



PRESS RELEASE

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RACs and ICES plan increased cooperation

Regional Task Forces will tackle weak stock assessments

ICES and the RACs are planning to establish regional *task forces* to tackle the problem of weak stock assessments impaired by deficiencies in the data used to estimate abundance and advise on management measures. The regional *task forces* will also provide a platform for increased cooperation and dialogue. Fisheries managers from the member states will be invited to participate to strengthen the initiative.

The North Sea and North Western Waters Regional Advisory Councils proposed the new initiative which has now been enthusiastically supported by ICES. At a recent meeting in Copenhagen it was agreed to go ahead and to establish terms of reference for the new task forces. Once established, the individual *task forces* will decide which fisheries and stock assessments should take priority.

Whilst some stock assessments are robust, others have suffered from years of a downward spiral of deteriorating data, leading to weak assessments, leading in turn to low TACs. Both fishermen and scientists have a keen interest in ensuring that the assessments are as strong as possible. In many ways this initiative can be seen as resetting or *rebooting* those assessments weakened by years of poor data.

Building on work already done by ICES with the Baltic and Pelagic RACs, the first task of each RTF will be to decide on which stocks require attention using a quality matrix. This helps to identify weak assessments and the nature of the problems faced. From there, the RTFs will make recommendations on:

- the type of assessment model appropriate for the fishery
- the specific data problems faced in the fishery (e.g. landings statistics, discards estimates, natural mortality estimates, changes in fleet behaviour)
- Steps to rectify the problems found

The RTFs will be a good place to discuss how industry data and knowledge can be incorporated into the assessments, including data from the various fisheries science partnerships now common throughout various member states.

The next step will be a meeting in early April to set the ground rules for this important new initiative.