to day work. Although a couple of MFA users stated that the statistics in chapter 4 were vital to their work.

Katy Barratt (Marine Scotland) commented that Chapter 5 on Stock Assessments is not a national statistic and that users should be made aware of this. Robert Clark (Sussex Sea Fisheries Committee) said that his whole office used the data from chapter 5 and a number of other users said that chapter 5 was interesting but that the information was also available from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).

Iain MacSween (Scottish Fishermen’s Organisation (SFO) referred to chapter 6 in his work and commented that ‘international data is becoming increasingly important to the industry’.

**Recommendations**

- Advertise the fact that we are available for further data requests to users.
- Reconsider the inclusion of chapter 5, if included ensure that it is made obvious that this is not a national statistic.
Question 2: What form of the publication do you use (internet or hardcopy or booklet), why?

Users were almost equally split on their preference for a hardcopy version (55 per cent) of the publication versus the use of only an online version (45 per cent). Users who preferred the hardcopy version of the publication did so because of the convenience of having a copy within reach on their desk for sense check and reference purposes. Users also found it useful for when they were out of the office and did not have easy access to the internet.

Those who preferred the online version did so as their style of working was better suited to downloading tables and PDFs for presentations and cutting and pasting data. Other users found the online statistics useful as everything was easily available, including historical data.

The majority of users (86 per cent) were aware that the publication was available on the internet but less than half (41 per cent) were aware of additional tables with extra detail also being available. Of those users who used the online tables all found the tables in Excel format easy to access and use. Other users generally had no problems with accessing and using Excel tables but would like clearer links to the tables on the website.

Recommendations

- Additional tables need to be more clearly labelled and users need to be made more aware of their location and availability.
- Produce a table that highlights changing table numbers over the last 3 years so people can find corresponding tables when numbering changes occur. This needs to be made available on the internet.
- Review web access to tables – make it easier to access i.e. less clicks.

Question 3: Are you aware of the overview booklet published with the publication?

Just over a quarter of users were not aware that an overview booklet was produced in conjunction with the hardcopy publication. The rest of the users were aware that an overview booklet was produced but generally felt that it was a reproduction of chapter 1 and consequently did not refer to the booklet at all. Some users felt that it may be useful for those who were not looking for too much detail or were new to the industry but that they wouldn’t refer to it because the full publication contains the same information. Iain MacSween (SFO) described the booklet as ‘the idiot’s guide to the fishing industry’.

Gurpreet Padda (Defra) commented that the booklet was useful in briefing the Minister and senior officials’. Gary Taylor said that he never refers to the booklet because he uses the publication but finds it a useful tool when meeting delegations from various countries as it provides an overview of the fishing industry. Angus Radford (MFA) said that the booklet is helpful for stakeholders and people coming into the fishing industry.

Recommendations

- Reconsider if this is needed at all – could we produce something different? If we are going to continue to produce it then we should do so in smaller quantities and keep for use at public events and targeted audiences.
Question 4: Is the publication released at an appropriate time for your needs?

Around two thirds of users would prefer an earlier release time but most understood why the publication was produced when it was and were comfortable with these reasons (that is time lag in data, time to process data and so on). Matt Elliott (Eurostat) felt that we were doing well to get it out when we did and that our timing was better than Eurostats release.

Just over three quarters of the users would be happy for the publication to be broken up and released in piecemeal form throughout the year as data became available, although 70 per cent of users would still like a complete compendium once all of the data became available.

Katy Barratt (Marine Scotland) suggested that provisional figures could be released earlier in the year as is done with the Scottish publication. She suggested that it was better to have something to work with than waiting until late in the year.

Some concerns that need to be considered were raised by Defra and MFA policy users. These included the possible confusion caused by having several versions of data in the public arena and they felt that it would be easier to manage if all the data was released at once. There were also some concerns around using provisional figures to supply data externally as this would need to be updated as the final version of the statistics became available. Gary Taylor for example would prefer to use previous year’s figures till the publication is released because he provides parliament with information and said that with provisional figures he would have to go back and change these.

Some issues were raised in regards to comparability of data coming from FSU. As many users can easily request data from the Fish Stats team a lot of data is supplied externally. A couple of users pointed out that the figures supplied to them through FSU often do not match with figures from the publication.

Recommendations

- We need to clarify how we are going to treat our official/national statistics, is this info already in the public arena? Can we release data before UKSFS come out. Need to have a clear guideline for all staff in FSU and more widely across the MMO.

Question 5: How do you prefer to view statistics? In text, tables, charts and maps?

The majority of users felt that the UKSFS had a good balance between tables and figures. Most users found the tables were essential in providing the raw figures needed for their work while the use of charts and maps were useful for presentations and looking at trends. Users’ preferences varied between the different types of data presentations with some leaning more towards the tables and others towards the charts and maps. All users said that they could easily understand the tables, charts and maps.

Bella Murfin (Defra) said that charts are only effective with tables as she was generally interested in the exact figures. Angus Radford said comparison charts for values are effective and that charts and maps are good for making comparisons and looking at trends. Iain MacSween (SFO) commented that ‘charts are great’ but the ‘commentary can be bland’.

Just under two thirds of users said that they read the commentary and of those that do almost all found the commentary clear and easy to understand. Those who did read the commentary did so for further contextual information on the statistics, while one Defra policy user (Bella Murfin) said she quoted commentary from the publication for policy purposes.
In contrast David Linke (Fishing news) said that he never reads the commentary because he feels that figures and charts are enough to form an opinion. He said he uses his own discretion and experience to interpret the figures.

**Recommendations**

- Maintain current or similar balance between tables and charts/maps in the hardcopy publication

**Question 6: Are you happy with the quality of the statistics that are provided in the UKSFS?**

All of the users were happy with the quality of the statistics produced in the UKSFS. A number of users from government said that because they knew where it came from and who produced it that they had no reason to doubt any of the statistics produced. Bella Murfin said that there was no reason to doubt the statistics because there is nothing else to compare it to and she never felt the need to question it because she has confidence in the Fish Stats team. Iain MacSween (SFO) said that he has ‘never found any glaring errors’ and that we have it ‘spot on’. Angus Radford (MFA) said that the publication is one of ‘great quality’. Colin Brodie (Seafish) said they are very happy with the quality of statistics in the publication but there are times when figures do not match other outputs from the FSU.

Several users including Joss Wiggins (Kent and Essex Sea Fisheries Committee), David Linke (Fishing News) and Nikki Hale (East of England Fish Producers’ Organisation (EEFPO)) had concerns that sometimes the figures do not compare well with what they know to be happening in reality. Joss Wiggins said that he acknowledged that the ‘problem lies in the root of the data’, where some quantity and value figures are allocated to the wrong ports therefore there is a slight discretion with recorded data against what is observed on the ground. He also said that when making reference to the publication, if they feel that the information doesn’t look right, then the figures will be adjusted for their region.

Robert Clark (Sussex Sea Fisheries Committee) had similar concerns and gave an example where the data is broken down based on assumptions such as ‘under 10 metres’ versus ‘over 10 metres’ vessels. However vessels under 10 metres in length do not have to hand in logbooks so this data may not be as accurate as for those over 10 metres vessels who do have to hand in log books. He suggested that these slight inaccuracies are fine for technical users of statistics but that it could be misleading for others. Nikki Hale (EEFPO) also suggested that statistics used in the publication are not always put in context. One of the examples she cited was the decreasing trend in catch levels of some key quota stocks. She believes that anyone from outside the industry looking at these figures will think that the catch is being driven down by fishing effort alone. She feels that more should be made of decreasing quotas and allowable days at sea contributing to lower catch levels.

**Recommendations**

- Make sure that we state clearly any data issues surrounding under 10 metre data, even though it has greatly improved since Registered Buyers and Sellers Scheme.
- Perhaps include a line showing EU quota levels for key stocks when looking at time series data on charts.
Question 7: In future if any further changes are made, how would you like to be engaged?

An important aspect of making any major changes to the publication of the UKSFS is to ensure that our users have pre-notice of these changes. It is also important that any changes are clearly outlined within the publication itself as well as on the publications website.

Just over two thirds of users said that they did not read special notes/forewords at the front of reference publications such as UKSFS. Almost all of the users said that they would like pre-warning of any major changes to the publication and all of these users would prefer to be contacted via e-mail. Although the majority of users did not read special notes all users felt that it was appropriate to list any changes in a special note at the front of the document.

Paul Dolder (Defra) suggested that a note should be distributed with the publication listing all of the changes as people are more likely to read this than a special note in the publication.

Recommendations

- Give pre-notice using email – ensure email distribution list is kept up to date.
- List major changes in a special note at the front of the document but also state changes have been made and refer people to the special note using the intro letter that we send with the publication
- Need to have a list of changes also made available on the website. So ensure that special note is added in electronic form on website. Look at other departments and see what they include on their website.

Question 8: Are you aware of official statistics/national statistics?

Over three quarters of users were aware of the terms official and national statistics. However, only 14 per cent of users knew what these terms meant and were aware of the quality procedures that are in place in order for a statistic to gain the official or national statistics badge.
Appendix A

UKSFS – Semi-structured interview topic guide

How do you use UKSFS?
• How often?
• Why do you use UKSFS?
• What decisions does it help you make?
• Is there enough detail to help you make these decisions?
• What sections of UKSFS do you refer to most – could be chapters or specific tables or charts or maps?

What form of the publication do you use (internet or hard copy or booklet) – why?
• Are you aware that UKSFS is available on the internet?
• What is your preference?
• There are additional tables on the website that are not published in the publication? Are you aware of this?
• Do you find the online tables in Excel easy to access?
• Would you prefer that the online tables were in a different format, such as PDF or CSV.

Are you aware of the overview booklet published with the publication?
• Do you feel this overview is enough to give the general trend of the fishing industry?
• Is there any other data that you would like to see included?
• Would you like this information presented any other way?

Is the publication released at an appropriate time for your needs?
• Are you happy with the current September release date?
• Would you be happy for the publication to be released piecemeal during the year as data becomes available?
• Would a summary document be useful once all data had been released?

How do you prefer to view statistics? In text, tables, charts, maps?
• Why do you like statistics shown like this?
• Why do you not like statistics shown like this?
• Can you easily understand the tables, charts and maps?
• Do you read the commentary that accompanies the tables/figures?
• If you read the commentary do you find it easy to understand and useful?

Are you happy with the quality of statistics that are provided in UKSFS?
• If not, why?
• When viewing the data on either the publication or website, is it clear to you where the data came from?

In future if any further changes are made, how would you like to be engaged with?
• Do you read special notes in the foreword of the document?
• Would you like pre-warning of any changes that will be made to the publication?
• Would you like a description of any changes to the publication listed in the foreword of the publication?

Are you aware of official statistics or national statistics?
• Do you know what these mean?
Are you aware of the quality procedures that need to be in place in order for statistics to be classified as official statistics or national statistics?
## Appendix B: Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allan McCulla</td>
<td>Anglo North Irish Fish Producers’ Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bella Murfin</td>
<td>Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gurpreet Padda</td>
<td>Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Simon West</td>
<td>Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs</td>
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<td>Paul Dolder</td>
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<td>Nikki Hale</td>
<td>East of England Fish Producers’ Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matt Elliot</td>
<td>Eurostat</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Linke</td>
<td>Fishing news (Media)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joss Wiggins</td>
<td>Kent and Essex Sea Fisheries Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gary Taylor</td>
<td>Marine and Fisheries Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iain Glasgow</td>
<td>Marine and Fisheries Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andrea O'Shaughnessy</td>
<td>Marine and Fisheries Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estelle Groark</td>
<td>Marine and Fisheries Agency</td>
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<td>Mark Longstaff</td>
<td>Marine and Fisheries Agency</td>
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<td>Simon Dedman</td>
<td>Marine and Fisheries Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angus Radford</td>
<td>Marine and Fisheries Agency (Hastings)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paola Serafino</td>
<td>Marine and Fisheries Agency (Hastings)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katy Barratt</td>
<td>Marine Scotland</td>
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<td>David Turnbull</td>
<td>Marine Scotland</td>
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<td>Pat McDonald</td>
<td>Marine Scotland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adam Brown</td>
<td>Seafish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colin Brodie</td>
<td>Seafish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iain MacSween</td>
<td>Scottish Fishermen’s Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Clark</td>
<td>Sussex Sea Fisheries Committee</td>
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