

Mr Bernhard Friess
Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
European Commission
1049 Brussel
Belgium

Dublin, 3rd February 2020

Subject: Request for genetic studies to be integrated into the Data Collection Framework

Dear Mr Friess,

At several recent meetings, members of the NWW Advisory Council have raised issues of stock identification and how uncertainty around the degree to which two or more stocks of the same species are mixed may frustrate the stock assessment process. In particular (and by way of example) members noted West of Scotland cod; a stock with an unknown degree of mixing with the, adjacent, North Sea stock. As well as introducing uncertainty to the assessment process, mixing can also lead to problems with the setting of limit reference points and issues around management decisions due to mismatch between stock and TAC management areas. Other examples cited included cod in the Irish and Celtic seas, several plaice and sole stocks *etc.*

According to ICES, the identification of the spatial boundaries of exploited stocks is a fundamental requirement before any assessment or modelling can be contemplated, and therefore lies at the very basis of resource management¹.

Following discussion, NWWAC members concluded that this problem may best be tackled using genetic identification of samples taken from zones where mixing is known to occur and have directed the Secretariat to investigate possible mechanisms for funding research in this area.

NWWAC members agree that genetic research offers a diverse collection of useful tools for informing fisheries managers in relation to stock structure and mixed-stock fisheries. The involvement of geneticists in stock assessment groups could also support the incorporation of already available genetic information into management.

Recognising, on the one hand, the primary role of the NWWAC as an *advisory* body and, on the other, the preeminent role of the Member States' fisheries research institutes in these matters, we are therefore seeking guidance from the Commission services on how best to proceed. We note in this regard, a separate joint request from several Advisory Councils to extend the reach of the new European Maritime, Fisheries, and Aquaculture Fund; an extension that could give Advisory Councils the capacity to commission research. Alternatively, the Data Collection Framework could provide a platform to integrate genetic data into EU fisheries management.

¹ ICES Stock Identification Methods Working Group (SIMWG) TOR
<http://ices.dk/community/Documents/Science%20EG%20ToRs/HAPISG/2018/SIMWG%20MA%20ToRs%202017.pdf>



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Regardless of the route chosen, the NWWAC is keen to see this matter resolved and stands ready to work with Member States' fisheries research institutes or other, independent, scientists appointed for the task. We would also, of course, welcome any advice that you or your colleagues in the Commission might have in this regard, specifically around funding or, more generally, on the approach to resolve this issue.

Yours sincerely,

Emiel Brouckaert
Chairman Executive Committee

