

# ICES WKDDRAC REPORT 2011

ICES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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## Report of the Data Deficiency Coordination Meeting with the RACs (WKDDRAC)

26–27 January 2011

Copenhagen, Denmark



**ICES**

International Council for  
the Exploration of the Sea

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Conseil International pour  
l'Exploration de la Mer

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## Introduction

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Within the North West Waters RAC and the North Sea RAC there has been mounting concern that data deficiencies of various kinds impair the quality of an increasing number of ICES stock assessments. The purpose of the WKDDRAC meeting was to discuss a proposal prepared jointly by the North West Waters and North Sea RACs that regional task forces, involving fisheries scientists, fisheries managers and fishermen be formed to identify those fisheries suffering from data deficiencies, examine the nature of those deficiencies and set in motion remedial measures that would over time improve the situation. See Annex 1.

Participants included the Chief Executive of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations (Barrie Deas), also chair of the Demersal Working Group of the North Sea RAC, a Fishery Policy Officer from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation (Rory Campbell) also member of the NSRAC demersal WG, the chairs of relevant ICES assessment working groups (North Sea (Clara Ulrich), Celtic Sea (Joel Vigneau), and hake, megrim and monkfish (Carmen Fernandez)), the Danish data coordinator (Jørgen Dalskov), one of the ACOM vice-chairs (Manuela Azevedo), the Head of the ICES Advisory Services (Poul Degnbol), a Professional Secretary familiar with data issues (Barbara Schoute) and the chair of ACOM (J.-J. Maguire). For participants' list, see Annex 2.

## **1 Defining the problem and types of data deficiencies**

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Out of the 150 stocks ICES advised on in 2010 (including elasmobranchs and deep-sea species), 43% of the stocks were assessed analytically, allowing stock and catch predictions to be made. For 45% of the stocks advice was given based on trends in surveys or catches. The perception is that the number of 'trends based' advice for which it is not possible to provide a forecast, is increasing, and that this results in TAC reductions when the recent EC policy papers are applied.

Problems causing the failing of analytical assessments are related to uncertainty in catch statistics, missing discard data discards time-series to be incorporate in the assessment, missing data for specific stocks, unreliable or unavailable indices of abundance, and insufficient information on stock definition.

WKDDRAC recognized that there are problems with several assessments and agreed that regional task forces could play a useful role towards improved assessments.

## 2 Identifying existing initiatives

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The proposed regional task forces could be the first step in the ICES benchmarking process. In this sense, the task forces would not duplicate the work of the benchmarks, but would be part of it.

Several initiatives to improve data quality were discussed including the use of on-board cameras to monitor how the catch is handled, penalties for refusing to take observers, but more incentives to improve the data are needed.

Sole in the Kattegat and monkfish in Subarea VI are success stories where cooperation between scientists, fishermen and fisheries management have led to improved assessment, stopping the spiralling down of unreliable data leading to lower TACs. For sole in the Kattegat, the improvement started with the collection private logbooks and real catch records back in time to calculate a new index of abundance. Later on, a joint survey with two commercial vessels was implemented.

WKDDRAC agreed that there are ways forward, but this will takes time, effort and commitment as well as positive incentives to do the right thing. The idea is to reset the system such that vessels could earn a decent living from appropriate TACs.

### **3 Involving the main parties required to set up regional initiatives (stakeholders, fisheries scientists, fisheries managers)**

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WKDDRAC agreed that RACs provide a vehicle for addressing the data deficiencies and that it is important that the first meeting in this process involve the right people, and that participants understand what the objective is. It is also important that each task force has flexibility in addressing the issue. The North Western Waters RAC has plans for a meeting in April and the North Sea RAC could cooperate in organising a joint meeting.

Regional Coordinating Meetings of the EC Data Collection Framework can be helpful in improving DCF data collection, thus resolving this problem, but in the short term, there is room for the proposed task force to play a role, e.g. by telling countries what data are missing. It is expected that this initiative will build trust and confidence in the process and in the science.

National authorities may respond more quickly to fishermen saying that there are data deficiencies; this may be perceived as a much stronger message than if the observation comes only from scientists. The regional task forces could also be a means to raise the data collection standards across the board.



## **4 Exploring the range of possible remedial measures**

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Possible sources of improved data include:

- Personal logbooks (diaries)
- Conservation credits
- Cameras on board
- Increased observer coverage
- Cooperative surveys
- Reference fleets—how to define.
- Fishery–science project
- Self-sampling: discard sampling. Few vessels and few trips sampled for discards in Netherlands.

## **5 Priority stocks**

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These will be identified by the regional task forces.

## **6 Understanding the limits to certainty**

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It should be understood from the start that improving the data will not result in 100% certainty in the assessments of all stocks all the time. Even with improved data, some inherent uncertainty will remain. The uncertainty section in the advisory reports could be improved to discuss how the uncertainty affects the advice and include statements on how reliable the data are, how stable the models are, and what are the doubts about the intermediate year.

## **7     Simpler assessment models?**

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Participants in the regional task forces should be aware that the objective is not to have age-based analytical assessments for all stocks. The objective is to have the most appropriate and useful assessment method for the data at hand. Filling the pedigree matrix will help identify what models can be used.

## 8 Agree next steps

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Tentative Terms of Reference for the regional task forces could be:

- a ) Identify priority stocks or fisheries (could be mixed fisheries, does not need to be single species)
- b ) Develop/agree on the score card of input data developed at WKACCU
- c ) Score the data and the assessments in the two RACs, to initiate the benchmarking process–Pedigree matrix or Lot 1 matrix.
- d ) Identify the effects of management measures and other externalities (wind farms) on data quality (WG on FTFB)
- e ) Additional data/knowledge–Where to invest
- f ) Implementing data in assessment method(s) through benchmarks–age based analytical assessment is not necessarily the best expected outcome.
- g ) Funding arrangements (possibly some money in the DCF).

WKDDRAC noted that it could be useful to involve the WG on Fisheries Systems to test their theoretical framework. The WG on Fisheries Systems could help the regional task forces becoming operational.

It is important that safeguards be agreed early on and that improving the data does not result in negative personal consequences for individuals involved in the process.

## **Annex 1: Initial NWWRAC and NSRAC proposal**

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### **ICES Assessments: Data Deficiencies**

Within the North West Waters RAC and the North Sea RAC there has been mounting concern that data deficiencies of various kinds impair the quality of an increasing number of ICES stock assessments.

As you know, this has immediate consequences for the fishing industry as the precautionary approach adopted by the Commission means that, in these circumstances, TACs are frequently set at lower levels that would otherwise have been the case.

It seems to us that it is unacceptable to allow the numbers of stocks for which it is not possible for ICES to provide an analytical assessment, or catch options, to increase; the priority therefore must be to find a way out of this impasse.

Either ICES must adopt a new approach, using assessment models where data are poor that are simpler, less reliant on supporting assumptions, and less data hungry, or we, collectively, must find ways of improving the data situation.

The NWWRAC, supported by the NSRAC, has suggested an initiative focused on the idea of a regional task force, involving fisheries scientists, fisheries managers and fishermen. The role of the task force would be to identify those fisheries suffering from data deficiencies, examine the nature of those deficiencies and to set in motion remedial measures that would over time improve the situation.

The Commission has welcomed this initiative but has declined to take a lead, drawing attention to other measures in place such as the Data Collection Framework Regulation that it claims may ease the situation.

We take the view that an initiative that brings together scientists fisheries managers and fisheries scientists at a regional level would have many advantages, not least pre-figuring and setting the scene for the kind of regional bodies that appear likely to emerge from CFP reform.

Against this background, I write to ask if you would be willing to meet with a small group of representatives from the two RACs to discuss the potential of the idea.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Kind regards,

(For and on behalf of the North West Waters and North Sea Regional Advisory Councils).

## Annex 2: Participants' list

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## **Annex 3: Agenda**

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### **Agenda for Meeting between RACs and ICES on Data Deficiencies, ICES, Copenhagen, 27th and 28th January 2011**

#### **Dealing with Data deficiencies on a systematic basis**

The purpose of the meeting is to discuss and take forward a proposal made jointly by the North West Waters and North Sea RACs that regional task forces be established to address the problem of weak assessments caused by data deficiencies.

#### **Agenda**

- 1 ) Introductions
- 2 ) Defining the problem and types of data deficiencies
- 3 ) Identifying existing initiatives
  - 3.1 ) ICES benchmark process
  - 3.2 ) Relevance for the NS Cod Benchmark Protocol (7–9th February)
  - 3.3 ) Data Collection Regulation
  - 3.4 ) Others
- 4 ) Scoping regional initiatives to address data deficiencies not addressed by current initiatives
- 5 ) Involving the main parties required to set up regional initiatives (stakeholders, fisheries scientists, fisheries managers)
- 6 ) Exploring the range of possible remedial measures
- 7 ) Priority stocks
- 8 ) Understanding the limits to certainty
- 9 ) Simpler assessment models?
- 10 ) Agree next Steps