RESEARCHING SCOTTISH ELASMOBRANCHS – OPPORTUNITY FOR A COMBINED APPROACH?

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MASTS ASM – HERIOT WATT

CONFERENCE CENTRE

The purpose of the workshop was to highlight the current elasmobranch research taking place in Scottish waters and to see if a collaborative approach might be beneficial in driving future research forwards. The workshop attracted 31 participants from a wide range of backgrounds, including many delegates from various institutions and groups within the MASTS community. There were 10 excellent presentations providing a good overview of current research and outreach work taking place in Scotland. One thing that was highlighted by the talks was that, in many cases, a multi-disciplinary approach was providing good data on specific species e.g. the Common Skate were a combined study using citizen collected mark/recapture data, acoustic and archival tagging programmes alongside genetic studies have yielded good insight into regional population composition and suitability for spatial management in the form of an MPA.

The talks highlighted current research on:

- UK spurdog populations being the focus of archival tagging studies by CEFAS and Aberdeen University, with the shared goal of gaining insight into the spurdog spatial ecology.
- The importance of deep sea reef habitats for species of deep water elasmobranchs such as blackmouth catshark, highlighted by work at Heriot Watt.
- The importance that citizen science can play in elasmobranch research.

One thing that was clear from all the talks is that in Scotland, we have a wide range of experience in elasmobranch research with many exciting opportunities to carry research forward. This will be far more effective, providing move insight and results if institutions work together, by bringing their own areas of expertise to a project as well as the use of their facilities, shark research in Scotland can really be driven forward.

Summary of feedback

- Very beneficial
- Highlighted the diverse range of elasmobranch research currently taking place
- Highlighted potential opportunities for sampling
- Good networking opportunity
- Needed a longer discussion section

Generally feedback was very positive. The short discussion section, while unfortunate, did highlight the fact that there is much to discuss, which should be taken as a positive and something to move forward with.

We were very grateful for MASTS funding that was used to encourage attendance and attract a wide range of expert speakers. Speakers at the workshop were reimbursed their day delegate rate and travel, overnight accommodation and subsistence allowance was also paid to key speakers.

Outputs

The workshop lead directly to:

- Collaborative work on spurdog survey trawl data, linking three MASTS institutions (Heriot Watt, Marine Scotland and Aberdeen University).
- Create a team of experts that will contribute to an upcoming event in May 2014 'Celebrating Scotland's Sharks', hosted by the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network, but with strong contribution from other MASTS partners.

Moving on from the workshop, it is now proposed to form an elasmobranch community project. The proposed project will bring together MASTS expertise and research capacity to address deficiencies in the knowledge of elasmobranchs in Scottish waters. Elasmobranchs are an integral component of marine ecosystems in Scotland and regionally they provide many societal and economic benefits to the Scottish economy.

The goal for Community Project members will be to summarise existing knowledge of elasmobranchs in Scottish waters report that will provide the strongest scientific evidence base from which policy-makers and other stakeholders can understand historic and recent trends in the diversity, distribution and important habitats for all elasmobranch species in Scotland's coastal zone and deep seas.

The proposed outputs for the project are:

- Feeder report to the Scottish and UK governments on the current state-of-the-art knowledge for Scottish elasmobranchs to aid in decision-making for the MSFD, CPOAs, CMS Shark MOU, and the IUCN
- Novel GIS layer for the interactive version of the Scotland Marine Atlas
- Multi-authored analyses in peer-reviewed journals