



June 2010

Subject: Request for collaboration in the annual survey of the Northern Shelf anglerfish stock

Dear Member State representative

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chairman of the North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council (NWWRAC). On behalf of the NWWRAC, I strongly encourage you to support and participate in the annual survey of the Northern Shelf anglerfish stock, which is currently operated under the auspices of Marine Scotland Science.

A presentation of this survey was made by Dr. Paul G. Fernandes at a Working Group meeting of the NWWRAC, held in Madrid last March¹. Our members considered this survey as a good example of scientific initiative in developing an innovative thinking to improve data accuracy and knowledge of the state of this stock. Furthermore, the NWWRAC members believe that this study might be an excellent test case for applying the methodology to future surveys for other species.

Background

In 2005, Fisheries Research Services (FRS, now Marine Scotland Science MSS) initiated a project to estimate the abundance and distribution of anglerfish on the European Northern Shelf. The project was unique in two aspects: firstly, the aim was to produce an absolute abundance estimate (i.e. a total number and biomass of anglerfish), as opposed to an index of relative abundance which is normally produced from surveys; and, secondly, the project involved the fishing industry throughout, from planning through to the execution of the surveys. The surveys also produce an index for northern shelf megrim.

For some time prior to these surveys becoming established, there was no assessment of the status of the stocks of anglerfish or megrim on the northern shelf. The trends in stock biomass derived from these surveys now form the basis for the advice emanating from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) for both of these stocks.

Six surveys have been carried out to date, in November 2005, 2006, 2007 and April 2008, 2009 & 2010. These covered much of the area of the known distribution of Northern Shelf anglerfish (ICES Divisions IVa, VIa and VIb at Rockall), with the exception of the central and southern parts of Area IV and the Skagerrak and Kattegat (Division IIIa) – see Figure 1. As the area is so large, these are multi-vessel surveys, incorporating the research vessel FRV Scotia, and three commercial fishing vessels. In 2006, 2007 and 2009, the survey was extended south into Irish waters with the participation of the Irish Marine Institute (MI) in association with Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM).

¹ Meeting report and presentation of Dr. Paul Fernandes are available on the meeting site:
http://www.nwwrac.org/Meetings/Meetings_ENG/Navigation.php?id=390&language=English

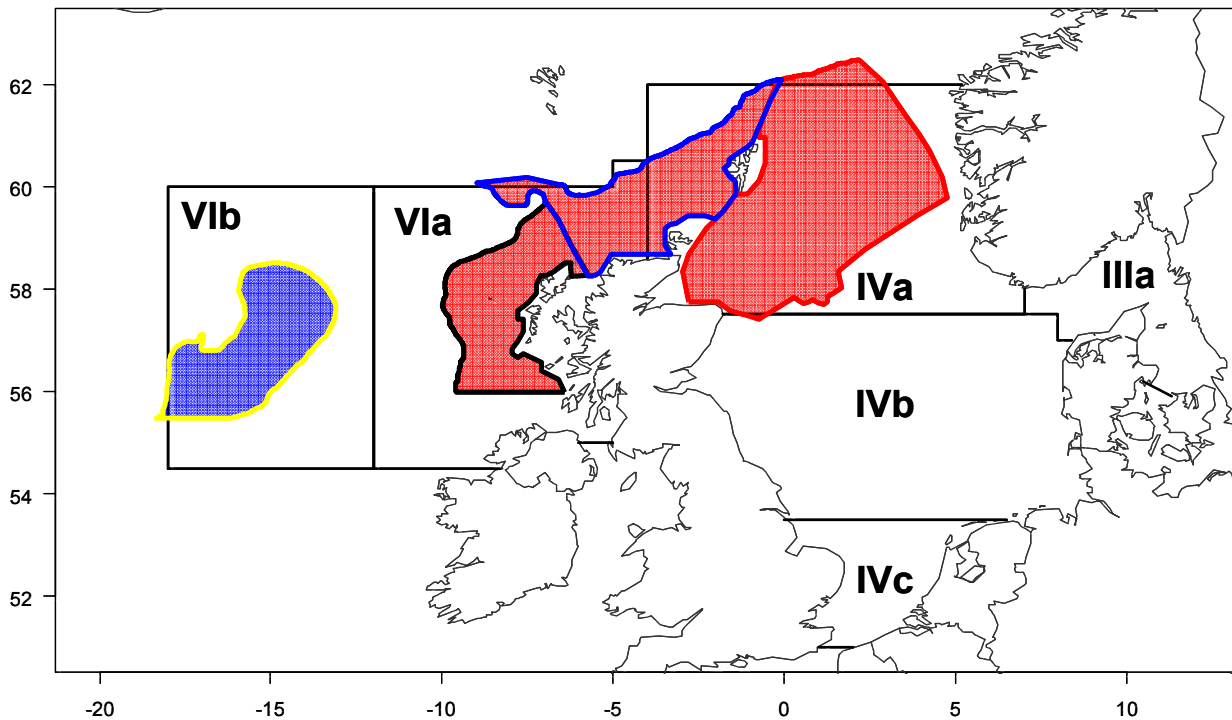


Figure 1. Map of the British Isles and the North Sea showing the ICES Divisions (roman numerals) which comprise the Northern Shelf anglerfish stock and the areas surveyed (shaded) by the MarineScotland Science anglerfish survey. In 2006, 2007 and 2009, the Marine Institute of Ireland also participated, extending the survey into the southern part of ICES Division VIa.

At a North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council (NWWWRAC) Working Group 1 meeting, held on 4 March 2010 in Madrid, a presentation was given by Dr. Paul G. Fernandes describing the results of the anglerfish survey to date. Several participants remarked on the fact that there are areas occupied by the Northern Shelf anglerfish which are not surveyed (namely the central and southern parts of Area IV and the Skagerrak and Kattegat in Division IIIa). Since the surveys started in 2005, MSS has made repeated requests to the research institutes from other countries with an interest in the anglerfish fishery to participate in the survey. These requests have been made through various international fora including the ICES expert group, which deals with the assessment of the Northern Shelf anglerfish stock. To date, the Marine Institute of Ireland is the only institute to have participated in 3 of the 5 years of the survey.

The NWWWRAC members suggested that a request for additional participation should be made, through the NWWWRAC, to all of the Member States which have active participation in the organisation.



Request

The NWWRAC recommends that those member states with a significant interest in the Northern Shelf anglerfish (and megrim) fishery participate in the survey of the Northern Shelf anglerfish stock. This survey is currently operated under the auspices of Marine Scotland Science.

Member states with a significant interest in this stock might include those with a total EC quota, in the ICES areas concerned, which are in excess of 200 t (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Spain, the Netherlands & the United Kingdom) and Norway (which had catches in excess of 1000 t in 2008).

This participation would take the form of:

- 10 days ship time of a suitable commercial or research vessel
- Sufficient funds to buy a net identical to that used in the MSS surveys;
- Deployment of scientific staff to collect data on the vessels;
- The provision of gear measurement equipment (e.g. Scanmar sensors); and
- Sufficient resources to process the data (e.g. processing of gear measurement data; ageing of anglerfish; suitable data collation).
- Member states with a smaller proportion of the TAC might consider joint participation and provide part resources to achieve a similar outcome.

I trust that you provide this request with due consideration as it is crucial that the viability of this project is assured.

I look forward to hearing from you soon

Yours faithfully,

Sam Lambourn
NWWRAC Chairman