

**North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council
Executive Committee Meeting
Brussels
22nd of November 2007**

Welcome

The Chairman welcomed the participants to the meeting and stated that he looked forward to a fruitful meeting. The minutes of the last meeting in Dublin (27 September 2007) were considered and the following points were agreed:

- The Spanish fishing industry thinks that real-time closures are not an appropriate tool for rebuilding the cod stocks. However, it acknowledges that the idea of individual vessel Cod Avoidance Plans (CAP) might be a useful tool for those metiers and fleets with significant catches or by-catches of cod, whenever these CAP will be applied on a voluntary basis and it is guaranteed that they will not affect to the activities of other fleets (like the Spanish) not targeting nor by-catching cod.
- The letter regarding the hake management plan should go immediately to the Commission.
- The issue regarding the Long-term management initiative and the possibility for funding to continue the current CEFAS project should be progressed with the Commission

The Agenda for this meeting was adopted without comment.

The Chairman also took the opportunity to introduce Isabelle Viallon from the EU Commission who is the newly appoint RAC co-ordinator.

Advice to the Commission on TACs and quotas for 2008.

The Chairman stated that as this was the most important issue on the agenda, he was willing to dedicate a substantial amount of time to get the NWWRAC advice right. The chairman asked each of the chairs to present the outcome advice given at their meetings on the 30th and 31st of October, these would then be discussed in light of the information provided at the RAC/ACFA meeting on the 13th of November.

Before commencing discussions at working group level the Chairman was asked to consider the text for the preamble to the advice. It was agreed that the preamble should clearly set out the NWWRACs views on the frontloading process, the scientific data and the method of applying TACs for under utilised stocks. The advice for the stocks would then be set out on area by area bases.

The advice developed as a result of the discussions in this section of the meeting is attached in Annex 1 of this document.

It was agreed that the NWWRAC would submit its views to the Commission before the end of November, in order to achieve this it was agreed that a draft advice paper would be formulated and circulated to the Executive Committee members with a limited time (2-3days) to comment. In addition due to time limitations the draft paper would be in English only.

Presentation from JNCC on proposed NATURA sites in UK waters

The Chairman welcome Mark Tasker and Charlotte Johnston to the meeting to discuss the UKs proposed Natura site for waters beyond 12nm. The presentation given by JNCC is available on the NWWRAC website.

Charlotte Johnston informed the NWWRAC that the UK Government have selected seven sites to put forward to the EU Commission as Natura sites under the Habitats directive. Of those seven, four are of interest to this RAC. The UK government is due to commence the consultation process on the proposed sites in December and will be asking for comments on them before March. The UK is currently looking for general comments, the sites are only identified and the management measures are not being considered at present. In addition the UK government will be considering the economic impacts of these sites before proposing them to the EU Commission. JNCC will ensure the NWWRAC is included in the consultation process.

The chairman thanks Charlotte and Mark for coming to the meeting and taken the time to discuss this important issue at length.

It was agreed that the NWWRAC would study the proposals in more detail and make a response to the consultation process over the coming weeks and before the March deadline.

Proposals for Focus Groups and Workshops

The following proposals for focus groups had been submitted to the Executive Committee for endorsement

- Improvement of Data.
- Cod Avoidance Plans
- Joint workshop on NSRAC on Natura 2000 and Habitats directive.
- Deepwater Gillnets
- Deep-Sea Species
- Northern Hake

The secretariat informed the members that it was difficult from a budget point of view to put in place all of the focus groups requested by members. The costs to set up all of these meetings in the current budget year was estimated €140,000, however there is only €70,000 available in the budget to put these meetings in place, therefore the secretariat asked for solutions to reduce the number of groups/meetings. The following was agreed:

- All groups would meet no more than twice within this budget year
- No more than 12 members would be funded to attend the meeting (including experts)
- No more than 15 should attend these meetings so as to permit work to be done, these are focus groups where work needs to be achieved it was felt that if more than 15 attend this work will not be possible. In addition there are interpretation implications when more than 15 people attend a meeting.
- The first set of meetings would be held in the first quarter of 2008, the dates would be published by the secretariat in the coming weeks
- The meetings on Deep-sea and Deepwater gillnet would be held back to back to reduce costs and the French organisation CNPMM offer facilitates to hold these meetings.
- The Spanish would assist in the provision of rooms, interpretation and equipment for the meeting on Northern Hake

It was agreed that this would alleviate the pressure on budget for these meetings and that the secretariat would commence work to set these meetings up in early 2008. It was further agreed that the work programme for 2008 would be amended to include this information and would be posted on the website.

Communications Programme

The secretariat presented a proposed communications programme for endorsement, the proposal was endorsed without change and the secretariat agreed to commence work in accordance to this paper.

AOB

The Chairman informed the members that Dolores Hanratty was leaving the NWWRAC Secretariat. Sam wished her best of luck in all future endeavours and presented her with a small token of appreciation from the NWWRAC.

Close of meeting

The NWWRAC meeting was closed at 5.00pm

ANNEX I - North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council Advice for TACS and quotas 2008

Introduction

The NWWRAC developed this advice after in-depth discussions with ICES, the Commission and internally over the period of October 30th-November 22nd. The following are general comments which the NWWRAC would ask the Commission to consider in conjunction with the advice being offered on a stock basis below.

Frontloading

The NWWRAC welcomes this opportunity to comment on the ICES advice for stocks and the Commission first draft proposal of TACs and quotas for 2008. However, the NWWRAC requests that the Commission ensure that this is the last year that the annual TAC and quota advice is delivered in this way. While the NWWRAC does recognise Commission's efforts to move towards frontloading they wish to underline the real need for earlier delivery of advice in 2008. The NWWRAC will of course do their utmost to support the Commission and ICES in this process change.

Scientific Data

The NWWRAC are concerned from the information received that data deficiencies for fish stocks are increasing. The NWWRAC requests that the Commission, ICES and the RACs make this a priority work issue for 2008. These discussions, regarding the gaps in scientific knowledge and about what is needed to fill these gaps, need to commence as a matter of urgency in early 2008. We are keen to play our part in this and will discuss with ICES how we can improve matters as soon in the new year as possible.

Under-utilised Stocks

The NWWRAC emphasises that they do not support the approach of ICES and the Commission with regard to the management of stocks that are deemed 'under-utilised'. Firstly the NWWRAC must urge that, unless ICES presents its advice in terms of a TAC tonnage, based on a proper assessment or data which clearly indicates that stocks are in decline, then the Commission should propose a "status-quo" TAC, rather than one based on average of recent landings or other reducing formulae. Furthermore where there is no assessment or a very uncertain assessment the Commission should seek additional information from fisheries managers, from any relevant fisheries science partnerships and from fishermen and their representatives. Finally the NWWRAC strongly believes that if the Commission continue to manage underutilised stocks by reducing the TAC annually, then more pressure may be exerted on these stocks by Member States to ensure that quota levels are maintained each year.

Comments on Stocks

- The NWWRAC recommends the following for stocks in the waters west of Scotland (ICES area VI)

Cod in VI: The TAC for this stock should be rolled-over to maintain 2007 levels on the basis that cod avoidance plans would be developed and implemented in 2008 as a pilot project with the central objective of reducing overall cod mortality in this area. The NWWRAC note that not all fisheries stakeholders fishing in this area are within the RAC, however it is proposed that the benefits of the scheme may provide suitable incentives for all relevant fishermen to participate.

Haddock in VIa&b: The same proportional relationship between catches and TAC that was used to determine the TAC for 2007 should be used to set the TAC for 2008.

Rockall Haddock: The same proportional relationship (65%) used to determine this TAC in 2007 to be used to set the TAC for 2008. Based on ICES advice of 10640 tonnes for 2008 this equates to a TAC Vib for 2008 of 6916 tonnes.

It is also recommended that NEAFC endeavour to achieve a robust international management plan that includes Russia.

Northern Shelf Anglerfish: The NWWRAC agreed with the advice given by ICES for this stock and supported the on-going work to improve the assessment of this stock.

Saithe in VI: The NWWRAC agreed with the advice given for this stock.

Whiting in VIa: Advice given on this stock is inadequate due to deficiencies in data, particularly regarding discarding. As outlined above, TAC levels based on recent catch levels are not appropriate will simply encourage the industry to put pressure on the stock to retain TAC levels. The TAC should be based on additional science which can be sought from working with industry. It is agreed that some improvements in selectivity could address discard levels.

Megrim in VI: Again, advice is given on an inadequate basis due to deficiencies in data. Additional science should be sought through work with the industry.

Nephrops in VI: Advice on Nephrops is supported.

- The NWWRAC makes the following recommendations for stocks in Celtic Sea area (ICES area VIIbcfghjk):

Data Deficient Stocks

The data used to develop the advice for many of the stocks in this area is inadequate; this is a situation that must be remedied immediately. Work to improve the data and reduce knowledge gaps must be made a priority for the RACs, ICES and the Commission in 2008. The NWWRAC will be working to set up workshops in 2008 to bring together the relevant stakeholders to try and overcome this ever-increasing problem. In the meantime ICES' and Commission's efforts to base TACs for 2008 on recent catch levels alone must be avoided as this will simply lead to mismanagement and will encourage member states to put pressure on stocks to retain TAC levels.

As a result for the majority of stocks in this area the NWWRAC is suggesting a roll-over of the TACs for the stocks where ICES has recommended the use of recent landing averages as management measures and the Commission has recommended a 15% reduction due to 'under utilisation'. This is accompanied by a commitment from the NWW RAC to try and address the paucity of data in these fisheries so that future advice can be better informed. The stocks in particular for which the NWWRAC are suggesting this roll-over include: Megrim in VII, Haddock in VII, VIII, IX, X, Plaice in VIIbc, Plaice in VIIhjk, Sole in VIIbc, Sole in VIIhjk, Anglerfish in VII, whiting in VIIbcdefghk and Ling in VI, VII, VIII

Other Stocks

Cod in VIIb-k: The majority of NWWRAC members, with the exception of WWF and the Spanish representatives who opted to abstain from advising on this stock, recommend that the TAC be rolled-over for 2008.

This advice is given on the basis that the Cod stock in these areas is showing signs of improved recruitment that is not yet picked up in the assessment. This is underlined by the fact that most member States have exhausted their quota for Cod in this area since early autumn. Furthermore the fishing mortality on these stocks has reduced by 30%. This is somewhat attributed to the Trevoise closure but is largely attributed to reductions in fishing capacity of vessels traditionally fishing in this area. In addition, with the introduction of improved control and enforcement in the area and the implementation of systems to monitor the buyers and sellers, landing controls on this stock are much tighter. The NWWRAC strongly believes that if the TAC is reduced by a further 25% in 2008, with no other measures to address cod avoidance, it will simply lead to significant discarding.

The fact that all of quota in this area has been used up in 2007 indicates that there are good sized fish on the grounds and indicates that if the quota is restricted further next year, the fishery will be closed even earlier and there will be a strong risk of greater levels of discarding. The NWWRAC therefore advises that rather than reducing the TAC that it is rolled-over and that incentives be put in place to take up appropriate selectivity measures. The NWWRAC will be working with scientists in 2008 to consider appropriate selectivity and cod avoidance measures for fisheries in this area.

Finally, the NWWRAC unanimously supports the maintenance of the Trevoise closure in this area, even though the Scientists have not been able to ascertain whether the reduction in fishing mortality is due to the closure. Nevertheless, the industry strongly believes that the Trevoise Closure has had the desired impact on the cod stocks in this area and as a result the NWWRAC strongly recommend its continuation.

Hake in VI, VII, Vb : The NWWRAC members agree with the ICES advice given on this stock but would urge that the Commission move towards a long term management plan for this stock as is recommended in Article 3 of EC Regulation 811/2004. The NWWRAC has written to the Commission separately on this issue.

Sole and Plaice in VIIfg: The NWWRAC supports the Commission advice on these stocks.

- The NWWRAC makes the following recommendations for stocks in English Channel (ICES area VIIde):

Plaice 7d: The NWWRAC urge that, in line with earlier statements, unless ICES presents its advice in terms of a TAC tonnage, based on a proper assessment, the Commission should propose a “status-quo” TAC rather than one based on average of recent landings.

Plaice 7e: The NWWRAC is concerned that the retrospective bias inherent in the Fishing Mortality (downwards) and Biomass (upwards) for this stock is causing much anxiety. ICES assessment states “Due to considerable uncertainty in current estimates of the stock and in recent recruitment estimates it is not possible to provide a short-term forecast.” Under these circumstances and in relation to the combined TAC with the 7d Plaice stock, NWWRAC request that for 2008 the TAC (7d,e) Plaice should be no lower than that set for 2007.

Sole 7d: The NWWRAC supports the advised TAC for 2008.

Sole 7e: The NWWRAC strongly supports the concept of a long-term management plan (MAMP) for this stock. However, the NWWRAC endorse the approach of earlier drafts of the proposed regulation as the potential impact of the strict quantitative interpretation of Article 3 of the MAMP¹, is causing great anxiety. Whilst it is accepted that the long-term target should be a Fishing Mortality corresponding to Maximum Sustainable Yield, $F_y=0.27$, the NWWRAC recommend that this is achieved at a more gradual rate than is now being implemented. Furthermore, the NWWRAC notes that 21% of the UK beam trawl fleet has been decommissioned during 2007 and this has not yet been taken into account into the recovery plan. Therefore, the NWWRAC recommend that the Commission reconsiders using a three-year static-step approach for TAC and effort limits as was proposed and supported by the NWWRAC last year.

- The NWWRAC makes the following recommendations for stocks in Irish Sea (ICES area VIIa):

Irish Sea Data Enhancement Project:

The NWWRAC support the implementation of the Irish Sea Data enhancement project and believe it is one of the most positive outcomes of December council 2007. However to ensure consistency within this initiative the NWWRAC strongly recommends that the levels of cuts being proposed by the Commission for stocks in this area be alleviated so that the data enhancement project can deliver.

In addition the NWWRAC recommend that the incentives, in terms of days at sea, to keep this project in place are intrinsic in the forthcoming annexes of the TAC and quota regulations. Furthermore, the NWWRAC would also urge the Commission and ICES to ensure that the data obtained from this exercise is fed into the assessments in 2008. Finally, the NWWRAC are recommending that further work is done in this area to improve retrospective data to assist scientist in confirming the robustness of the assessments. The NWWRAC are currently drafting a project proposal to this effect.

¹ Council Regulation (EC) No 509/2007, adopted April 2007

'Queenie' Scallop fishery

The NWWRAC recommend that the queenie fishery executed in the Isle of Mann be exempted from the days at sea regime. Supporting documentation regarding this fishery is available and can be forwarded to you on request.