

North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council

Report Working Group 4 (Irish Sea – ICES VIIa)

**The Coach House – Dublin Castle
Friday 28 October 2011**

Outgoing Chairman: Lorcan O’Cinnéide
Incoming Chairman: Alan McCulla
Rapporteur: John Crudden

1. Welcome

The Chairman opened the meeting at 16:00h and welcomed everyone. William Stewart, observer from CFCA was introduced to the meeting. Apologies were received from Tom Bryan-Brown, Manx Fish Producers Organisation.

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

The agenda as circulated was agreed with the following inclusions:

- Report from the STECF evaluation process of Regulation (EC) No. 1342/2008 and its implications for other species (nephrops, whitefish, plaice, rays...) in the Irish Sea.
- State of Irish Sea cod stock and subsequent proposal for a zero TAC for Cod in 2012 to be included in item 4.
- STECF proposal on technical measures for the immediate reduction of discards at the Irish Sea stocks will be also discussed under item 4.

The report of the last Working Group meeting of 6th July 2011 was approved without comment.

2. Election of the Working Group 4 Officers

The Secretariat outlined the procedure for the nomination and election of Working Group 4 Officers.

- Chairman: One nomination had been received for the position of Chairman. **Alan McCulla** had been proposed and seconded and was unanimously elected.

- Vice-Chairman: One nomination was received for the position of Vice-Chairman. **Tom Bryan-Brown** had been proposed and seconded and was unanimously elected.
- Rapporteur: One nomination was received for the position of Rapporteur. **John Crudden** had been proposed and seconded and was unanimously elected.

The term of office for the three positions would be for three years (Oct 2011- Sep 2014).

Lorcan O’Cinnéide in his closing remarks as outgoing Chairman thanked everyone who had worked with him over the past six years. He said that he would have liked a more positive output from the WG than was the case but recognised the difficult situation that existed in the Irish Sea was a barrier to this as well as the institutional and regulatory constraints at EU level. He wished the incoming officers well for the coming three years and stood down as Chairman.

Alan McCulla assumed the Chairmanship of the meeting at this point.

Alan said that Lorcan was too hard on himself in relation to the output of the WG4 over the past number of years. His departure from the RAC will be a big loss and he wished him well in whatever he does in the future. He thanked everyone for elevating him to the position of Chairman.

Johnny Woodlock paid tribute to the fair manner in which Lorcan chaired the WG meetings and how he treated everyone and their opinions. He also wished him well in the future.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

3. Discussion of the Work Priorities for Working Group 4 for Year 7

The priority issues for the RAC had been discussed at the General Assembly the previous day¹. Not all issues were relevant to the Irish Sea and the meeting agreed to list the priority areas for the next WG4 meeting.

¹ See

http://www.nwwrac.org/admin/publication/upload/NWWRAC_Work%20Programme_NWWRAC_Y7_260911_EN.pdf

4. Review of management measures for Irish Sea Fisheries

4.1. Cod Recovery Plan for the Irish Sea

The Chairman opened the discussion to the floor.

Barrie Deas said that we had been discussing this topic for the past 2 days. The Commission was speaking about a regional approach as a solution. There were some parallels between the problems in the Irish Sea and West of Scotland but it was unfair to lump the two areas together. The onus was on the WG to come up with a better solution and it was important that we have 2 excellent scientists with us to help develop good advice. The upcoming STECF meeting was the most important and immediate issue for us now.

Alan McCulla said that the Cod Recovery Plan was 12 years in existence in the Irish Sea. The opinion in the Commission is that the Irish Sea is neglected when there are still relatively healthy stocks such as prawns and some pelagic species (e.g. herring). We need to change that view when looking for a replacement plan.

Lorcan O’Cinnéide expressed the view that the situation in the Irish sea has different drivers. As regards the state of the cod stock the ICES advice this year is the worst ever. Those who don’t target nephrops have no other avenue to make a living. On top of this the foreseeable introduction of a set of emergency measures to reduce discards as well as an automatic -25% TAC would mean that some boats could not operate. All these will influence how this WG does its job. It will be up to the industry representatives from UK, Ireland and Belgium to come up with initiatives that will allow their members make a living. We don’t want to denude the Irish Sea of fishermen and displace them to other areas.

4.2. Development of a strategic plan for the Irish Sea

Colm Lordan said that he shared the sentiments of the industry representatives expressed above. The ecosystem has changed since the 1950’s and despite the best efforts of everyone it may not be possible for it to get it back to where it was then. We need to think on an ecosystem approach for the implementation of a management plan for the Irish Sea fisheries and address the biological realities of the stocks that have declined (e.g. haddock, whiting, sole...) and set clear management objectives to balance them against those that are in a healthy state now.

John Lynch shared his opinion that those segments of the fleet that have changed their methods towards a more ecosystem based approach are the very ones that are bearing the heaviest measures imposed on them (e.g. reduction of fishing effort and TACs).

Lorcan O’Cinnéide said that many fishermen were not accepting the need to move from a single species to a multi species ecosystem based approach and that must change. The level of uncertainty for so many stocks is difficult to accept and we cannot accept the 0% TAC. There needs to be a cold and realistic acceptance of providing data to improve existing deficiencies.

Johnny Woodlock said that it was up to the industry to fill the gaps in terms of data needs. He believed that the industry had that data as was demonstrated at a recent NWWRAC focus group meeting on Sharks, Skates and Rays held in Madrid in September. He suggested that closed nursery areas be established. These would impose big sacrifices in the short-term but would deliver healthy sustainable stocks in the long-term.

Pieter-Jan Schon said that a scientific paper could be drafted to suggest a way forward. A benchmarking exercise for Irish Sea Cod will take place in 2012. He said that the question of unaccounted mortality (whether natural or predation) needs to be taken account of. It is important to develop more science-industry partnerships to pull together the existing knowledge and close the gap in terms of data deficiencies.

4.3. Nephrops in ICES Area VII

The meeting was reminded that there had been considerable discussion in WG 2 on nephrops and it wasn’t necessary to discuss it again. A paper had been drafted by the Irish industry but had not been agreed on as yet. The overall approach fell within the remit of the discard initiative. The 2011 estimate is that the stock is in a very healthy state and being fished close to MSY and that message needs to be broadcast.

Actions:

The Secretariat will invite a scientific representative from AFBI to give a presentation on an ecosystem-based management project for the Irish Sea at next WG4 meeting.

The meeting agreed to develop and deliver a scientific paper based on the points discussed and identify where the problems and uncertainties lie for each stock and what needs to be done as remedial measures / actions.

5. Data deficiency issues for stocks assessment

There were no reports from the Data Co-ordinators as yet. The meeting was reminded of who had responsibility for the various stocks:

- Sean O'Donoghue will report on cod and haddock;
- Alan McCulla will deal with whiting but it is not considered as a priority stock;
- Lorcan O'Cinnéide and Eibhlín O'Sullivan will share responsibilities for Nephrops in VII;
- Paul Trebilcock will look after Skates and Sharks.

Pieter-Jan Schon reminded the meeting that there was a standing invitation from ICES to members of the RAC to attend benchmarking meetings as observers. Alan McCulla put his name forward as an observer.

INFORMATION POINTS

6. Outcomes of the Focus Group meeting on Skates, Rays and Sharks (Madrid, 16th of September 2011)

The Chairman said that this point had been discussed earlier in Working Group 2 but he allowed a brief discussion to take place.

John Lynch said that his members regularly undertake observer trips with the Marine Institute and have collated a lot of data over the years on spawning grounds and nursery areas. His members have self-imposed MLS and tagging programmes in place for sharks.

Colm Lordan said that the assessment model used by the Commission was age based and was only suitable for cod. Also landing have not been species based in the past.

Johnny Woodlock expressed surprise that fishermen knew exactly where some of these stocks were and that they had the data to prove it. He recognised that there are deficiencies for some stocks and suggested a dedicated fleet to address this.

7. Discussion on developments of Irish Sea Marine Conservation Zones Project

Alan McCulla delivered a presentation made by AFBI on the extent of Marine Protected Areas in Northern Ireland and the North Irish Sea. The 85% of the fishing effort of the Northern Ireland fleet is in these areas and will result in up to 100 trawlers being impacted.

Lorcan O’Cinnéide said that was a multiplicity of agencies carrying out their own studies on site selection resulting in a complex and sometimes overlapping set of criteria used to define an area as MPA/MCZ. Furthermore, it was a full-time job for the fishermen representatives trying to follow their activities. He did not advocate a blanket “no” to MPAs however we should be concerned at the way the process is being implemented.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

8. Summary of actions and proposals to be put forward to the Executive Committee

8.1. Development of a strategic plan for Irish Sea Fisheries:

- The Secretariat will invite a scientific representative from AFBI to give a presentation on an ecosystem-based management project for the Irish Sea at next WG4 meeting.
- The meeting agreed to develop and deliver a scientific paper based on the points discussed and identify where the problems and uncertainties lie for each stock and what needs to be done as remedial measures / actions.

8.2. Data deficiencies:

The appointed data Co-ordinators for each Irish Sea Stock will liaise with fishing industry colleagues and scientists and attend all necessary ICES meetings and will report back on the progress achieved in work at the next WG4 meeting.

8.3. Other issues:

The meeting called on the Executive Committee to ask the Secretariat to look into the feasibility of rotating the WG meetings so that WG 4 does not always fall last.

With no other business to the discuss the Chairman thanked everyone for their participation and closed the meeting at 18:00h

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ANNEX I. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

<u>MEMBERS</u>		
<u>Name</u>	<u>Surname/s</u>	<u>Organization</u>
Lorcan	O’Cinnéide	Irish Fish Producers' Organisation – Outgoing WG4 Chairman
Alan	McCulla	Anglo-North Irish Fish PO – Elected WG4 Chairman
John	Crudden	European Anglers Alliance - Rapporteur
Luc	Corbisier	Stichting voor Duurzame Visserij
John	Daly	Irish Seal Sanctuary
Barrie	Deas	NFFO UK
John	Lynch	Irish Fishermen’s Organisation

<u>OBSERVERS</u>		
<u>Name</u>	<u>Surname/s</u>	<u>Organization</u>
Edward	Fahey	Free lance journalist
Colm	Lordan	Marine Institute – Ireland
Brendan	Price	Environmental Activist
Pieter-Jan	Schon	AFBI – Northern Ireland
William	Stewart	Community Fisheries Control Agency (CFCA)
John	Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary



NWWRAC SECRETARIAT		
Conor	Nolan	Executive Secretary
Alexandre	Rodríguez	Executive Assistant, Policy Coordinator