

RACs' Role in the Development of Robust and Inclusive Long-term Management Plans - A Discussion Paper

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Background

One of our ambitions for RACs has been for them to play a central role in developing well founded, long-term management plans that meet the twin objectives of achieving the political objective of moving depleted stocks towards MSY, whilst at the same time providing greater stability and economic benefits for the fishing industry.

Recognising, in the Commission's phrase, that developing robust, long-term management plans in an inclusive way, "would involve enormous transaction costs," the RACs have investigated Community sources of finance to develop long-term management plans; but so far without notable success. This is a pity because after a strong start in working on how MSY (or some broad, sensible proxy of MSY) this work is in danger of stalling. This note suggests a possible way out of this impasse.

Commission

At the MIRAC meeting between ICES and the RACs, in Vigo, on 29th and 30th January, the Commission was very explicit that it would not contemplate paying additional funds to RACs to secure scientific data on stocks, or fisheries, necessary to develop robust meaningful long-term management plans. The Commission's rationale is that it shouldn't pay twice for its scientific advice - once from ICES and then again from ICES , or some other scientific authority, via RAC advice.

There is less resistance to finding Community funds to cover the costs of port or regional meetings with direct stakeholders that would be a necessary underpinning for an inclusive approach. It is important therefore that we continue to explore this possibility.

A further point to emerge from the MIRAC meeting is that the RACs have not been as active as they might in asking the Commission to submit specific RAC requests for ICES advice under the memorandum of understanding between the Commission and ICES.

Long-term Management Plans: an alternative approach

In view of the above, an alternative approach to preparing robust advice on long-term management plan could be based on:

1. RAC requests to ICES, via the Commission, for the data and analysis we require for the development of long-term management plans
2. Using the new requirement on the Commission to produce regulatory impact assessments (which must elaborate various options on how to meet any particular objective) to undertake the preparatory work that could then form the basis of discussions with stakeholders in each fishery.
3. The work of STECF which could (through the Commission) be used to elaborate options for achieving MSY in specific fisheries, based on both biological and economic data.
4. Stakeholder meetings at convenient locations to discuss and hopefully agree, a way forward based on the options provided, or some superior alternative.
5. RAC advice to the Commission on LTM Plans on a fishery by fishery basis.

RACs' Requests to ICES

If we are to approach our work on MSY on this basis, it will require the Development Groups/Working Groups to define **with precision** what we require from ICES. This would in itself be a major task requiring scientific input and a great deal of thought. Asking the right questions will be critical. This would be best done with scientific input into the development/working groups.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Our aspiration has been to elaborate **options** for how to move towards MSY (or in the case of stocks already at or thereabouts MSY, how to keep them there). These would provide the **basis for discussions with the participants in each fishery**.

As the Commission is required to undertake something similar in its regulatory impact assessments, it may be possible to piggy-back our work on the Commission's regulatory impact assessments. Whether this would provide a genuine vehicle for the RACs work would depend on the degree to which the Commission would be willing to take on RAC concerns and perspectives at an early stage in the process of policy formulation.

Suggested Way Forward

1. Mini-Conference: A coordination meeting with ICES and the Commission to agree a framework for RAC input into LTM plans. At a minimum this would involve all the chairs of the Development/Working Groups. To prevent duplication this should involve all interested RACS
2. Meetings of each Development/Working Group, with scientific assistance, to define the terms of our request to ICES for advice on the development of LTM plans
3. Dialogue with the Commission on the regulatory impact assessment for each fishery; specifically discussion on the range of options to be considered for achieving movement to MSY and the involvement of STECF
4. Once in possession of the options, elaborated by ICES, the Commission and STECF, a series of stakeholder meetings with the participants in each fishery, with the aim of finding an agreed consensus on a way forward.
5. The formulation of draft RAC advice by each Development/Working Group based on the forgoing process.
6. The adoption of formal RAC advice on Long Term Management Plans on a fishery by fishery basis