

F-REP event hailed 'a huge success'

Three-day workshop 'by fishermen, for fishermen', with the aim of forging connections and sharing skills to underpin co-management, set to be rolled out across the UK in 2024

THE FISHING INTO THE Future (FITF) three-day Fisheries Resource Education Programme (F-REP) event, held at Chilworth Manor near Southampton from 6 to 9 November, brought 34 working fishermen and a number of fishermen's representatives together with a wide range of those involved in the science and management of British fisheries,

By **EMMA PLOTNEK**
Executive director of
Fishing into the Future

including officials from Defra and the MMO, and scientists from Cefas and UK universities.

F-REP aims to break down barriers between people working within the industry, connecting fishermen who work along the



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coast from one another but don't know each other, and also forging links between fishermen, scientists and managers.

We encourage people to exchange stories and learn from one another, and invite fishermen to facilitate sessions and be actively involved in the planning and delivery of the event.

FITF is a charity dedicated to supporting people involved with the fishing industry to work effectively together. We believe that co-management – an approach where key groups work together in decision-making – is the best approach to build sustainable fisheries and a prosperous fishing industry.

But the success of co-management depends on having the right conditions for everyone to work together. This event was designed to equip working fishermen with the skills, connections and confidence to further (or to jumpstart) their participation in fisheries science and management.

We want to create the best



▲ Everyone got involved with the interactive session to design and run a stock assessment on day one (science). John Balls, a fisherman from Clovelly in North Devon, and Nick West from Mevagissey are seen here working on their practical research survey design.

conditions for co-management, collaborative research and industry-led science, where industry, science and government are all participants in research and decision-making. F-REP is about giving people from the fishing industry who are not always able to effectively input into these spaces the opportunity to gain the skills and connections to participate. Equally importantly, it is also about breaking down barriers for people in science and management to understand and reach the industry.

The agenda – available at: fishingporthole.co.uk/f-rep – tells its own story. Day one concentrated on fisheries science and data collection, with a mix of government and academic scientists such as Mike Kaiser from Heriot-Watt university and Rui Viera from Cefas giving talks tailored to working fishermen, giving participants an insight into the ecosystems of their local marine environment.

This was complemented by examples of industry-led science with, for example, Gary Buchan,

skipper of the scalloper Evening Star, discussing his involvement over several years in collecting and providing data for use in scallop stock assessments.

Day two looked at an issue that will occupy a huge amount of the industry's time and efforts in the next 12 months: Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs). Whilst consultation on the first round of FMPs concluded this autumn, 2024 will see the process accelerate, with 26 more expected within the year – a hugely ambitious target.

The day also looked at how to create, build and strengthen fishing associations and, as importantly, help them deliver their messages on behalf of members.

This rolled over into day three, where social science, anthropology, economics and marketing were also thrown into the mix.

FOR MYSELF, THE highlight was the connections the people in the room made with each other. Despite working in



▲ Attendees including Rui Viera (Cefas), Aisling Lannin (MMO), Yasmin Ornsby (Hastings Fishermen's Protection Society), Mark Ball (Hastings fisherman) and Gavin Ziemann (Axmouth fisherman) discuss the stock assessment approach.



▲ The F-REP event was oversubscribed, and there wasn't a spare seat in the room. Over 30 working fishermen attended, along with about a dozen fishing industry representatives. The room was set up with an inner and an outer semicircle, with fishermen seated in the inner circle to prioritise their voices and participation.



▲ The workshop participants outside the venue of Chilworth Manor, near Southampton. A further F-REP, in Yorkshire, is planned for February.

Industry-science mixer



▲ An informal environment at the industry-science mixer allowed in-depth conversations to develop and connections to be made. Lyme Bay fisherman Aubrey Banfield is seen here chatting to Demet Dinler, an anthropologist from the University of Sussex.

As an additional event on the agenda, the Future Towns Innovation Hub at the University of Southampton hosted an industry-science mixer, together with Fishing into the Future and The Fishmongers' Company.

Researchers, scientists and tech industry innovators were given a strict one-minute pitch to talk to the room about their work and its relevance to the fishing industry. Seamlessly facilitated by Gus Caslake, most people managed to give an elevator pitch-style intro in the time allocated (or got buzzed out!).

Gus, who was also on the F-REP planning team, said: "The 18 speakers did a fantastic job of summing up their work and why industry should talk to them about it. People then got talking, and we literally had to tear them apart an hour and a

half later to end the event!

"It was a huge success – people really enjoyed it, and asked us to repeat. It's not often that these people in academia get the opportunity to hear feedback and insights from people at the forefront of working in the marine and fisheries systems, and vice versa – it opened up a new world to the fishermen in the room to see the sheer scale and diversity of subjects scientists are working on."

Newhaven-based skipper Neil Whitney said: "This got everyone fired up, and what was great to see was that non-fishing attendees were clearly so keen to learn from working fishermen. The fact that we were still at the hotel reception chatting at 2am sums up how successful this was. You can't fake that kind of enthusiasm and interest."

different roles, we were able to see each other as fellow humans with good intentions. We share a common goal and an interest in supporting fishing communities, fisheries and healthy seas.

This sometimes meant challenging each other and asking difficult questions – but we are all walking away better connected and with a greater understanding and empathy for each other. Ideally we can now pick up the phone to each other when we have an issue – and try to resolve it together!

F-REP's recipe for success is using a mix of interactive learning and speaker sessions. The activities in the agenda were a big hit, as people got to practice skills and working together. We ran an activity where groups designed and carried out stock assessment surveys using bags full of thousands of beans to represent fish stocks. People

got their mathematical and analytical brains going, to comprehend the complexity of fisheries science.

We also had a great session where groups were given challenging – but commonplace – scenarios reflecting the reality of the combined issues that affect fisheries management decisions. Groups had to negotiate and agree proposals for an FMP, working together as fishermen, scientists and government. However, we got people to swap roles, so fishermen played the role of NGOs and government, and government personnel were simulating the role of fishermen, getting people comfortable with the process of engaging in an FMP. Even the most sceptical and reserved people got involved and were enjoying playing their role, and everyone came out with a better understanding of the process

'Finding a way forward together'

By **DAVID STEVENS**
Event chair and skipper of
Crystal Sea SS 118

As soon as we set the date for this event, I was invested – I knew we were going to have key people from fisheries management in the room, along with many of the industry representatives and PO directors from along the south and part of the east coast.

It was a key opportunity for us to talk about fisheries management, hash out plans and goals for how we want talk to one another, and exchange ideas around the structure of how to work together moving ahead. Getting the balance right between understanding management and letting people in the room have their say was crucial. We wanted to avoid 'death by PowerPoint', so we split the day up.

In small groups, comprising a mixture of industry, science and management, we had the

opportunity to speak to each other candidly, about what and where we felt the management process in our fisheries was failing, and where it can improve. It was also an opportunity for management and science to do something they never get the chance to do: discuss with industry where we as an industry are failing to engage with them, and what we can do better.

This was a great session built around specific questions, such as barriers to engagement, how information is shared, and the spaces and structures for how decision-making takes place. This led to an honest and forthright discussion, which helped us understand how we can all help to build the collaborative approach required to underpin co-management.

It was clear there was a lot of hurt, and trust to be rebuilt, on all sides, with a few jokes about our collective need for some marriage counselling to find a way forward together. The fact we had fishermen,

producer organisations and fishing industry groups all together in the same room, discussing and working together as equals on the future of FMPs, felt like a really positive step.

One thing that felt really reassuring was the input from various regional fishing industry associations and groups that have great leadership and can help reach areas that do not have good representation. Seeing the Lyme Bay CIC present, and Yasmin Ornsby from Hastings Fishermen's Protection Society weighing in, gives me hope that we are finding better ways of collaboration and communicating with the industry on a variety of levels.

We want to encourage more knowledge sharing and focus on the positive aspects of associating and forming groups, and the newly launched Fishermen's Associations Toolkit by The Fishmongers' Company will help to further improve things.

and each other!

Every time I looked around the room, people were engaged, listening, asking questions and following each and every session. People were really present and keen to participate.

The number of fishermen who committed to be with us was a testament to what we do – considering they were willing to commit four days out of their week before they even knew what the weather was doing! Understandably, several guys turned up pretty sceptical, so it's great to see them walk away enthusiastic and reinvigorated about what the future could hold if this level of engagement and enhanced understanding is maintained.

This F-REP was the start of a process, not the end. It was highlighted in the wrap-up of the event that this process of learning and connecting is not additional to the fisheries management process, but a key component to ensuring its success.

The F-REP is funded by The Fishmongers' Company, The Seafarers' Charity and the FaSS scheme, and there will be a follow-up event on the east coast, near York, in February 2024, with a greater focus on shellfish species. The goal is to roll out more events through 2024 across the UK.

Full details of the next event, and how to apply for one of the funded places, will be made available on the FITF website.

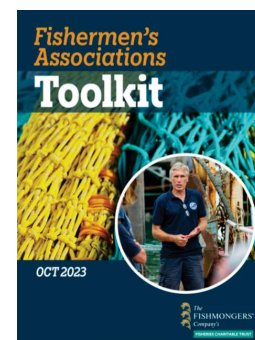
New toolkit to help fishing associations

There are significant benefits in bringing people together to form a representative organisation or association. However, setting up an organisation can be a daunting and challenging process.

F-REP provided the perfect opportunity to discuss and share experiences, bringing together as it did representatives from some of the oldest, and the very newest, fishermen's organisations on the south coast and further afield.

A session from NFFO deputy chief executive Mike Roach on his insights into working in representative industry groups was followed by the launch of The Fishmongers' Company's Fisheries Charitable Trust toolkit for fishermen's associations, a guide for anyone thinking of setting up a fishing group.

This toolkit, complete with practical guidance, tools and templates, shows one possible route toward developing a fishing association. It covers the broad range of activities that associations can offer to benefit the wider community,



▲ The detailed toolkit developed by The Fishmongers' Company to support local fishermen in developing strong representative groups can be downloaded from the FITF website.

from improving prices through to implementing new management measures, seeking funding, collecting scientific data and research and the purchase of gear, technology and infrastructure to improve livelihoods and the sustainability of the sector.

The toolkit is available at: bit.ly/3Ga9P99