

ICES MIRAC REPORT 2009

ICES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ICES CM 2009/ACOM:36

Report of the Meeting between ICES and the Regional Advisory Councils (MIRAC)

26–27 January 2009

Copenhagen, Denmark



ICES

International Council for
the Exploration of the Sea

CIEM

Conseil International pour
l'Exploration de la Mer

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Executive summary

The fourth meeting between ICES and the European Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) was held in the ICES headquarters, 26–27 January 2009. The objective of the meeting is to coordinate work between ICES and RACs and to provide a forum for exchange of ideas about future collaborations.

The meeting was well attended by all the RACs of relevance to ICES (North Sea RAC, North Western Waters RAC, South Western Waters RAC, Pelagic RAC, Baltic RAC and Long Distance RAC) and by several members of the ICES Advisory Services and the ICES General Secretary (Gerd Hubold). The meeting was chaired by Mike Sissenwine.

In an open and frank way, the participants discussed issues of common interest to ICES and the RACs, like the collaboration on benchmark assessments including fishers' data, the scientific needs of the RACs and the advisory services of ICES, joint workshops between RACs and ICES and the participation of young fishers at the ICES ASC.

The meeting was successful in aligning the work plans of ICES and the RACs, fine tuning the cooperation, and in provided ample opportunities to explore future collaborations.

1 Background and Terms of Reference

For the fourth time a meeting between ICES and the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) was held. For the first time a set of Terms of References was made for the meeting:

2008/2/ACOM36 ICES will invite the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) and other stakeholders to meet with the ACOM leadership (Chair: Mike Sissenwine, USA) on 26–27 January 2009 at ICES HQ to:

- a) Discuss practical arrangements in 2009 for cooperation between RACs and ICES, including procedures for the delivery and discussion of ICES advice as well as Young Fishermen's participation in ICES ASC Halifax 2008.
- b) Review progress on following up of action points from the 2008 MIRAC meeting including a review of progress on development and evaluation of Management Plans and on RAC Focus groups on improving the data quality.
- c) Invite RACs to report on their experience of working with ICES during 2008 and to present their research and advisory needs, and discuss ICES' experience of participating in RAC meetings in 2008.

2 Participants and agenda

A participants list is given in Annex 1.

The meeting had 29 participants. Both ICES and all RACs of relevance for ICES (BSRAC, SWWRAC, NWWRAC, NSRAC, PRAC, and LDRAC) were well represented. Three observers from the EC were present.

The Agenda is shown in Annex 2.

3 Minutes of the meeting

3.1 Opening and welcome

The meeting was opened by the General Secretary of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), Gerd Hubold.

This was followed by a round table presentation of participants.

The Chair went through the agenda, and a.o.b. (any other business) was added to the agenda. No further comments to the agenda were made.

3.2 Progress on follow up action points from the previous MIRAC meeting in January 2008

Several Action Items addressed the need for better planning and coordination. The response has been generally positive, but it was also recognized that some improvements can be made. Open lines of communication between the RACs and ICES were regarded as important.

MIRAC identified points where improvements could be attempted:

- 1) Communications on ICES/STECF Workshop on management plans.

The RACs generally felt that information about the meeting should have been sent out to them in better time before the meeting. They were informed only a few weeks before the meeting took place.

- 2) Lack of progress on "Traffic Light" representation of uncertainty.

Objective and transparent representation of uncertainty in the individual stock advice from ICES is desirable. It was mentioned that context matters, e.g. data limited assessments with simple models may in some cases yield more reliable advice than data rich assessments with state-of-the-art models.

It was found important to identify uncertainty in relation to the following parameters:

- Stock size and F
- Trends in SSB and F
- Classification of fishery
- TAC advice relative to objectives

The RACs feel strongly that ICES should prepare a user-friendly framework to communicate uncertainty.

ICES will consider options (e.g. a workshop) for preparing such a framework, recognizing that stakeholders and managers must participate in order to get the context right.

For 2009, ICES will strive toward a situation where the classifications in summary tables are better supported by text and analyses than hitherto.

Slow progress has been made on the use of fishers' data (or knowledge) as input to advice. All agreed in general on this point, but often "the devil is in the details".

The cooperative spirit is strong (exemplified by the interest in data compilation and benchmark workshops), but it will probably fade, if tangible progress is not made. Political correctness needs to be replaced by candor. Scientists must be free to say “no”, and fishers must be free to say “why not” or why not do it “this way.”

We need a roadmap. It may be worth driving on a slippery road, but only if it goes where you want to go!

Progress depends on building mutual realistic expectations between member state scientists and the industry. ICES is only a facilitator and a process manager.

ICES could participate in a RAC initiated workshop with industry to clarify expectations, to consider a framework for cooperative research, and to identify “low hanging fruit” (opportunities to demonstrate success quickly).

3.3 The RACs’ experience with working with ICES during 2008 (round the table)

Generally, the RACs found the work with ICES positive in terms of relationship between ICES and the RACs. There is a good spirit on both sides. There seems however, to be too many meetings and everyone involved is rather stressed. RACs continue to feel a need to have direct access to scientists in some situations. RACs understand and appreciate their observers status (e.g. in ICES ADGs), but in some cases they feel hampered in making constructive contributions (want to be more than a “fly on the wall”). ICES welcomes stakeholder observers, and they should be made to feel welcome (not seated at the back of the room).

One RAC commended ICES for the article “ICES explained” published in Fishing News in November 2007 and the formal presentation of the new ICES structure, at different RAC meetings. These are examples of good practices in this field.

Some RAC members do not understand why there for some very important commercial stocks such as megrim, anglerfish, and Norway lobster are not appropriate data for stock assessments to underpin the TAC settings. These stocks have for as long time been important and why is proper sampling and assessment still not in place?

3.4 ICES’ experience of participating in RAC meetings in 2008 (Doc 05)

ICES has participated in 20 RAC meetings in 2008 of the 26 meetings were scientific input was requested by the RACs. Most of the meetings were attended by Martin Pastoors in his role as Vice Chair of ACOM explaining the ICES advice. When ICES is represented in RAC meetings, it is generally in the role of observer to provide information to the RACs, and is not directly interfering with the advice that is formulated by the RACs.

The experience with “older” RACs and “newer” RACs shows that there is a need for better explanations of the advisory principles that are used by ICES in the provision of advice. This is especially relevant when the assessments are considered to be weak and uncertain.

3.5 Benchmark Workshops in ICES

The ICES separation of its fish stocks assessment work into benchmark workshops and update assessment working groups is a new process with only one benchmark workshop conducted so far. The immediate impression from both the RACs and ICES

side is positive. Stakeholders appreciated the opportunity to participate, but the process would have benefitted from clearer guidance. It was suggested that ICES conveners of Benchmarks might organize scoping meetings with RACs well in advance (months) to identify problems, issues, and opportunities for input to the Benchmarks. Meetings of eight days are generally too long for most stakeholders. RACs should focus their input on the first few days of benchmark workshops.

It is important to give feedback to Stakeholders on their input. Especially if data are not used, it should be clearly explained why not. It should in that case also be reported whether there is a way forwards for that particular dataset, so that in future it could be of use, or whether the available resources should rather be spend on some other types of input.

Concern was expressed that the Benchmark approach for updating data and methodological inputs to advice might be too ridged. What happens if problems or opportunities for improvements are identified between two Benchmark workshops? ICES responded that it will take more experience with Benchmarks to know if this is actually a problem, but if so, processes will have to be established to deal with it.

The status of industry participants in Benchmarks was discussed. Are they expected to represent RACs and is this realistic? ICES indicated that it does not matter so much what organization a given participant represents. What is important is the merit of the data and ideas the participant brings to the Benchmark. This applies to scientists as well as stakeholders.

3.6 Development of Management Plans-how can ICES and the RACs work together on this?

RACs, ICES, and EC all recognize the importance of Management Plans (MPs).

Agreements are needed on:

- The scope of MPs. Are they more than single-stock HCRs? How many should there be? What is their priority?
- The process for developing plans. What are the roles and responsibilities of scientists, managers, and stakeholders including RACs?
- The evaluation models. They need to be practical to address the backlog of unevaluated MPs. They need to be available interactively during MP development.
- The evaluation criteria. Precautionary approach is not specified fully enough to stand alone as the basis for evaluation. Risk criteria are up to managers (taking account of stakeholders), not up to scientists.
- MPs should not assume that science “stands still.” For instance specific numerical values should not be used in HCRs. Such values could be subject to revision and improvement as science advances (e.g. use Bmsy, not 150 000 tonnes).
- MP performance needs to be monitored, and “fixed” if a plan is not working.
- User-friendly guidelines for MPs would be valuable. ICES noted that the reports of ICES SGMAS over many years collectively formed the bases for such guidelines. It is worth considering publishing such guidelines in the cooperative research series.

3.7 Timing of advice

RACs are generally positive about most advice being issued in the first half of the year. The Pelagic RAC wants advice on pelagic stocks at this time of the year as well. Shifting pelagic advice to the first half of the year is primarily a workload issue. It is only possible if member countries agree as the workload falls on their scientists. The Commission has not requested earlier advice on pelagic stocks. ICES has no plans at the moment to shift the timing of pelagic advice.

3.8 User friendly format of advice

The importance of clear user-friendly summaries of advice was discussed. A good example of summaries prepared by France was circulated. ICES noted that it was working on an improved summary, and that this will be circulated for comment when it is ready.

It was also noted that simple user-friendly summaries would be at odds with schemes to more fully display complex issues of uncertainty about advice. Even if the summaries express uncertainty (e.g. colour coding), people will only focus (and extract) the information in the summaries that serves their purpose. Simple user-friendly summaries make it easier to do so.

3.9 Press release of ICES advice

Some RACs expressed concern that ICES press releases put too much emphasis on bad news. ICES noted that there were no press releases about fisheries advice in 2008, but it felt it should issue press releases in future. It is better for ICES to get a balanced message out, rather than waiting to react to someone else's spin. However, ICES cannot control the press and they seem often to focus on bad news.

3.10 Other issues in the cooperation between ICES and RACs

RACs still feel the need for direct access to "science" in some situations, although they acknowledge that the EC has been reasonably responsive by passing on RAC's requests to ICES.

Some RACs noted that language is a problem in the communication of ICES advice (English is difficult for many of their members).

Appreciation was expressed specifically for Martin Pastoors' presentations to RACs. ICES indicated it will continue to give high priority to these presentations, but it acknowledged that Martin will be a hard "act" to follow.

It was noted that descriptions of regulations in some advice documents are not accurate. ICES noted that it was assigning staff to oversee the preparation of this information to improve accuracy and consistency.

Some RACs feel they still need to be briefed on "ICES principles" (the concepts, data, models, and processes behind ICES advice).

RACs indicated they would like better access to the "living" meeting schedule that ICES maintains. It is password protected out of courtesy to some of the people identified in the schedule, but ICES is investigating ways to make it more accessible to RACs.

A workshop involving RACs and ICES is being planned to address data and science needs in preparation for 2010 advice on deep-water fisheries.

Support for “young fishermen” at ICES Annual Science Conferences was discussed. RACs generally favoured this opportunity. Everyone was pleased with the participation in 2007 (Helsinki), but disappointed with 2008 (Halifax). We will see how it goes in 2009 (Berlin). The MIRAC continues to endorse a programme for fishers’ participation in ASCs, although the criteria of “young” may not be appropriate. Also, it is still regarded as unrealistic for active fishers to spend an entire week at the ASC, so the present system of a three day programme for them should be continued. The RACs need to consider how fishers that attend ASCs can share their experience broadly with the RAC community.

4 Concluding remarks

The Chair thanked all the participants, and noted that he looked forward to continuing cooperation. Further, he summarized key points from the meeting (see Annex 4).

Annex 1 Participants at MIRAC 2009

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Annex 2 Agenda

MIRAC (Meeting between ICES and the RACs)

26 January, 14:00–27 January, 13:00 2009

ICES Headquarters, Copenhagen, Denmark

Chair: Mike Sissenwine

26 January, 14.00

1. Opening and welcome.
2. Adoption of agenda.
3. Progress on following up of action points from the previous MIRAC meeting in January 2008 (Mike Sissenwine, PowerPoint, Doc 4).
4. Cooperation: Status in 2008.

Annotation: The Chair will conduct a Tour de table and in particular invite RACs to comment on the cooperation between RACs and ICES in 2008.

ICES' will report on its experience of participating in RAC meetings in 2008 (Mike Sissenwine, Doc 5).

The Meeting is invited to discuss how the change in timing of advice has functioned. Furthermore the meeting is invited to discuss how to improve the RACs cooperation with the scientists and on how national science institutes and scientists fit into the picture.

16:00–16:15 Coffee break

5. Reform of the ICES advisory structure and new timing of Advice (Hans Lassen, Doc 6)
 - a. Overview of the reform and how it has functioned in 2008.
 - b. Benchmark and data compilation workshops where stakeholder inputs are expected.
 - c. ICES Advice. The meeting is invited to discuss the form and format of the ICES advice including a "traffic light approach" for the quality of the ICES assessments.

Annotation: The meeting will review the recent experience with the benchmark process (only one workshop has been conducted at the time of the meeting: The Benchmark Workshop on Roundfish 16–23 January).

6. Development of Management Plans – how can ICES and the RACs work together on this? (Doc 7, PowerPoint presentation on strategy in such evaluations).

Annotation: ICES is often asked to do simulations in order to find the most suitable combination of parameters for a management plan. This is in order to opti-

mize yield as well as minimize risk for stock depletion and, based on such simulations, consider if the plan is precautionary. ICES will present the strategy in such evaluations. The meeting is invited to consider how such evaluations can take the Johannesburg requirement of advice based on MSY into account.

Close of first day (18:00)

Social event

27 January, 09.00

7. Young fishermen's participation in ICES ASC. How was it in Helsinki 2007 and in Halifax 2008? What is the way forward? 2009 (Doc 8).
8. ICES and RAC meetings in 2009 of common interest (Mike Sissenwine, Doc 9 and Doc 10).

Annotation: The meeting is invited to discuss how to keep each other updated on dates, events and meetings, practical arrangements for cooperation between RACs and ICES, and procedures for presenting advice.

9. EC requests dealt with by ICES in 2008 (Henrik Sparholt, Doc11).

Annotation: the presentation will focus on those requests that are generated as a result of RACs approach to EC.

11:00–11:15 Coffee break

10. RAC's research and advisory needs, including issues on which the RACs might request EC to seek ICES advice (Ann Bell, Doc 12, Luc van Hoof, Doc 13, Doc 14).

Annotation: Imares (Netherlands) is currently studying how results from DCR projects can be better disseminated. Based on this presentation the meeting is invited to consider how communication of studies and other science projects can best be disseminated. ICES will report on its work on developing standards and criteria for data collection under DCR (ICES contributions Doc 14).

11. Conclusion and action points.

Closure (13.00)

Annex 3 List of documents or presentations

No.	TITLE	AGENDA PT.	RESPONSIBLE	STATUS
1	Document list		HGJ	
2	Draft Agenda		HS/HGJ	
3	Participant list		HGJ	
4	Action Points from MIRAC 2008	3	MS	
5	ICES participation in RAC meetings in 2008	4 Annotation	MS	
6	ICES Advisory Services 2008	5	HL	
7	Development of Management Plans	6	HL	
8	Young Fishermen at ASC	7	HS	
9	ICES meetings 2009 of interest to RACs	8	HS	
10	List of RAC meetings 2009 at which ICES will be represented	8	HGJ	
11	EC requests 2008 dealt with by ICES	9	HS	
13	Disseminating results of DCR studies	10	Luc van Hoof	
14	ICES contributions-DCR	10 Annotation	CM	

Annex 4 Concluding remarks. Prepared and partly presented by the Chair and send around to participants after the meeting for comments

MIRAC 2009
26-27 January
ICES Headquarters
Copenhagen

Summary Point
Prepared by the Chair

**Review of Action Items
from MIRAC 2008**

- Several Action Items addressed the need for better planning and coordination. The response as been generally positive, but we can always do better. Open lines of communication (two way) are important.
- MIRAC expressed disappointment about:
 - Communications on ICES/STECF Workshop on management plans
 - Lack of progress on “Traffic Light” representation of uncertainty
 - Slow progress on use of fishers’ data (or knowledge) as input to advice

**“Traffic Light”
representation of uncertainty**

- Objective and transparent representation of uncertainty is desirable
- Context matters- e.g., data limited assessments with simple models may yield more reliable advice than data rich assessments with state of the art models
- Uncertainty about what???
- Stock size and F
- Trends in SSB and F
- Classification of fishery
- TAC advice relative to objectives

**“Traffic Light”
representation of uncertainty**

- The RACs feel strongly that ICES should prepare a user friendly framework to communicate uncertainty
- ICES will *consider* options (e.g., a workshop) for preparing such a framework, recognizing that stakeholders and managers must participate in order to get the context right
- For 2009, make sure that classifications in summary tables are supported by text and analyses

USE OF FISHERS DATA (KNOWLEDGE)

- All agree in general, but the devil is in the details!
- The cooperative spirit is strong (exemplified by interest in data compilation and benchmarks), but it will fade (or worse) without tangible progress
- Political correctness needs to be replaced by candor. Scientists must be free to say “no”, and fishers must be free to say “why not” or why not do it “this way.”

USE OF FISHERS DATA (KNOWLEDGE)

- **Need a roadmap. It may be worth driving on a slippery road, but only if it goes where you want to go!**
- **Progress depends on building mutual realistic expectations between member state scientists and industry. ICES is only a facilitators/process manager.**
- **ICES could participate in a RAC initiated workshop with industry to clarify expectations, consider a framework for cooperative research, and identify “low hanging fruit” (opportunities to demonstrate success quickly).**

REVIEW OF 2008

- **Generally positive in terms of relationship between ICES and RACs. Good spirit on both sides**
- **Too many meetings, everyone stressed**
- **RACs continue to feel a need to have direct access to scientists in some situations**
- **RACs understand and appreciate their observers status (e.g., ADGs), but in some cases feel hampered in making constructive contributions (want to be more than a “fly on the wall”). ICES welcomes stakeholder observers, and they should be made to feel welcome (not seated at the back of the room).**

BENCHMARK WORKSHOPS

- **This is a new process with only one workshop so far. The initial reaction of the MIRAC is positive.**
- **Stakeholders’ appreciated the opportunity to participate, but:**
 - **Would have benefitted from clearer guidance.**
 - **ICES conveners of Benchmarks might organize scoping meetings with RACs well in advance (months) to identify problems and issues, and opportunities for input to the Benchmarks.**
 - **8 days is too long for most stakeholders. RACs should focus there input on the first few days.**

BENCHMARK WORKSHOPS

- It is important that there be feedback to Stakeholders on their input. If it is not used, why? Is there a way forward to use it in the future, or should they consider some other type of input?
- Concern was expressed that the Benchmark approach to updating data and methodological inputs to advice might be too ridged. What happens if problems or opportunities for improvements are identified between Benchmarks?
- ICES responded that it will take more experience with Benchmarks to know if this (the previous bullet point) is actually a problem, but if so, processes will have to be established to deal with it.
- The status of participants in Benchmarks was discussed. Are they expected to represent RACs and is this realistic? ICES indicated that it does not care who participants at Benchmarks represent. What's important is the merit of the data and ideas they bring to the Benchmark, not where they come from. This applies to scientists as well as stakeholders.

MANAGEMENT PLANS

- RACs, ICES, EC all recognize importance of MPs. They are a priority.
- Need to decide on:
 - the scope of MPs. Are they more than single stock HCRs? How many should there be? What's their priority?
 - process for developing plans. What are the roles and responsibilities of scientists, managers, stakeholders including RACs.
 - evaluation models. They need to be practical to address the backlog of unevaluated MP. They need to be available interactively during plan development.
 - Evaluation criteria. Precautionary approach is not specified fully enough to stand allow as the basis for evaluation. Risk criteria are up to managers (taking account of stakeholders), not scientists.

MANAGEMENT PLANS

- MPs should not assume that science "stands still." Don't use specific numerical values in HCRs that should be subject to revision and improvement as science advances (i.e., use Bmsy, not 150,000 tones).
- Plan performance needs to be monitored, and "fixed" if plan isn't working.
- User friendly guidelines for management plans would be valuable. ICES noted that the reports of SGMAS over many years collectively formed the bases for such guidelines. It is worth considering publishing such guidelines as in the cooperative research series.

TIMING OF ADVICE

- RACs are generally positive about most advice being issued in the first half of the year.
- Pelagic RAC wants advice on pelagic stocks earlier in the year.
- Shifting pelagic advice earlier in the year is primarily a workload issue. It is only possible if member countries agree as the workload falls on their scientists.
- The Commission has not requested earlier advice on pelagics.
- ICES has no plans to shift the timing of pelagic advice

USER FRIENDLY ADVICE SUMMARIES

- The importance of clear user friendly summaries of advice was discussed.
- A good example of summaries prepared by France was circulated.
- ICES noted that it was working on an improved summary, and it would be circulated for comment.
- It was also noted that simple user friendly summaries would be at odds with schemes to more fully display complex issue of uncertainty about advice. Even if the summaries express uncertainty (e.g., color coding), people will only focus (and extract) the information in the summaries that serves their purpose. Simple user friendly summaries make it easier to do so.

PRESS RELEASES

- Some RACs expressed concern that ICES press releases put too much emphasis on bad news.
- ICES noted that there were no press releases about fisheries advice in 2008, but it felt it should issue press releases in the future.
- It is better for ICES to get a balanced message out, rather than waiting to react to someone else's spin.

OTHER ISSUES

- RACs still feel the need for direct access to “science” in some situations, although they acknowledge that the Commission has been reasonably responsive by passing on their requests to ICES.
- Some RACs noted that language is a problem in the communication of ICES advice (English is difficult for many of their members).
- Appreciation was expressed specifically for Martin Pastoors’ presentations to RACs. ICES indicated it will continue to give high priority to these presentation, but it acknowledged that Martin will be a hard “act” to follow.

OTHER ISSUES

- It was noted that descriptions of regulations in some advice documents are not accurate. ICES noted that it was assigning staff to oversee the preparation of this information to improve accuracy and consistency.
- Some RACs feel they still need to be briefed on “ICES principles” (the concepts, data, models, processes behind ICES advice).
- RACs indicated they would like better access to the “living” meeting schedule ICES maintains. It is password protected out of courtesy to some of the people identified in the schedule, but ICES is investigating ways to make it more accessible to RACs.
- A workshop involving RACs and ICES is being planned to address data and science needs in preparation for 2010 advice on deepwater fisheries.
- Support for “young fishermen” at ICES Annual Science Conferences was discussed. RACs generally favored this opportunity. Everyone was pleased with the participation in 2007 (Helsinki), but disappointed with 2008 (Halifax). We’ll see how it goes in 2009 (Berlin). The MIRAC continues to endorse a program for fishers’ participation in ASCs, although the criteria of “young” may not be appropriate. Also, it may be unrealistic for active fishers to spend an entire week at ASCs. The RACs need to consider fishers that attend RACs can share there experience broadly with the RAC community.