

Report on the ICES STECF Joint Meeting on Long Term Management Plans held in Copenhagen 28-30th January 2009

Participants

The meeting was jointly chaired by Mike Sissenwine (Chairman of the ICES Advisory Committee) and John Casey (Chairman of STECF) and was attended by a wide range of specialists from ICES and STECF. The European Commission was present and the RACs were represented by the NWWRAC, NSRAC, Baltic RAC, Pelagic RAC, Long Distance RAC and the SWWRAC.

Background

The immediate problem facing ICES is a backlog of requests to evaluate existing management plans, including those for several cod fisheries. There is a notable absence of clear criteria and agreed guidelines that would guarantee a consistent and coherent approach.

At the same time, driven by the WSSD commitments on MSY, there are growing expectations from fisheries managers and stakeholders, such as the regional advisory councils, that scientists, economists and other experts and have a central role to play in the development and evaluation of long term management plans and that a new integrated and inclusive process is required to achieve this.

It is recognised that management plans in the future will have to be more than the simple harvest control rules that currently pass for management plans. Specifically, LTMPs will have to be based on both biological and economic objectives, within an ecosystem approach, and will therefore require the integration of biological, social and economic data and perspectives. For this reason it was decided that a joint ICES/ STECF meeting would be a useful way to launch a work programme on long-term management plans. The RACs had been invited to participate in recognition that an inclusive process was likely to deliver stronger management plans than a top-down process. A second meeting is envisaged, probably convened by the European Commission; this will address the policy issues involved in developing soundly based management plans that have a high degree of buy-in from all participants.

Format

The meeting proceeded through a full plenary session for the first day in which a range of presentations were made, followed by a mix of breakout groups and plenary sessions over two days. A full report of the meetings conclusions will be available in due course.

Issues

From the outset it was clear that although all parties recognised the major challenges presented by LTMPs, many of the participants had already absorbed the key points in recent debates about what to do and what not to do when developing and evaluating LTMPs. The most important of these are that:

- LTMPs require both biological and economic objectives
- LTMPs require something different from “sequential” evaluations, where the science precedes everything else and evaluates progress at various intervals. A new *iterative* process is required so that all parties can learn from each other in a continuous *feedback loop*
- A major focus of should be on successful *implementation* of LTMPs and the scope to improve and *adapt* the plans as they evolve, data improves and lessons are learned.
- There is a trade off between models of increasing complexity that may approach closer to reality but also become increasingly difficult to explain to managers and stakeholders as the complexity increases.
- The need for multi-species models is understood but also the recognition that in complex fisheries they may lack predictive power because of the range of assumptions that are built into them.
- The need to better understand how the dialogue between scientists, fisheries managers and fisheries stakeholders works.

- The need to find ways of assessing and taking into account “fishery response variability”, in other words the reaction of fishing vessel operators to management measures that can have profound consequences for the successful implementation of policy
- The need to develop *feedback models* between biology and economics and between specialists and stakeholders
- Ways of dealing with complexity and uncertainty, including the “non linearity” between mortality and effort and effort and catches. In other words, time at sea has a very oblique relationship to practise at sea and this can have profound implications for the effectiveness of management measures
- We are all looking for a process that is more useful and more interactive than current arrangements
- How we(as managers and stakeholders) define the questions we ask ICES, in order to elicit the most useful response, is a central issue
- We need to find ways of dealing with the fact that, especially in the EU, “management” is highly diffuse (Commission, Ministers, Member states sub-state level authorities)
- LTMPs should develop through trial and error. There must be scope to periodically review and adapt the plans as new data becomes available and in light of the practical experience of implementing the plan. In other words LTM plans should *evolve*

Stakeholders

The RACs were invited to make presentations to the joint meeting. The Pelagic RAC outlined its mixed experience of working with ICES on a number of management plans including Horse Mackerel and Western Mackerel.

A presentation on behalf of all the RACs representing demersal fisheries, covered the following points:

- The RACs have been grappling with how to contribute to the development of long term management plans and in particular, how to engage with the scientific community and stakeholders (vessel operators) on a fishery by fishery basis.
- Some valuable preliminary work had been undertaken in a workshop in Edinburgh in March 2006 and a seminar in Nantes in September 2008. These had produced useful guidelines for the development of long term management plans, including the points that:
 - LTMPs were desirable in that they offered stability and a move away from ad hoc measures and crisis management
 - LTMPs should be tailored to specific fisheries
 - The development of LTMPs should be inclusive, involving scientists, economists, managers and stakeholders in an iterative process
 - Effective buy in by the fishing industry is a prerequisite for successful implementation of LTM plans
 - The role of scientists was seen as more than just as evaluators of plans but as active collaborators in the design of effective plans. Science could prepare various options to achieve desirable objectives for discussion by stakeholders and managers
 - The development of effective feedback loops will be the key to successful collaboration in the development of LTMPs
 - Given the, sometimes difficult, history of relations between fisheries science and the fishing industry, collaboration in dealing with data gaps and inevitable uncertainties represents a journey from mistrust to trust and mutual confidence

- Put simply, the task confronting all parties is to define:
 - > where we are now
 - > Where we want to be in 3/5/10 year's time
 - > The best way to get there
- The timeframe for the transition would be a critical factor
- Moving incrementally in the right direction would be more important than an undue emphasis on setting targets

The RACS also held a number of concerns about the development of LTMPs. These include:

- The need to ensure that an integrated approach, involving both biology and economics, is achieved
- Whether there is the institutional capacity within ICES, within STECF and within the RACs to undertake this substantial undertaking with large transaction costs
- That MSY (and therefore the objectives of LTMPs) should not be understood only in terms of a particular fishing mortality or biomass
- That strenuous efforts should be made to ensure that the information on which LTMPs will be based is accessible to non-specialists; this will be an essential foundation for the dialogue with stakeholders
- It will be important to develop shared definitions: From the outset defining the fishery in terms of the stock, or the fleets, or the gears, all have major implications for the LTMP
- Impact Assessments have an important role to play in the development of LTMPs but these should be understood not as a final one-off event but as part of the iterative process of development

Conclusions

This was an important meeting that signals the start of a serious engagement with the major task of developing inclusive long-term management plans. This will be done, unlike the past, on the basis of an approach that integrates biological and economic data and perspectives and involves stakeholders in the process of development. It is clear that no party has an absolutely clear idea of how to proceed in this new territory but there is a general view that by following an iterative, transparent process we can have confidence that much can be achieved.

The immediate task for ICES is to develop evaluation criteria for the management plans already in place; but it is the development of new management plans, through an entirely new process that offers the bigger challenge over time but also the more substantial benefits.

Barrie Deas – NWWRAC Representative at the meeting