



## North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council

### REPORT

#### Working Group 4 – Irish Sea - ICES Area VIIa

Dublin Castle, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2013

11:00 – 13:00

Chairman: Alan McCulla

Rapporteur: John Crudden

#### 1. Welcome

The Chairman, Alan McCulla, opened the meeting at 11:00 and welcomed all participants. He dispensed with the usual round-table introductions but extended a special welcomed to the Member States representatives present, Paddy Campbell (DARD – Northern Ireland) and Iain Glasgow (DEFRA - UK).

- Apologies: Apologies were received for non-attendance at the meeting from Michael Keatinge (BIM), Michael Jones (DAFM – Wales), Iwan Ball (WWF-UK), Luc Corbisier (SDVO), Pieter-Jan Schon (AFBI - NI), Sean O'Donoghue (KFO), André Gueguen (OPOB) and Jacques Pichon (PMA).

The full list of participants at the meeting is shown in Annex I.

- Adoption of the agenda: The agenda as circulated was adopted with two changes. Item 3, Review of the Cod Management Plan and Item 6, Data limited Stocks were deleted as they had been discussed at earlier Working Group meetings.
- Adoption of the report from the last meeting: The report from the last WG4 meeting held in Bilbao on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2013 was adopted without comments.

## 2. Towards a mixed fishery management plan for the Irish Sea

### 2.1. Outcomes of Irish Sea Focus Group meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2013

Alan McCulla opened the discussion on this item by stating that in his view this was one of the most productive meetings this RAC ever held and he thanked all the participants for their input into it. He invited comments from the floor.

Barrie Deas said that he agreed with Alan McCulla. It was a successful meeting because we had managed in getting Member State Fisheries Managers, Scientists and stakeholders around the one table to exchange views on all aspects of the issue. Significant progress was made but we need to keep this momentum going.

The aim of this group is to develop a Multi-species Management Plan for the Irish Sea. Unaccounted mortality is the big issue and until we find an answer to this it will be difficult to move forward. We should keep in mind that the Commission has said that if the NWWRAC comes up with a Long-term Management Plan that is consistent with MSY it will be approved so there is a lot to play for. The core issue is why Irish Sea cod stock is not improving. This is contrary to positive trends of reducing mortality across the North Atlantic.

The NWWRAC does not have the capacity to do the work necessary to drive this process due to budgetary and staff constraints. We need to access funding to recruit someone to do this.

The Chairman reminded the meeting of the list of actions arising from the Focus Group meeting and the people responsible to undertake them – see item 6 of Focus Group meeting report.

### 2.2. Irish Sea Sole stock

*Presentation by Hilde Van Haecke (ILVO)*

The speaker delivered a short presentation to update the meeting on progress on the Belgian fisheries-science partnership research project to date. She reminded the meeting that the objectives of the project were to rebuild the Irish Sea sole stock and to deliver a sustainable fishery. The participation of the NWWRAC is essential to deliver these objectives.

12 Belgian boats are currently licensed to fish sole in the Irish Sea with a TAC of 36 tonnes. 67 additional tonnes have been acquired by way of swaps. It is a condition of the license that boats must inform the Belgian authorities 3 days before each trip and must carry observers on board. 11 boats were active in the Irish Sea, 10 beam trawlers and 1 otter trawler.



In the first half of 2013 42 fishing trips were taken amounting to 249 days at sea. 11 trips were not notified, 9 trips were notified late and 22 were notified on time. 14 trips had no observers on board while 8 were observed. It is too early to draw conclusions.

62% of the sole quota has been fished to date so it will depend on further swaps to allow the Belgian fleet to fish to the end of the year. The VMS data available from the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the year indicates that the boats are fishing the same locations as last year.

Funding of the project is a problem for ILVO. The Commission has recently replied to their letter of request for funding (submitted in April) with a number of recommendations / suggestions:

- Rethink the approach and integrate it in a wider project focusing on the development of a mixed fisheries management plan for the Irish Sea. ILVO is happy with this as it fits in to the proposal from the Focus Group.
- It must have the support of the NWWRAC and all Member States with links to Irish Sea fisheries. ILVO has the support of the NWWRAC but the Member States have yet to respond to their request.
- A mechanism has to be found to address the weaknesses in the scientific assessments. This is work for ICES to do probably through a benchmarking process in the near future.
- Financing of observer programmes is provided under the Data Collection Framework. There will be no direct financing for the Advisory Councils for that area of work.
- Consider the time frames. Celtic Sea in development but no application for other areas in the next 2 years. ILVO is not happy with this as the project will be overtaken with other events.

Hilde advised the meeting that she is leaving ILVO and she is being replaced as project leader by Els Torreele with immediate effect.

#### *Exchange of views / comments from the floor*

Alan McCulla said that he was sorry to hear this. He thanked her for the work she had done so far and on his own behalf and on behalf of the NWWRAC WG4 members he wished her well in her future career. He noted the point that some boats did not have observers on board and asked what the outcome of this was. Hilde replied that the Belgian authorities will deal with this at a later date.

Alan McCulla brought it to the notice of the meeting that the ICES advice for pelagic stocks (e.g. herring) in the Irish Sea in 2014 said that: *“activities that have a negative impact on the spawning habitat of herring, such as extraction of marine aggregates and marine construction on the spawning grounds, should not occur.”*

He wondered why ICES did not include this statement in its advice for other species. The meeting agreed that this needs clarification (see action list in agenda item 7).

### 2.3. Template for a MAMP for the Irish Sea – Framework and Objectives

The Chairman said that the Secretariat had been very diligent in getting the template circulated to the members very quickly after the Focus Group meeting. He expressed his disappointment that there had been very little input from the members and proposed that we discuss and it now at the meeting.

Suggested amendments were agreed and recorded by the Secretariat. Barrie Deas was tasked with drafting two additional pieces of text which the Secretariat will incorporate and re-circulate to the members of the WG4 for approval (see action list in agenda item 7).

Johnny Woodlock brought up the Irish Seal Sanctuary proposal for a Fully Documented Fishery for the Irish Sea. He said that the ILVO project was a good example and called for it to be extended to all national fleets in the area as a pilot project.

Alan McCulla said that this item had been raised at the last WG4 meeting and had not been supported.

### 2.4. Collaboration with Member States to fund a Project Coordinator for a MAMP proposal

In the absence of Michael Keatinge, Conor Nolan, in his capacity as BIM manager, briefed the meeting on progress on this matter. He said that work is continuing on the application and it was close to being completed in the next few days.

Barrie Deas brought it to the attention of the meeting that the GAP2 Project had substantial funding available looking to fund smaller projects under the title of collaboration between scientists and stakeholders in underpinning Fisheries Management Plans with Member States.



The Project Coordinator would be funded under the EMFF national programmes but there were other aspects of the work that needed to be funded as well and we should look to GAP2 for this. See the action list in agenda item 7 in relation to these 2 points.

## 2.5. Data Issues: scientific uncertainties in mortality

Alan McCulla was very critical of some of the ICES advice for 2014 for the Irish Sea demersal stocks this year which he described a “next to useless”. He stated that the fisheries were falling victim to ever decreasing circles in terms of TAC reductions.

Barrie Deas recalled that in the last 5 or 6 years unaccounted mortality was a feature of the assessments for the North Sea. It was significant that this had disappeared from the texts this year which could be as a result of improved data availability.

Alan McCulla asked the Commission for its view.

Roy Griffin said that the Commission can see some progress being made but was concerned that although the advice has been reporting improvements since 2005 the data deficiencies do not seem to improve. A special request has been made to ICES on unaccounted mortality. A response was expected in July but this has been delayed until October at the request of ICES. This could be regarded as a good signal; hopefully ICES is investigating new assessment methods.

In relation to Irish Sea sole we need to make progress as the impact of all fleets on this stock has to be part of any management plan.

Overall, the Commission is happy with the direction the RAC is going in the Irish Sea but reminded the audience that any plan the NWWRAC comes up with will have to be consistent and in conformity with the principles of the revised Common Fisheries Policy.

Johnny Woodlock suggested we invite one scientist from ICES WGCSE to address the next Irish Sea Focus Group meeting. The Secretariat told the meeting that ICES had informed all RACs in June that it had limited resources available to attend RAC meetings in the future so the attendance of a person from ICES would be actively sought but could not be guaranteed.

### **3. Update on Irish Sea Nephrops**

#### **3.1. Change of timing for scientific advice**

Eibhlín O’Sullivan, gave an update in relation to Nephrops Management. The NWWRAC has made a proposal to the Commission to change the timing of the advice from June to October and we are pleased that the Commission and ICES have agreed to do this.

#### **3.2. Development of NWWRAC advice: timetable**

Eibhlín O’Sullivan said that we are awaiting the report of the ICES benchmark workshop on Nephrops (WKNEP) before we can progress on a proposal for advice.

Alan McCulla said that the last 10 months had been a unique period for this fishery because of the cold weather and we were lucky that the timing of the advice had been put back otherwise we would be looking at a disaster for the fishers.

Jane Sandell said that the abundance of burrows in the North Sea Nephrops fishery had not decreased however there was a decline in the number of individuals to be seen on the surface. There is a fear that the Commission will impose an across-the-board reduction in the TAC for areas VI and VII. She addressed the Commission representatives and reminded them of the NWWRAC agreed view that Functional Unit Management by TAC is not the answer. It will make things difficult for fishermen and managers alike.

Eibhlín O’Sullivan agreed with this statement saying that Functional Unit Management does not assist from a conservation point of view.

Roy Griffin said that the Commission had not developed any proposal this year to implement a Functional Unit Management, however he noted that ICES advice is provided by Functional Unit. It is asking the NWWRAC for advice on management options. In relation to the Porcupine there are issues for STECF who advocate a robust approach. The Commission needs to explore them.

Jane Sandell said that the NWWRAC did submit advice on the Porcupine Bank to the Commission last year (December 2012). The industry does support measures where an area is suffering from decline but the introduction of a TAC is an artificial constraint. This area has been changed dramatically since the TAC was introduced.

It was agreed to wait for the advice from ICES to be published before proceeding further (see action list in agenda item 7).



## 4. Seasonal closure for Skates and Rays

### 4.1. Update on Commission's request to STECF for advice on the evaluation of the effectiveness of a seasonal closure for Skates and Rays

Following an action agreed at the last WG4 meeting in Bilbao, Eibhlín O'Sullivan has drafted a letter on behalf of the NWWRAC asking the Commission to evaluate the effectiveness of the voluntary closure. The Secretariat will circulate it to the members for fast-track approval.

Roy Griffin said that the Commission had not requested ICES / STECF to evaluate the voluntary closure. Such a request needs to be supported by substantive information.

### 4.2. Spurdog and Porbeagle

Eibhlín O'Sullivan said that the NWWRAC had made no progress in drafting advice to the Commission in relation to the zero TAC for these species. In the context of the discard ban she proposed that the NWWRAC drafts a letter to the Commission to request ICES advice to improve the knowledge on these stocks and propose alternative management measures to the present arrangements. She suggested that these would include a suite of measures such as the landing of incidental by-catch, a small by-catch quota, maximum landing sizes, seasonal and area closures.

Johnny Woodlock said that these stocks are on the verge of extinction in the Northeast Atlantic hence the reason for protection status. He had written to Commissioner Damanaki on behalf of the Irish Seal Sanctuary and was informed that the discard ban will not apply to protected species.

Paul Trebilcock said that he supported the proposal from Eibhlín O'Sullivan. There is a big gap between the perception of the industry and the Commission.

## 5. Summary of actions agreed and proposals for the Executive Committee

### ICES Advice

1. Ask ICES for clarification on its advice in relation on pelagic stocks that certain activities such as offshore marine constructions that have a negative impact on spawning habitats should not occur and whether this advice should apply to other stocks.

### Mixed Fisheries Management Plan for the Irish Sea

2. Barrie Deas will draft two pieces of text to complete the template establishing the framework and objectives for the plan. The Secretariat will circulate the revised text.
3. Michael Keatinge will complete the application for EMFF funding for a Project Coordinator to drive the project.
4. The NWWRAC Secretariat will contact the GAP2 project coordinators to investigate additional sources of funding for associated work streams.
5. Ask the Executive Committee to endorse the Focus Group proposal and course of action for a Mixed Fisheries Management Plan for the Irish Sea.

### Nephrops Management

6. The NWWRAC will wait to receive the ICES advice for Nephrops stocks in areas VI and VII expected in October. The nephrops data coordinators, Jane Sandell and Eibhlín O'Sullivan, will draft the NWWRAC advice to the Commission on management options. Particular mention will be made to the Porcupine area (FU16).

### Seasonal Closure for Skates and Rays

7. The Secretariat will circulate a letter drafted by Eibhlín O'Sullivan for fast-track approval requesting the Commission to evaluate the voluntary closure proposed by the NWWRAC last December.

### Spurdog and Porbeagle

8. Eibhlín O'Sullivan will draft a letter to the Secretariat asking the Commission to request ICES for better information on the state of the stocks and including management proposals alternate to the current measures.

## 6. Close of the meeting

With no other business to discuss the Chairman thanked everyone for their participation.

**The meeting was adjourned at 13:00h.**





## **ANNEX I. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

<b>MEMBERS</b>		
<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Surname/s</u></b>	<b><u>Organization</u></b>
Alan	McCulla	ANIFPO – <b>WG4 Chairman</b>
Thomas	Bryan-Brown	Manx FPO – <b>WG4 Vice Chairman</b>
John	Crudden	EAA – <b>WG4 Rapporteur</b>
Bertie	Armstrong	NWWRAC Chairman
Barrie	Deas	NFFO UK
Lindsey	Dodds	WWF UK
John	Hermse	Scallop Association
John	Lynch	Irish Fishermen’s Organisation
Francis	O’Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisation
Caitlín	Uí Aodha	Irish South & East FPO
John	Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary

<b>OBSERVERS</b>		
<u><b>Name</b></u>	<u><b>Surname/s</b></u>	<u><b>Organization</b></u>
Victoria	Beaz	European Bureau for Conservation and Development (EBCD)
Paddy	Campbell	DARD - Northern Ireland
Stephen	Cederrand	European Fisheries Control Agency
Alan	Coghill	Scottish Fishermen's Federation
Debbie	Crockard	MCSUK – Seas at Risk
Ramón	De la Figuera	MAGRAMA – Spain
Iain	Glasgow	DEFRA – United Kingdom
Hugo	González	ANASOL-ARVI
Roy	Griffin	DG MARE - European Commission
Rory	Keatinge	Coastwatch Ireland
Jesús	Lourido	Puerto de Celeiro
Laurent	Markovic	DG MARE - European Commission
Michael	McLeod	Marine Scotland - Scottish Government
Eduardo	Míguez	EAFPA
Jennifer	Mouat	Scottish Whitefish FPA
Eibhlín	O'Sullivan	Irish South & West FPO
Mike	Park	Scottish Whitefish FPA
Brendan	Price	Irish Seal Sanctuary



<b>OBSERVERS (cont.)</b>		
<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Surname/s</u></b>	<b><u>Organization</u></b>
Dominic	Rihan	DG MARE – European Commission
Jane	Sandell	Scottish Fishermen’s Organisation
Sam	Stone	Marine Conservation Society UK
Paul	Trebilcock	Cornish FPO
Hilde	Vanhaecke	ILVO Belgium - <b>Presenter</b>
Liane	Veitch	Client Earth

<b>NWWRAC SECRETARIAT</b>		
Conor	Nolan	NWWRAC Executive Secretary
Joanna	McGrath	Executive Assistant, Administration and Finances
Alex	Rodríguez	Executive Assistant, Fisheries Policy and Communication