

North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council

REPORT

Focus Group – Mixed Fisheries Management Plan for the Irish Sea (ICES Area VIIa) Dublin, 5th July 2012

Chairman: Alan McCulla
Rapporteur: John Crudden

1. Welcome

The Focus Group Chairman, Alan McCulla, opened the meeting at 14:00h.

- Apologies: Apologies were recorded from Thomas Bryan-Brown.
- Introduction:

The chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for staying on for this important meeting. He also thanked John Crudden for accepting acting as the Rapporteur. The list of participants is shown in Annex I.

- Adoption of the agenda:

The agenda as circulated was adopted without additions. The Chairman proposed moving the coffee break forward to suit the meeting which he hoped to have completed by 16:00h.

- Setting the scene: Objectives of the meeting:

The Chairman referred to the meeting of Working Group 4 (Irish Sea) held the day before at which he introduced the Focus Group meeting. He introduced the document from Poseidon Management prepared for Anglo North Irish Fish Producers Organisation (ANIFPO). Although it is specifically relevant for the Northern Ireland fleets it could be used as a basis to kick-start a Mixed-Fishery Management Plan for the Irish Sea. He cautioned about confusing this with the on-going work on the review of the Cod Management Plan (EC Reg. 1342/2008).

2. Issues with science on the Irish Sea stocks.

2.1. Presentation on the state of the stocks

Pieter Jan Schon gave an overall presentation on the state of the stocks in the Irish Sea.

- Cod: There is a new assessment incorporating seven surveys. The principle message from the graphs is that there is massive unknown mortality. Discard rates are generally low, although the strong 2009/2010 year class has led to increased discarding. The decline in the stock dates back to the 1970's. Recruitment remains at relatively low levels and ICES advice is that there should be no directed fishery. The benchmark process is a "work in progress". Since 2007 there have been additional observer trips, focusing on discards as part of the Enhanced Data Programme.
- Nephrops: The stock is in a fairly good state with stocks trends naturally fluctuating around relatively stable levels for many years.
- Whiting is a data-poor stock. Mortality is high with discarding being the main problem. ICES advise for adopting the precautionary approach. More observations at sea would help to improve the knowledge of the stock.
- Haddock is in a reasonable state. There is a low quota uptake due to the whitefish fleet disappearing from the Irish Sea and is now basically a by-catch from the nephrops fishery. It is due to be benchmarked next year.
- Sole and Plaice are in a similar state to cod (zero TAC, no directed fisheries and discards should be minimised).

In general the stocks in the Irish Sea are in a relatively poor state. More data is not needed, what is needed now is to refine the assessments we already have. There is good co-operation between the science and the various fleets, more observer coverage and more than enough independent surveys available.

The Marine Institute has produced an interactive map of the various fleet segments based on VMS data and logbook information. To get a better overall picture all that is needed is to add the UK and Belgian fleet data.

The next step is to move to a Mixed Fishery model. The eco-system approach is way down the line because of the lack of data but it would not take a lot of effort to catch up if we do things in progressive steps.

2.2. Open Discussion

Sean O'Donoghue said that as the RAC has agreed to look at the cod issue in ICES areas VI and VII as a whole this is of relevance to this Focus Group. Cod recovery is the driving force and will be so for a number of years.

Alan McCulla said that even though nephrops in FU15 have fluctuated around MSY the harvest rates were in proportion to the biomass and should not be a cause for alarm. Discarding on whiting had been reduced by 50%.

Sean O'Donoghue made the point that a huge decline in effort in terms of Kw/days is not being reflected in the fishing mortality and there has to be a reason for that.

Pieter Jan Schon said that this was not unique to the Irish Sea, it has happened elsewhere. Cod is the most startling example of this. Science cannot explain this and it is a good idea look at 2 areas together.

In addition to Pieter Jan comments, Norman Graham reminded that the situation with West of Scotland is slightly different, but the Kattegat and Irish Sea are very similar examples to compare. He made the point that an audit on all the possible issues was needed to determine where the unaccounted mortality was coming from.

A question asked as to whether there was any migration between cod populations from either North or South from the Irish Sea as was believed by some industry representatives. The scientific advice was that minimal migration was taking place south into the Celtic Sea but of no significance while none was taking place North.

A debate took place on the idea of moving from single-species management to mixed fishery and multi-species management in a step-by-step way. Sean O'Donoghue made the point that everyone needs to talk the same language. The Commission view on mixed species and multi-species are not always the same as the stakeholder view. We need to agree specifically what we propose to do before we go any further. This Focus Group should be considered as a subset of the one on Cod in the two eco-regions and the work we do in this Focus Group will fit very neatly into that.

Johnny Woodlock made the point that we should not rely solely on a single species fishery. He suggested seasonal closures for spawning and nursery areas should be considered as was evident by the stock improvement resulting from the Porcupine (FU16) closure.

Norman Graham outlined the pathway to success we should follow.

- Carry out the single stock assessments first.
- Look at all the technical interactions and map the area.
- Identify the priority actions and fix the objectives
- Take account of economic and social aspects

A bio-economic model might be the best tool to analyse all these variables. In this way we solve the problem in a stepwise approach.

2.3. Proposed way forward

Barrie Deas agreed with Norman's approach.

Alan McCulla suggested that Poseidon Management be asked to redraft the text in the paper along the lines of our discussion today. Funding was available to do this.

Bertie Armstrong and Alan Coghill raised the similarity of our proposals with the Brown Crab initiative. All that was needed was a steering group from the RAC to keep connected to the project. John Lynch made the point that we also need to keep connected with the Cod FG.

Sean O'Donoghue reminded the meeting that the socio-economic aspects have to be included.

The Commission representative welcomed the initiative and hopes to see progress made by this RAC in the following months.

3. Close of the meeting

The Chairman thanked everyone for their participation. He thanked the Irish Government for the use of the facilities, the staff of Dublin Castle and the RAC Secretariat for looking after us.

With no other business to discuss he closed the meeting at 15:50 h.

ANNEX I. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

MEMBERS		
<u>Name</u>	<u>Surname/s</u>	<u>Organization</u>
Alan	McCulla	ANIFPO – Focus Group Chairman
John	Crudden	EAA – Focus Group Rapporteur
Bertie	Armstrong	Scottish Fishermen’s Federation
Iwan	Ball	World Wildlife Fund
Luc	Corbisier	Stichting voor Duurzame Visserij
Barrie	Deas	NFFO UK
Cécile	Fouquet	European Bureau for Conservation and Development (EBCD)
John	Lynch	Irish Fishermen’s Organisation
Francis	O’Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisation
Sean	O’Donoghue	Killybegs Fishermen’s Organisation
John	Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary



OBSERVERS		
<u>Name</u>	<u>Surname/s</u>	<u>Organization</u>
Emiel	Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Alan	Coghill	Scottish Fishermen's Federation
Grant	Fulton	SFPA Ireland
Norman	Graham	Marine Institute
Roy	Griffin	European Commission
Pieter Jan	Schon	AFBI – Northern Ireland
William	Stewart	European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA)

NWWRAC SECRETARIAT		
Alexandre	Rodríguez	Fisheries Policy Coordinator