

NATIONAL MARINE BIOLOGICAL AQC SCHEME
FINAL MINUTES
4th June, 10:00 am
SEPA, Riccarton, Edinburgh

Present:

T. Mackie (TM)	EHS (DOENI)	(Chair)	
M. O'Reilly (MOR)	SEPA	(Infaunal	Contract
Manager)			
P. Addison (PA)	EA/JNCC	(Technical Secretary)	
A. Miles (AM)	EA	(Financial Manager)	
L. Oliver (LO)	EA/CCW		
K. Cooper (KC)	CEFAS		
M. Robertson (MR)	FRS		
S. Coates (SC)	EA		
S. Holt (SH)	SEPA	(deputy for C. Scanlan)	

Apologies:

C. Milner (CM)	SEPA
M. Service (MS)	AFBINI

1. Membership of group (correspondence lists)

- Email lists need to be updated, separate circulation lists for CMA committee members and full committee, inclusive of contractors, and Scheme participants. List should be called : Committee and Committee + contractors. There are separate Distribution lists for participants for each component.

ACTION: PA to send out updated email lists. All to update address books.

2. Role of new QA Post

Prue Addison is working in the new QA post (1 year contract), which is jointly funded by EA and JNCC. Although the post will focus on EA and JNCC priorities, it is envisioned that the work progressed will be relevant to all CMAs and, as such, it is hoped that the post can report through the NMBAQC. Where work is relevant to other CMAs, it is hoped that they will have direct input into the work plans. The Committee agreed that the post was a great idea and PA will keep all informed as to her work.

The success of this post will determine if there will be future funding to extend the post beyond one year.

Initial work areas for PA:

- Update website, technical secretary for NMBAQC
- PSA (Potential funding from Aggregates levy??)
- Opportunistic Macroalgae
- Epibiota (replace Paolo as JNCC contact on committee)

3. HBDSEG

a) Clarification of NMBAQC's role (incl. TOR)

TOR are still to be defined following the new role of the NMBAQC as being agreed with HBDSEG. TM has drafted a letter to HBDSEG, outlining the new role of NMBAQC (i.e. biological components that could be considered by the group). All agreed that the letter was an accurate description of what the Committee could cover.

Key points raised include:

- NMBAQC is a technical group that focuses on AQC of marine monitoring components for the WFD, HD and CSEMP. Therefore we will not expand into new areas such as marine mammals and seabirds.
- We aren't an accreditation or auditing agency for external consultants, our work is driven by CMA's requirements (based on WFD, HD and CSEMP).
- Scheme components do not need to all follow a similar format (in terms of the types of ring tests and id guides produced) – they should be developed based on specific methodological problems with each component.
- Eventually each component should have a external AQC ring test or protocol set up for 'flagging' data i.e. assigning a 'pass' or 'fail' to samples.

ACTIONS:

- TM to send letter to Jane Hawkrige (and cc in committee) by 060608
- MOR to write some text clarifying our role for inclusion on the website – specifically that we are not an accreditation or auditing agency for external consultants.
- MOR to write some text explaining intention to develop AQC/auditing and sample flagging procedures for all components (outlined in last two key points above).

b) Charting Progress 2 (CP2)

NMBAQC has not been asked to comment on CP2, only individuals as representatives of their organisations. The CP2 scoping study, mentions CSEMP infaunal data a lot. No official action from NMBAQC is currently required.

c) MERMAN – European Register of Marine Species (ERMS)

There is still a need to standardise the taxon lists used by the CMAs and the databases. TM has discussed the addition of an additional field in UNICORN and MERMAN for ERMS taxon list codes to allow for an easy export into the ICES database. This would be a first stage, as there is still a definite need to transfer CMA's data to a standard taxonomic lists (ERMS).

ACTION: TM to follow up with Nigel Grist (Unicomarine) re. the addition of an additional field (ERMS code) in UNICORN.

4. Macroalgae

A draft document regarding a possible QA Scheme for macroalgae, written by Emma Wells through the WFD plants task team, had been circulated for comment.

Rocky Shore Macroalgae

- SH highlighted that there was still a need for macroalgal ringtests, as identification of taxa is considered the biggest QA concern (over methodological issues).
- A macroalgal RT should be produced for Yr 15, but there was some discussion as to whether this should cover the reduced or full taxa lists. Funding has to be sourced before this can proceed.
- There was some discussion as to whether the photos for the last RT used repeat photos. Although not the same photos, it was acknowledged that the photos may have been on the same specimen. Collection of new specimens now means that any additional RTs would contain photos of new specimens.
- There were suggestions for a future Own Sample ring test – labs could provide specimens in multiple formats: preserved, pressed and photos (of specimen itself and the habitat it was found in).

ACTION:

- SH to scope requirement of new RT i.e. reduced or full taxa list and identify level of participant interest (e.g. Conservation Agencies may require full taxon list)
- SH (with PAs help) to organise tender documentation for a new Intertidal macroalgae ring test. Possible contractors - Emma Wells, Frances Baker. ALL to send in other contacts.
- PA to chase up JNCC and Conservation agencies– do they require a subtidal macroalgae ring test? LO to give PA CCW info on this.
- SH to investigate whether an Own Sample test in the future is required, feasible and how could this be financed.
- MR to give SH Swedish contact details for Hans Kautsky, who he thinks is doing similar macroalgae QA work.
- SH to send PA SEPA's existing Procedures for Macroalgal work
- PA to find out what existing macroalgae workshops are planned for the future and give info to KC to update the website.

a) Opportunistic Macroalgae

Key points about the QA for opportunistic macroalgae re. document drafted by Emma Wells:

- Document suggests that labs should take algae back to the lab for weighing – LO highlighted that this is not always the case. SH said that SEPA take samples back to the lab and rinse in freshwater.
- LO also has concerns with measuring: spatial extent (level of accuracy of GPS), biomass.
- Id issues (although only 6 genera) were raised, but these are minimal compared to the above issues.

ACTION: LO and SH to send PA their protocols for opportunistic macroalgae monitoring. PA to collate this information into a document outlining the main differences between agencies methodologies and possible quality concerns.

b) Furoid extent

Key points:

- This WFD tool is not yet fully developed, as it is not certain as to whether the class boundaries have not been finalised. Salinity measurements over the tidal cycles are needed both for finalising the boundaries and for the assessment.
- TM described the in situ salinity loggers that he uses.

ACTION:

- PA to check with Mike Best (WFD plants task team lead) as to the state of the classification tool.
- PA to circulate EA SOP for fucooid extent to committee.
- PA to get details of salinity loggers from TM

5. Phytoplankton

The Marine Institute are running phytoplankton workshops and ring tests. It is important that this work links through to the NMBAQC and BEQUALM.

AM highlighted the issues that the EA have come across when running the WFD phytoplankton tools. The taxon lists (level of taxonomic discrimination by different analysts) and methods used by analysts would appear to affect the status classifications. As such the EA is progressing methods to audit their phytoplankton samples. Currently an assessment of single sample variation is being run (i.e. multiple analysis of a single sample and assessing differences in results) in order to define variability. A standard taxon list is being prepared by Mike Best (WFD plants team). Results of these investigations will be shared with the Committee.

ACTIONS:

- AM will circulate the results of the EA study regarding the auditing of their phytoplankton samples.
- TM/MoR to contact Joe, or to identify a deputy, to attend the NMBAQC meetings re phytoplankton. - MOR has already spoke to Joe about a deputy – he wants to remain the Phytoplankton lead/ MI Representative even though unlikely to attend meetings in person.

6. Angiosperms (Seagrass)

ACTIONS:

- TM to send subtidal seagrass procedures of the Sea Search program to LO and PA.
- LO to send PA CCW procedures for subtidal seagrass monitoring
- PA to identify main QA risks for intertidal and subtidal seagrass assessment.

7. Fish

SC updated the group on the Fish ID guide. The Wheeler Guide scanned images are not at corporate quality, so there has been a lot of work to fix this. In order to produce the guide there is a £20,000 cost (following on from the development costs). The aim is that by Christmas, the guide should be in a format (pdf at least) available to staff. Printing on waterproof paper requires a minimum print run of 500 – therefore need to know that there is enough interest in this before it goes ahead. Formal training will also be provided with this guide.

The trial of the fish reverse Ring Test has begun within the EA (Adam Waugh as lead) and SEPA (MoR). This trial is to identify, and solve, logistical issues, prior to a wider release (hopefully) to Agencies for autumn sampling.

8. Epibiota

The epibiota video ring test is underway being run by Envision (3 year contract). The Video Ring test pilot will be supported through funding from the aggregate levy and other CMA's and the rest through participation fees.

There were some concerns that the video quality is quite poor. Any comments should go to MS or TM. PA will join the steering group for this work on behalf of JNCC.

ACTION:

- TM to send PA information on this work to date.
- PA to get confirmation from Matt about the funding of this contract – is it really 3 years??
- PA to join epibiota sub group. TM to send through date of next meeting.
- Royal Haskoning is doing a lot of CCW drop down video monitoring, LO to check whether they are participating.

9. Benthic Infauna

MoR reported back on the meeting (MOR and AM) with Unicmarine (David Hall, Martin Dyer) on 170408. Discussions focused on the review and development of the Scheme.

a) Components

- In order to minimise costs, it was agreed to drop monthly and interim reports. A short report will be produced for each meeting.
- The Yr 15 priorities were agreed upon, so sign up sheets could be sent out.
- There is now the opportunity for up to three individual analyst to join up as a 'shared group' member.
- The macro benthic (MB) test is costly and could be cut in Yr 16. Alternatively, David Hall suggested replacing with an artificial MB module.
- It has been agreed (following discussion at Jan 08 committee meeting) that the Own Sample module will be only mandatory module to satisfy the minimum requirements for BEQUALM. There is a risk that take up of the RTs may be reduced.
- Attendance of Unicmarine at NMBAQC meetings has been reduced to one per year, with three meetings covered through video/phone conference calls.
- It has to be emphasised that the Own Samples module is not an audit run for external consultants, it is driven by the need of CMAs to audit data used for marine management.
- KC suggested changing the emphasis of components, with focus on the Lab reference (beneficial to build up labs specimen records) (This was highlighted in Year 15 Info Note) and Own Sample modules. The Macro Benthic module may be less useful.
- AM has sent out the sign-up forms, and a draft participant list circulated to Unicmarine.

ACTION:

- MOR to sort out SEPA issues (RT/OS for aquaculture labs submitting data to SEPA).
- AM to check if Unicomarine have removed the >30 labs extra cost.
- AM to chase up participant list, and those who aren't signed up yet.
- AM to send out participant list to committee and confirm no one has been missing out.
- PA to confirm their membership with JNCC.
- AM/PA look up which labs are signed up for what components, and how finances stand.
- TM to request start up funding from HBDSEG for new quality elements, e.g. saltmarsh, angiosperms and macroalgae.

b) Comments from Unicomarine

Unicomarine provided a meeting summary document. Key points:

- Taxonomic workshop planned for 10-14th Nov, Dove Laboratory
- Provisional line up: Hesionidae, Spionidae, Terebellomorpha and Nephtyidae
- Opinion expressed as to the storage of samples in taxon vials. “potting taxa individually reduces enumeration and taxonomic errors and discourages inaccurate in-situ counts/identification. Storing samples by taxon vials has been promoted as ‘best practice’ by the Scheme for 14 years, facilitating detailed audits and rapid access to historical specimens for subsequent taxonomic advancements / reviews and incorporation into reference collections”. AM was surprised that this best practice had not been followed by Unicomarine for EA’s WFD samples and suggested that it was because the EA contract had not specified this. AM asked other CMAs as to their contract wording to ensure that best practice was followed. The Committee agreed with Unicomarine re best practice, and have decided that contracts with labs must now specify that samples must be kept at species level.

ACTION:

- MOR to chase up proposed costs of taxonomic workshop so see if it can proceed.
- AM/PA to let participants know asap re workshop plans
- PA to obtain contract wording from TM to ensure contractors follow best practice.

c) Sub-sampling test

EA has done a small trial comparing the difference between full and sub samples from Southampton water, and the effect on the final WFD classification assessment (Infaunal Quality Index score).

ACTION:

- PA to circulate draft report showing sub-sampling affect in Southampton Water
- PA to progress methodology re full analysis vs sub sampling for different habitats -using EA results and reference to Humber report (1997). NB this will be mainly relating to WFD (i.e. effects on biomass will not be assessed initially).

- PA to follow up on Unicomarine protocols for sub sampling. Then add our comments and circulate to committee for their comments, then return to Unicomarine.

10. CSEMP Design

There is ongoing debate as to the purpose and design of the CSEMP benthic infaunal programme. AM explained that the EA are looking to rationalise their sampling for CSEMP in light of new duties, but it is difficult to redesign a survey without clarification of the statistical aims of the programme. All samples will have equal status and be used for multiple reporting purposes, so QC must be in place, and at an equal level, for all monitoring (ie auditing/ OS exercise cannot focus purely on CSEMP).

It was highlighted that the CSEMP infauna data should be analysed, and made more widely available for use e.g. to Academic institutions. This is an incredibly valuable dataset and yet, to date, under utilised. Standardised reporting templates out of MERMAN would make this data more 'user- friendly).

AM/LO/ PA will be looking at the data for England and Wales and will do some exploratory analysis of the data .

John Thain has contacted TM, re the rewrite of the Green Book. TM is not sure how much time he would have for this task but will pass on information as required.

The draft Processing Requirements Protocol (PRP)and Taxonomic Discrimination Protocol (TDP) and proposed PSA protocol could contribute to the Green Book rewrite.

ACTIONS:

- TM to contact CSEG to query what the biological program was designed to detect?
- AM/PA to report back on the assessment done for England and Wales
- AM – re-circulate PRP/TDP to committee for comments.

11. PSA

Previously the need for an SOP for particle size analysis has been highlighted. With PA in post we now have the resource to progress this. KC pointed out that Clare Mason in CEFAS can now put time to the task as well.

ACTIONS:

- AM and PA to meet Clare Mason and scope out main PSA issues and what is needed (SOP etc)
- PA to carry out tender process if external input is required (ie work cannot be done in house).
- PA to send out PSA Questionnaire to labs

12. Website

PA provided a document outlining update requirements for the website. KC confirmed that CEFAS could update the website if PA collated the information and forwarded. Each committee members' role should be clarified on the website.

ACTION:

- PA to collate updated material from committee members and provide to KC for uploading onto the website.
- Each committee member to write a short description of their expertise and their specific role in the NMBAQC and send to PA (by 30/06/08)

13. Next Meeting

Martin Dyer requested that a specific Contractor infaunal/fish meeting take place in the not to distant future to discuss issues.

ACTION:

- AM/PA to confirm requirements for Unicomarine/NMBAQC meeting – timing (sometime in July?) and VC/teleconference
- Next NMBAQC meeting in August – date TBA