

NWWRAC Meeting Report from Working Group 2  
November 2005



**Minutes**  
**North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council**  
**(NWW RAC)**

**Working Group 2**  
**Western Approaches and Celtic Sea (ICES VII except a,d&e)**

Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> of November 2005  
9.30am-1.00pm

Rapporteur: Paul Trebilcock

**Welcome, Introduction and Election of Officers**

Mr. André leBerre, Honorary President of the NWW RAC, opened the meeting and welcomed all members. He wished them a fruitful meeting and handed over to Sam Lambourn Chairman of the NWW RAC to start the meeting.

With regards to membership of the Working Group 2 (WG2) it was noted that WG2 was now over subscribed and that it was the job of the Executive Committee to appoint the members of WG2s to a maximum of 25. It was further requested that if there are any nominees present who were prepared to attend as active observers rather than members that they should let the secretariat know as soon as possible.

Hugo Crisanto González García was elected by consensus for the position of Chairman and André Guegen for the position of Vice Chairman.

The Chairman thanked Sam Lambourn and continued the meeting by calling for an election of the rapporteur. Paul Trebilcock was elected by consensus.

**Adoption of the Agenda**

Adopted by consensus.

**Adoption of the Rules of Procedure**

Adopted by consensus.

**ICES Advice**

The Chairman asked Mike Armstrong from CEFAS to brief the meeting.

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**Cod**

It was explained that ICES had good information on the long-term trends but that there were problems with recent commercial catch data, therefore ACFM classify the state of the stock as unknown. Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) remains above the level of BPA, a threshold that ICES and the Commission suggest that it should not fall below.

It was reported that there had been some reduction in fleet sizes in recent years (particularly in the French fleet). However ICES suggested that there was a weak relationship between this and the overall state of the stock. ICES advice again calls for a reduction in Fishing Mortality (F) and additionally claims that there are shortcomings in the data for discarding.

ICES have suggested the need for a management plan that leads to a progressive reduction in fishing mortality.

WG2 then heard a revue of the 2005 Celtic Sea closure. In essence it had been proposed by the French, UK and Irish fishing industries as an alternative to a Commission developed recovery plan. It proposed the closure of three ICES statistical rectangles (30 E4, 31E4 and 32E3) to all demersal fishing during January, February and March 2005. The proposal was independently verified and supported at the time by scientists and administrations, the Commission and Council of Ministers also welcomed it as a genuine industry developed alternative to the management of Celtic Sea cod by effort control.

However, a derogation was negotiated by the Belgian administration for the beam trawlers in the month of March, which it was felt de-valued the benefits of the closure.

Initial estimates of the effect of the Trevose closure were that it would reduce fishing mortality by approximately 13% and ICES feel that the actual effect was close to what was anticipated. It was further noted that a recent IFREMER study has suggested that the closure led to a significant reduction in the fishing mortality, particularly as the French fleet have the most significant impact on this stock.

WG2 then heard that the impact of the closure had appeared to be positive although improvements could be made for 2006. Industry representatives reported that they had held several meetings during 2005 to develop new proposals for 2006 and wanted WG2 to look at the new proposal and if possible support it as a NWW RAC position.

The industry wanted the overall principle of the closure to stay in place, however it was acknowledged that all interested stakeholders had to be involved in the development process. Taking that into account, the proposal for 2006 was a closure of three ICES statistical rectangles (30E4, 31E4 and 32E3) outside of the six-mile limit of UK and Ireland to all demersal fishing during February and March 2005 **no derogations**. All boats could fish in January.

ICES data suggests that captures of cod in these boxes in January are close to insignificant in comparison to February and March. Therefore from a scientific point of view it would be possible to support the closure in February and March.

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There was then a lengthily and full discussion where the following issues emerged:

- This is a pro-active industry developed proposal that has been put forward before any immediate stock crisis and furthermore it is scientifically justified.
- Political interference had undermined the benefits of the 2005 closure and that the industry proposal for 2006 was a positive development that had attempted to take into account the concerns of all stakeholders whilst retaining scientific validity.
- It was felt essential that the closure be during February and March, for all demersal vessels.
- The issue of displacement was raised however it was noted that this had been taken into account in the original proposal. Scientists had factored in the potential effects of displacement into the assessment of the impacts of the closure and the net benefit was felt to be positive.
- Displacement must be monitored and assessed as an integral part of the closure.
- For clarification it was stated that as the closure was for demersal fishing therefore potting vessels would be allowed to continue to fish with pots for crab, whelk and lobster in the closed area.
- The impact of the closure on other species cannot be overlooked. It was felt vital that there be a full scientific assessment of the impacts of the closure on other species such as sole, plaice, nephrops and other gadoids.

The following comments were made on behalf of Belgian representatives who were not present:

- A closure in March to Beam-trawlers would perhaps encourage diversion of effort into other areas.
- Having the boxes open in January would be of limited economic benefit to the Belgian fleet.
- Beam-Trawlers land very low amounts of cod.

This position was seen as difficult to understand given that Belgian representatives had for the sake of consensus agreed to the proposal at stakeholder meetings through out the year, at EAFPO meetings and in a meeting with the Commission. However given that they were not present it was not possible to analyse the apparently ambiguous position.

The NGOs stated that they supported the principles of the closure and that when the fishing industry comes forward with proposals that are forward looking, effect and exemplary it was welcomed. It was noted that scientific validation and support were essential in order to fully support the proposal.

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Mike Armstrong responded for the scientific community making the following points:

- The scientific community were in fact very enthusiastic regarding the closure and its benefits.
- It was a unique opportunity to strengthen the relationship between scientists and fishermen.
- Cod Spawning does not really start until February therefore February and March were the most justifiable months to close from a scientific perspective.
- Aggregation of cod is high in the months of February and March. Therefore it is consistent with the objectives of the closure to reduce fishing mortality and improve the age structure of the stock for the closure to take place at this time.
- Part of the scientific evaluation had looked at the displacement of effort in this closure. It suggested that there was some displacement but there was a 13-14% reduction in cod fishing mortality in total.
- ICES have stated that this stock is in need of a long-term management plan and that the fishing industry must be involved in the development of this.

Following a short break it was agreed that the proposal to be considered by WG2 was as follows: 'a closure of three ICES statistical rectangles (30E4, 31E4 and 32E3) outside of the six-mile limit of UK and Ireland, to all demersal fishing during February and March 2006 **no derogations**. All boats could fish in January.'

There was consensus for the proposal, although it was recognised that there was one dissenting argument by proxy from Belgium. It was further noted that notwithstanding the Belgian position there was unanimous and strong support for this proposal from those present.

It was noted that it was critical how this issue was dealt with for the future of WG2. It was felt that if issues were of fundamental importance to any stakeholder group they should attend WG2.

It was resolved that the rapporteur would produce a position paper on the Celtic Sea closure reflecting the overwhelming strength of support for the proposal but also acknowledging the Belgian position.

### **Northern Hake**

ICES advice was for an increase in the TAC for 2006 of 3%.

It was noted that there was already a hake recovery plan in place. It was also noted that if the stock continued to rebuild there would be no need for an ongoing recovery plan within two years.

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For the hake stock it was noted that the recruitment is stable and the fishing mortality is decreasing and the spawning stock biomass is increasing why are we not making a proposal to the Commission to raise the TAC up to 15%.

This was not scientifically justifiable, as an increase in TAC of 15% would result in an increase in fishing mortality above that of the precautionary level.

The group heard that the hake recovery plan was introduced 5 years ago under emergency powers by the Commission yet there has been no scientific evaluation of the measures introduced and it is essential that an evaluation takes place.

### **Other Stocks**

Because of time constraints it was not possible to discuss other stocks in any depth. It was noted that the ICES advice was favourable for Monkfish and this was welcomed.

### **Commission Non-paper Establishing Emergency Measures to Protect Deep-sea Species in Waters West of Scotland and Ireland**

Strong feelings were expressed regarding the proposals by the Commission. There was acknowledgment that this issue must be addressed as a priority. However the response must be proportionate.

The meeting agreed by consensus that there was an immediate need for regulation or some effective control measures to be implemented in the deep-water net fishery. However, there was no consensus for a total ban as proposed by the Commission. There was also strong support for the development of a retrieval scheme that should be implemented as a priority.

It was resolved that the rapporteur would produce a position paper on the Commission's non-paper establishing emergency measures to protect deep-sea species in waters west of Scotland and Ireland reflecting the opinion and comments of WG2.

### **Work Programme for 2006**

Because of time constraints it was agreed that the work programme for 2006 would be fully discussed at the beginning of the next meeting.

A number of items for consideration were proposed:

- Simplification of fisheries regulations
- Technical Conservation regulations
- Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) issues
- Electronic logbooks

It was resolved that any other proposals for the 2006 work programme should be sent to the secretariat for consideration at the next working group meeting.

### **Any Other Business**

There was no further business.