REPORT OF THE MEETING BETWEEN RACs AND ICES DEEPWATER SPECIALISTS

9 March 2009, Copenhagen (ICES)

One of the main conclusions of the inter-RAC meeting on the assessment of deepwater populations held in July 2008 in Lisbon was that scientists' and professionals' perceptions are divided as to the state of stocks. This meeting between professionals and ICES scientists (WGDEEP and WGDEC) therefore aims to establish possibilities for sharing knowledge (data, experience) in order to improve scientific understanding.

Data presently used by scientists and their limitations

P Large provided a brief historic overview of WGDEEP's work and listed the key limitations constraining evaluation of deepwater stocks:

- The precise definition of stocks is difficult because knowledge is scarce as regards the distribution, biology and behaviour of the various species.
- Precision of data: Catch data are unavailable on some species. Member States' statutory duty to undertake observation programmes has nonetheless allowed the collection of supplementary information.
- The use of commercial data (landings and effort) for assessment models may involve standardization difficulties, because the data are largely dependent on how fisheries are specifically practised (actual effort, fishing strategy, etc). Data obtained from scientific campaigns are needed to calibrate different models, but such data are very scarce.
- The behaviour of some species may bias perceptions of the state of stocks (behaviour of concentration/aggregation: orange roughy, blue ling).

Presentation of data obtained by professionals that may be of use for scientific assessment purposes

P Lorance (IFREMER) presented the first results of data analysis, trawl by trawl, of the French Deep Water Tally Book. This database comprises over 25,000 trawls from 1996 to 2008 (composition of catches and accurate data on fishing effort and fishing depth). This first analysis concentrates on the study on the CPUE in relation to blue ling, and distinguishes between the aggregation period (March to May) and by-catch of this species. The trends differ from those observed on the basis of data drawn from logbooks, which are less accurate (several trawls combined in a single fishing sequence, no data given on depth). The database information becomes really relevant from 2000 onwards. To refine analysis of the signs of abundance over a longer period, WGDEEP will have to determine whether it is better to continue data collection in future (almost exhaustively) or to study earlier data (less accurate).

I Figueiredo (IPIMAR) presented the programme of Portuguese small-scale deep water longline fisheries, to be integrated with the European project on information-sharing among professionals and scientists. This joint programme between IPIMAR and Artesanal Pesca will garner improved knowledge of this fishery by collecting data on catch composition (scabbard catches, shark by-catches), effective fishing effort and interaction with marine mammals (depredation from longlines).

These programmes taken together will provide scientists with valuable data. Some will be evaluated and discussed at the WGDEEP 2009 meeting, although their chief role will be to serve as a key element of the meeting on the construction of indicators scheduled for next year, with the goal of developing new methods of stocks assessment.

Deep water environmental issues and professionals' data

Robert Brock (WGDEC) referred to the value of professionals' data for the purposes of suitably defining the habitats specific to deep waters. Only professionals are able to obtain data on the nature of sea bottoms over vast geographical areas (owing to the cost of scientific prospecting campaigns). Brock backed up his argument with the example of the protected coral areas in Rockall, which are defined on the basis of SLB data (protection of areas unaffected by fishing activity). On this point, RAC representatives indicated that the issue is relatively sensitive for professionals, because the boundary of closed areas is often drawn too widely in comparison with the actual area to be protected. It would thus be desirable to set down a regulatory framework for delineating the boundaries of protection areas.

Scientific campaigns

L. Dransfeld, head of the scientific Planning Group on the North-east Atlantic Continental Slope Survey, presented the implementation project for a campaign to observe deep water stocks. The programme is intended to extend observations at sea from conventional scientific campaigns to deep-sea bottoms. Different campaigns could be difficult to standardize, especially in the southern area, where fishing with trawl nets appears to be unfeasible.
Scientists hope professionals will play an active role in the programme: drawing up of the protocol, selection of prospecting areas, presence of professionals on board observation ships.

Specific observations of blue ling in the framework of Regulation (EC) 43/2009

The Commission addressed a question to ICES about observation modes specific to blue ling in the framework of Regulation (EC) 43/2009, and ICES should have replied before 13 March 2009. WGDEEP members should therefore propose a standardized protocol for blue ling observation within the period 1 March to 31 May 2009. Observations should concentrate chiefly on the maturity of specimens studied.

DeepFishMan project

P Lorance presented the European project DeepFishMan (Management And Monitoring Of Deep-sea Fisheries And Stocks), to be begun in June and scheduled to run for three years. The programme is intended to implement management strategies for deep water fisheries in the Northwest Atlantic:

- Identify new methods of assessment and management measures
- Implement long-term management measures

Several case studies relate to the boundary of NWW RAC: orange roughy in ICES areas VI and VII, blue ling in areas Vb, VI and VII, and trawl fisheries in French deep waters. The RACs will be actively involved in this programme and be invited to take part in the various meetings.

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