

BIM EMFAF Work Programme Project Report 2023

BENEFICIARY:	Bord Iascaigh Mhara
PROJECT REFERENCE NUMBER:	23/SPIS/DIS-BG011-BR068
NAME OF PROJECT:	Enhancing our knowledge of the biology of NEA mackerel
IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD:	1 st January to 31 st December 2023

Project Scope

The Institute of Marine Research in Bergen (IMR) has conducted tagging experiments on mackerel (Ireland's most valuable wild caught finfish species) on an annual basis since 1968, both in the North Sea and to the west of Ireland during the spawning season May–June. In 2011 steel tags were replaced with Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags in order to increase the efficiency of the work. RFID is a technology that uses radio waves to transfer data from an electronic tag, called an RFID tag, through a reader for the purpose of identifying and tracking the object. The RFID data have been used to construct a new abundance index which has been used in the mackerel stock assessment since 2017. The tag-recapture data outputs provide increased confidence to the stock assessment carried out and significantly aids in the management advice provided. During 2022 BIM supported the upgrading of mackerel scanners at three pelagic processing plants in the northwest. BIM worked with both the Marine Institute (MI) and the Killybegs Fishermens Organisation (KFO) to arrange for a third-party technical expert to upgrade mackerel scanning equipment at three pelagic processing plants. This allowed Ireland to kick-start the collection of biological data from tagged mackerel and engage in the international tag scanning initiative that is helping scientists and managers better understand the biology of NEA mackerel.

During 2023 a follow up two-year project was initiated to further roll out scanning units at additional plants and ensure robust biological tag return data are collected by the pelagic sector and feeds into an international initiative to improve our understanding of the mackerel and therefore enhance management standards.

Objectives

- Ensure three existing scanning units are fully operational and logging data.
- Communicate specific progress to each of the three participating processors.
- Communicate project progress to pelagic sector through workshops.
- Identify two processors to install two additional scanners.
- Promote benefits of project through various media to communicate benefits of project.

Outcomes

Based on the success of the project during 2022 it was deemed prudent to develop a longer-term plan for the continuation of the mackerel tag scanning project. In addition to the existing units being maintained and their performance monitored, it was also considered important to increase the proportion of the landed catch being scanned by deploying additional units at more processing plants.



There was significant engagement with the third-party RFID expert during the early part of 2023 to establish the most cost effective and efficient means of progressing the technology from an install and operational perspective (2023-2024). It was agreed that the priority for 2023 was engagement with all pelagic stakeholders (fishers and processors) to maximise buy-in and ensure optimum uptake of the scanners by the processing sector. The install and upgrading of scanners in Killybegs was therefore re-scheduled to all take place in 2024 to cut down on travel costs of the third-party and to maximise visibility which processors were open to having scanners installed.

As part of the engagement process for 2023, contact was made with individual fishers to explain progress and benefits of participating in the project. Likewise, all pelagic processors were contacted similarly on an individual basis. In addition, articles were published in various trade press media during August 2023 to explain the project to a wider audience and increase awareness of the project. A workshop was also held in Killybegs (also online) for fishers and processors in September 2023 to present results on the project to date, outline the benefits of the data collected and communicate future plans. The activities completed during 2023 allows upgrades and installs to progress effectively during 2024. A report will also be produced in 2024 to detail the progress made on the overall two-year project.

Summary of Project Spend

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Total Approved Costs	€56,703
Total Eligible Expenditure	€56,702
EMFAF Eligible Expenditure	€28,351
Exchequer	€28,351

Project Partners: Marine Institute

Report by: Michael Gallagher

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Government of Ireland



Arna chomhchistiú ag
an Aontas Eorpach

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