



North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council

Response to the Communication from the European Commission Concerning Fishing Opportunities for 2014 - COM (2013) 319 final

Rationale / Timing of consultation

This document is the North Western Waters RAC (henceforth, NWWWRAC) response to the EU public consultation published by the Commission on the 30th of May 2013.

The NWWWRAC had the opportunity to discuss this Communication at the Working Group meetings held in Dublin the 23 and 24 July 2013. A presentation on the preliminary views agreed was subsequently made by the NWWWRAC Chairman at the EC Workshop on the State of Stocks for 2014, held in Brussels on 17 September 2013.

The present response has been adopted by consensus by the Executive Committee members of the NWWWRAC.

1. Introduction

The NWWWRAC would like to make the following remarks in relation to some important issues:

- Practical application of the reformed CFP:

The NWWWRAC agrees the aspirations of the reform, but notes that in some areas, for example MSY, landing obligations and regionalisation, a wide gap exists between the aims and the present availability of practical means for their execution. As explained below in greater detail, the NWWWRAC is well placed and willing to work, with the assistance of the Commission, Member States and the scientific community, on closing these gaps.

- Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY):

The NWWWRAC supports the commitment agreed by the EU at Johannesburg to reach Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) for commercial stocks, where applicable. However, despite the efforts made to date (including reductions of fishing capacity and introduction of additional technical measures), reality dictates that MSY might not be attained for all stocks by 2015 at the latest¹ due to environmental (multispecies) and technical (mixed fisheries) interactions in a significant number of fisheries.

¹ The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development, adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002, indicated “for those depleted stocks and, where possible, by 2015 at latest”.



As agreed by the Council and the Parliament at their compromise text agreed on CFP Reform in June 2013, the MSY approach should be implemented in a flexible way and allow a transitional scheme with a range of values rather than fixed reference points to achieve the desired outcome by 2020.

Such an approach would prove very useful to avoid the adoption of short term measures that would only bring detrimental socio-economic effects for fishing activities that are or will be sustainable in the long term.

- Total allowable catches:

The NWWRAC agrees with the statement that overfishing should continue to be phased out and that improvements in selectivity of gears must be prioritised. However, the NWWRAC notes a divergence between the scientific advice and its translation into political decisions in the fixing and setting of TACs and effort levels in European waters and for European fleets. This dichotomy of views does not only apply to TAC setting but also to other important management measures that may be influenced by public perception rather than by solid scientific advice. The implementation of landing obligations, for most commercial species between 2015 and 2020, which will be mentioned later in this advice, is an example. The practical aspects of these measures must be addressed carefully within the framework of the CFP reform in an open and inclusive manner with the aim of achieving a common understanding between EU policy makers, scientists, national administrations, control authorities and stakeholders.

2. State of Fish Stocks

The NWWRAC welcomes the acknowledgement expressed by the Commission that the trends of most European Fish Stocks in the north east Atlantic show a marked improvement in terms of assessment and provision of advice. The two annexes included show both an improvement of the state of the stocks and a decrease of fishing efforts for most areas. The description of current knowledge on the state of fish stocks on a regional basis helps also to better understand what is the situation and the stocks that require prior attention.

Despite this positive message, the NWWRAC believes that efforts should be redoubled and necessary resources allocated via the EMFF regulation to improve data collection and assessments to mitigate data deficiencies and inaccuracies, and reduce the number of data limited stocks where possible.

In this particular, the acknowledgement made by the Commission to the work of the NWWRAC with ICES in relation to the “*data deficiency initiative*” is very encouraging, as this is considered to be one of the main work priorities for the NWWRAC in the present and forthcoming years.



The NWWWRAC takes note of the specific concerns of the Commission regarding the whitefish (cod, haddock and whiting) stocks in the Irish Sea and the West of Scotland. The NWWWRAC is currently working with scientists and policy makers on developing a multiannual management plan for demersal species in these areas (ICES subdivisions VIa and VIIa). Specific technical measures have already been proposed and implemented in 2012 to improve selectivity and reduce discards of whitefish in West of Scotland and part of the Celtic Sea (VIIg).

The NWWWRAC is willing to work with relevant Member States (i.e. those having a fleet operating in the area) and the Commission to consider the inclusion of further selectivity measures in 2013 and 2014.

The NWWWRAC is also committed to provide specific advice on management measures for Nephrops stocks in areas VI and VII, with particular focus on Porcupine Bank (FU16). The NWWWRAC also looks forward to an enhancement of the work in progress towards long term management plans in the North Western Waters.

3. Economic analysis

The economic performance (profitability of sales) of EU fishing fleets in aggregated terms is said to be poor due to lower catch rates and higher costs associated with fishing (fuel prices and usage). Downward trends are also shown in the employment in the fishing sector. However, there seems to be certain contradictions in this section as it subsequently affirms that both the income and the value from landings have increased, with an increase in net profits for 40% of the fleet.

Rather than the figures, the NWWWRAC is concerned over the underlying reasons for them. For this reason, the NWWWRAC advocates for increased efforts and funding for dedicated socio-economic studies or impact assessment reports that help to support management decisions and provide a balanced approach to fisheries management from an inclusive biological, economic and social perspective, also paying attention to self-supply in the EU.

4. Policy directions

4.1. Developments in scientific advice for stocks where information is incomplete

The NWWWRAC welcomes the new advisory methodology introduced by ICES in 2012, as it reduces uncertainties and provide quantitative advice for an important number of stocks using all available information through a clearly explained procedure that has been presented by ICES ACOM representatives at NWWWRAC meetings.



However, the fishing industry of the NWWWRAC is still concerned about the application of the precautionary margin set by ICES leading to a resurgence of automatic reductions of 20% for data limited stocks lacking of analytical assessment. The fishing industry of the NWWWRAC reiterates its disagreement with the imposition of catch reductions relying only on a precautionary approach even in situations where trends for the stock without population size estimates show an improvement.

Auto-reductions in these cases are not therefore properly justified for conservation reasons. The fishing industry of the NWWWRAC would prefer an approach which takes into account stock trends instead of this single, over-simplified approach. The setting of TACs should also be revised when scientific assessments show a clear recovery of some species, such as the northern hake stock².

It is the intention of the NWWWRAC to continue working with ICES and national scientists in identifying and tackling the reasons for lack and quality of data as well as where this responsibility lies. A more sophisticated solution is required to manage data poor stocks and mitigate data uncertainties.

4.2. Obligation to land all catches

The NWWWRAC has initiated work at Technical Group level to understand the legal framework and implementing measures that will be applied to land all catches of demersal fisheries in north western waters for the period 2016-2019.

The collaborative work from the outset between Member States and Advisory Councils under a future form/s of regional structure/s will be crucial for producing joint recommendations on future fishery management or (temporary) regional discards plans. The Commission should act as facilitator of this process and endorse the joint recommendations that are agreed as far as they are in compliance with precautionary approach and sustainable exploitation.

4.3. Fishing effort

The NWWWRAC appreciates the inclusion by the Commission of the graphics showing a general decrease of fishing effort in West of Scotland, Irish Sea and Eastern Channel in the period 2003/2004-2010 under Annex II. This reflects the sacrifices and compromises made by the industry to adapt to the effort limitations reduce fishing capacity and make progress for a sustainable fishing activity.

² NWWWRAC letter requesting an in-year adjustment of TAC for northern hake stock (4 September 2013): http://www.nwwrac.org/admin/publication/upload/NWWWRAC_Letter_Inyear_Review_TAC_Northern_Hake_4_Sept2013_EN.pdf



5. Management by multi-annual plans

The NWWRAC is anxious to see a solution that allows unlocking the institutional impasse between the European Parliament and the Council regarding their competencies in relation to the fixing of measures that are linked to fishing opportunities.

The NWWRAC would like to see a speedy adoption of Long Term Management Plans regardless whether this is made by co-decision or by the Council. There are a number of plans that already have been evaluated by ICES and STECF as precautionary and might help the industry to establish long term fishing strategies while ensuring a sustainable exploitation of fish stocks. It is reminded that the NWWRAC has assisted ICES with the development of a proposal for a long term management plan for West of Scotland haddock in the past and is now working on developing mixed fisheries approach for demersal species in West of Scotland (VIa), part of the Celtic Sea (VIIIfg) and Irish Sea (VIIa), respectively.

6. Method for proposing TACs

The NWWRAC understands and generally supports the principles for setting TACs as stated by the Commission with the observation provided under item 1 for MSY framework of advice.

The procedure to maintain TACs for selected data-limited stocks listed in Annex III at levels fixed for 2013 is also accepted by the NWWRAC.

7. Deep sea species

The NWWRAC has no comments on the fixing of fishing opportunities for deep-sea species but would like to note that the proposal of Regulation reviewing management measures and access regime for deep-sea fisheries has been substantially discussed in 2013 and a broader discussion paper has been jointly agreed by 4 RACs (North Western Waters, Long Distance, South Western Waters and North Sea) summarising the state of debate and views on this subject matter. This document can be found in the publications section of the NWWRAC website.

8. Schedule

The NWWRAC welcomes the further extension of the period of consultation given to the Regional Advisory Councils and the Member States from July to September; and that the Commission proposal is tabled now in mid-October as this allows to incorporate summer surveys for some stocks (such as Nephrops). The NWWRAC also is appreciative of the decision to continue issuing a Communication on an annual basis. The NWWRAC would still like to see more detail in the justification as to how the Commission reflects the RACs input and views in their proposal on a Regulation to the Council.