

**North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council Meeting
with the
EU Commission
on the
Deepwater Gillnet Ban**

7th of April 2006

NWWRAC

Barrie Deas
Helen Mc Lachlan
Juan Carlos Corras
Sean O'Donoghue (Obs)
Jacques Pichon (Obs)
Patricia Comiskey (Sec)

Experts

Phil Large (CEFAS)
Esteban Puente (AZTI)
Nils Roar Hareide (DEEPNET & MI Ireland)
Sean Ryan (DEFRA)

Observers

Thomas Dias
Javier Pita
Manuel Otero
Luis Garcia
Juan Pintos
Roman Garcia Gallanto
Concepción Sánchez Trujillano

EU Commission

Ernesto Penas Lado
Peter Hopkins
Javier Vazquez
Lordes Alvarellos

Introduction

Ernesto Penas Lado opened the meeting by welcoming all participants and asked everybody to briefly introduce themselves.

Mr Penas Lado then gave an overview of the outcome of the meeting with the NWWRAC on the 7th of March where the Commission has asked the NWWRAC to consider how to progress the removal of the deepwater gillnet ban. He stated that the NWWRAC had set out general recommendations, that the hake fishery be removed in the first instance and that further work be conducted on the monkfish and deepwater shark fisheries to ascertain practices in this fishery. The Commission had asked that the NWWRAC organize this meeting of experts, industry and Commission to further develop these recommendations into detailed plans. He suggested that the agenda drawn up by the NWWRAC be followed for this meeting.

Mr Barrie Deas of the NWWRAC thanked Mr Penas Lado and concurred with his synopsis of the situation to date. He informed the EU Commission that the NWWRAC had met with the fishing boat owners involved in the fishery that morning and there was a lengthy discussion on many issues he felt that they should have an opportunity to air their views now.

Juan Carlos Corras stated on behalf of his organization that they could not support a partial opening of the fishery. He informed the Commission that his organization had presented recommendations regarding length of gear, mesh size, soak time and control that should be implemented for all three fisheries.

Luis Garcia stated that the depth should be extended to 850m to allow the tangle net fishing for monkfish to resume. This is a depth that trawl fisheries operate at and if this ban had been put in place for trawlers it would be lifted immediately.

Roman Garcia Gallanto stated that the ban was ill conceived and did not take into account the enormous social and economic implications and suggested that it be lifted immediately for all fisheries.

Javier Pita stated that the industry wanted to achieve a responsible and sustainable fishery and not simply to reopen it and that the Commission should implement the measures being suggested by the industry. He stated that the mesh size for gillnets fishing for hake should be standardized across area VII and VIII as 100mm.

Mr Penas Lado thanked the industry representatives for their opinion. He however stated that changes in mesh sizes were a longer term issue which could be considered in the review of Technical Conservation Measure but could not be introduced as part of a quick reopening of the deep water fisheries. He suggested that we continue with the agenda taking the above points into consideration.

Re-opening of the Hake Fishery

Definition of the Hake fishery

Mr Barrie Deas informed the Commission that the NWWRAC had debated in the morning if it was best to define the fishery as a list of vessels, by mesh size or by depth.

Ernesto Penas suggested that comments on three issues be sought from around the table.

Mr Sean O'Donoghue stated that mesh size is how to describe this fishery and said that the status quo on mesh size should be retained, which is 120mm for area VI and VII. He said that this would be an easy amendment to include in the TAC and quota regulation.

Ms Helen McLachlan stated that as an NGO representative of the NWWRAC she would not support the depth suggested by the industry of 850m as this may include a bycatch of deepwater sharks. She informed the Commission that the scientific experts at the meeting in the morning had confirmed that reducing the depth to 600m would exclude most bycatch of deepwater shark but that this would need to be verified with an observer programme. Ms McLachlan noted that if the Commission were to look at restricting the hake fishery on depth then perhaps the ICES definition of deepwater as over 400m should be considered a cut off point for the hake fishery. Finally she stated that whatever decision the Commission took there would need to be a means of monitoring the fishery and that any measures would need to be effectively enforced.

Javier Vazquez asked that the participants consider measures that are controllable. A list of vessels can be ascertained from the Member States and should be the method used to define the fishery.

Nils Roar Hareide stated that with a list of vessels there will always be changes, and that the depth is difficult because if the reopening extends to 850m there will be a potential bycatch of shark, if depth is to be considered a maximum of 600m should be used. He concluded that the mesh size might be the most useful to consider from a control point of view as the monkfish and deepwater shark fisheries use a completely different mesh size.

Sean O'Donoghue stated that the idea suggested by Javier Vazquez of the Commission may not work as the western waters regulation do not specify hake vessels. He reiterated that the best way to describe the fishery is by gear type, ie 120mm mesh. Depth could be considered but should be tied in with the mesh size.

Juan Carlos Corras stated that it would not be fair to use vessels as this would reduce a vessels ability to change gear type etc. He also stated that it would be shortsighted to limit the depth as climate changes are constantly affecting the distribution of species such as hake. Furthermore he stated that if mesh sizes were to be used to define the fishery, the mesh size for hake should be set at 100mm.

Sean Ryan of DEFRA stated that the Commission should consider a restrictive opening of the fishery based on mesh size and depths and that this should be considered by STECF later in the year.

Peter Hopkins confirmed that the Commission are planning a meeting of STECF in July to review these fisheries and to propose appropriate management measures.

Observer programme

Mr Barrie Deas stated that this was one of the priorities was the early reopening of the hake fishery if necessary with an observer programme. He stated that the NWWRAC were not clear, if there is to be an observer programme, how extensive this programme should be and would ask the experts present their views on it.

Mr Phil Large of CEFAS stated that an observer scheme to record the bycatch of deepwater species would need to be extensive. However, if considering only operation practices, the observer programme may not need to be quite as detailed and expensive.

Ernesto Penas Lado stated that the Commission would consider the need for an observer programme for the reopening of this fishery.

Conclusions

The Commission recognized that it was difficult to obtain a solution to this problem for the NWWRAC but stated that this discussion had been useful and will help to formulate a definition of the fishery. Once the fishery is adequately defined by the Commission, they will seek to amend the TAC and quota regulation so that the deepwater hake fishery will be removed from the ban.

Clean up Programme

Ernesto Penas Lado informed the meeting that the Commission is preparing to fund a study on the specific areas for clean up. This is being prepared momentarily and is due to be advertised for tender soon.

Sean Ryan of DEFRA informed the meeting of a second DEFRA/CEFAS gear retrieval survey, which is due to take place over the summer months of 2006.

Juan Carlos Corras informed the meeting that his organization believes that nothing will be found in these studies but that his members are willing to co-operate with those carrying out the work.

Monkfish and Deepwater Shark

Barrie Deas suggested that there is a real need for further data on both of these fisheries and as a result a pilot project to collect data should be put in place for these fisheries. In order to put a scheme in place this meeting should address three issues, how many vessels should be used in the scheme, what information should be collected and what type observer coverage is needed.

Phil Large stated that the type and extent of observer scheme needed depends upon the type of information you wish to collect. Considering there is a need to collect a wide range of information on these fisheries, a comprehensive observer scheme is most likely needed in the long term. However if the Commission wanted to take a snapshot of such a fishery and to collect some data in time for the STECF meeting in July then he proposed that they consider organizing a two week trip in each area, VI, VII and VIII on the monkfish fishery. Dr Large stated that the red crab fishery should also be considered as part of this observer scheme and that one two week trip on this fishery should also be carried out.

Sean Ryan of DEFRA suggested that since there was some existing information on the deepwater shark fishery which could be made available to STECF, the focus should be on the monkfish fishery.

Ernesto Penas Lado agreed with Phil Large's suggestion and stated that the Member States could organize such trips once they inform the Commission appropriately. However he would ask that the Member States in question communicate and agree on a common programme together before it is launched.

Luis Garcia stated that he would support such a scheme and would offer his vessel to carry out the campaign. He also stated that he could cover the cost of the biologist onboard.

Conclusions

It was agreed that a snapshot of the fishery should be taken by carrying out 4 two week cruises over May and June. The data from these cruises will be made available to STECF in July. Three of the cruises will collect data for the monkfish fishery in area VI, VII and VIII and one will collect data on the deepwater redcrab fishery. The UK should present its proposals to the Commission for the cruises it will carry out and the Commission will approach the relevant French authorities to see whether they will carry out similar work in area VIII. The scheme may incur a partial cost for the vessels commissioned. The main things to be considered in the observer scheme will be soak time, catch composition, discards and length of nets. On the deepwater shark fishery current data would be provided from the UK for review by STECF.

Conclusions of the Meeting and Timetable

Ernesto Penas Lado concluded the meeting by summarizing the approach that the Commission would take. He stated that the commission would take a three phased approach:

Phase one: The Commission will define the Hake fishery and move as quickly as possible to develop an amendment to the TAC and quota regulations to remove the hake fishery from the ban.

Phase two: The Commission will work with the relevant Member States (France and UK) to develop a limited observer scheme to collect data on the monkfish and red crab fishery. The scheme will be carried out over May and June and data will be reviewed by STECF in July.

Phase three: The Commission will work with the relevant Member States to consider the option for longer term management of these fisheries.

Mr Penas Lado then thanked all participants and closed the meeting.