

Summary report of the MIRAC meeting Copenhagen ICES Headquarters - 26th and 27th of January 2009

Participants

The meeting was chaired by Mike Sissenwine (ICES Chair) and the European Commission was represented by Paul Dengbol, Isabelle Viallon and Patrick Daniel. For the NWWRAC, the representatives were Jim Portus, Stéphanie Tachaires and Alexandre Rodriguez on behalf of the Secretary. Patricia Comiskey prepared a short document in order to explain the exchange of information between the RAC and ICES on 2008 and she specifically addressed some key questions concerning the preparation of benchmarking workshops organized by ICES.

Review of actions addressed on the 2008 MIRAC report

In general terms, ICES and RAC were globally satisfied on the improvement of the collaboration between both organizations. Dialogue was open and fluid and RAC members seemed to appreciate the exchange of information and collaboration which is perceived to be increasing.

However, many RAC members expressed their disappointment on the lack of progress of the « traffic light approach » as proposed last year by Barrie Deas. The objective was to establish a simple colour index code (green, orange, red) in order to ascertain the quality of the advice given by ICES. The aim of the industry was to have a easier understanding on which stocks assessment are based on data that need to be improved in order to get a more solid advice in the following year.

A large debate was opened on this topic:

- ICES and European Commission explained that it is really difficult to display the quality of the advice on an index colour because there are several sources of uncertainties and they don't have all the same extent and interpretation. The uncertainties can be either linked to the model used in the assessment or to the data themselves. So the question at this stage is «uncertainty but about what»? About trends in SSB, in the stock size, in the TAC advice relative to the objectives? Discrimination between these parameters could be difficult.
- Moreover, the European Commission seems to be reluctant to use such “traffic light system” because the existing or future advices with a « red colour » may be interpreted by the stakeholders as not valid, and this is not always the case.

→OUTCOME: This proposal needs further discussion and ICES and EC will think about it on 2009. ICES will consider options (e.g. a workshop) for preparing a simple protocol to communicate the quality of advice, recognizing that stakeholders and managers must be involved in this process in order to rightly set up a common agreed framework for action.

- Very slow progress on how use of data coming from fishermen in the advisory process
The SWWRAC mentioned the work of an ICES working group dedicated to «on how uses fishers for sampling catches», but it seems that operational results are not yet available. There is a very strong cooperative spirit but no tangible progress has been perceived by now.

It was pointed out that the national scientific institutes play a key role. ICES is a mere facilitator but progress depends mostly on national initiatives between scientists and fishermen.

→ ***ACTION: ICES could participate in a RAC initiated workshop with industry to clarify expectations, consider setting up a framework for cooperative research, and identifying a more realistic or “low hanging fruit” approach based on opportunities to demonstrate success quickly.***

- Participation of RAC in ICES meeting and ICES participation on RAC meeting:

Everyone appreciated the collaboration in 2008. But the number of meetings has proven to be a real difficulty for everyone as it impedes to achieve efficiency. In ICES meeting, some RAC representatives felt that the status of observers was not enterly welcomed by the scientific community and they didn't feel very integrated in the debate. → **ICES answered that they of course welcome stakeholder observers and they should be made to feel welcome (not seated at the back of the room).**

Appreciation was expressed specifically for the advice presentations to RACs made by Martin Pastoors.

→ **ICES indicated it will continue to give high priority to these presentations.**

* Data Benchmarking Workshops

All the representatives showed their willingness to contribute to this process.

The NWWRAC requested to have a framework document or protocol before the meeting to know exactly what type of data their members should provide, in which format, etc. in order to be considered and integrated into the scientific assessment of the stocks. It was outlined that the industry needs to prepare the incorporation of their knowledge and data in a scientific process but for that they need ToR from the scientists. The duration of those types of meetings (8 days scheduled) was highlighted as a major obstacle for the industry to participate. A shorter timing was deemed necessary to improve the participation of stakeholders during the whole meeting.

Feedback and dissemination of results to Stakeholders on the integration of their input is another crucial issue. If data provided are not incorporated into the scientific assessments, the reason should be clearly explained to the members. Furthermore, the scientific community might also propose a way forward to use these or other sources of data in the future.

The status of the participants in Benchmark workshops was also discussed. Questions arose if they are expected to represent the RACs. RAC representatives explained that one or a few representatives can't have the knowledge on all fisheries discussed in these groups. ICES emphasized that what is really important is the quality of the data and ideas they might bring to these forums, regardless which organization they represent. This applies to scientists as well as stakeholders. Being this the case, a European Commission representative said that the EC could only give a financial support if the participant have the role of RAC representative. The question on who will be able to pay to help this collaboration was not furtherly discussed.

→ ICES convenes that Benchmark Workshops might organize meetings with RACs well in advance (months) to the next ones to identify weaknesses and opportunities for input to feed the Benchmark Workshops.

* All participants (ICES, RAC, and EC) acknowledge that management plan are a priority issue. But many questions have to be dealt with before taking further action¹:

- What is the scope of management plan: a single stock? A fishery? How ecosystem approach might influence the election of the scope and be embodied in the process?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of scientists, managers, stakeholders including RACs? Nowadays, ICES scientists were asked to evaluate plan prepared by managers. Do we need to re-think the process?
- The scientific evaluation of the plan needs to be completed in due time prior to its preparation in order to avoid those situations in which the plan can't be evaluated.
- Plan implementation needs to be monitored and accordingly revised if the plan does not give the results initially expected by the managers.
- User friendly guidelines for adoption and implementation of management plans would be of great help. The guidelines prepared by the SWWRAC was mentioned as example.

¹ A Workshop organized by ICES and STECF on management plans was held in Copenhagen the 28-30 January immediately after the MIRAC meeting

* Timing of advice

RACs are generally positive about most advice being issued in the first half of the year. Pelagic RAC asked to have advice on pelagic stocks earlier in the year. But shifting pelagic advice earlier in the year is primarily a workload issue. It is only possible if member countries agree as the workload falls on their scientists.

The dissemination of advice was also discussed. Some representatives indicated that a friendly representation of advice, well understandable by the industry representatives and the fishermen is a way of progress. CNPMEM (French member of the NWWRAC) presented the synthesis done yearly by CNPMEM on those stocks being relevant to the French fishing industry., It shows with graphs and colours: the state of the stock, the main conclusions of the ICES advice, as well as the recent evolution of the different parameters (F, SSB, R: increase, decrease...).

→ **OUTCOME: EC and ICES do not plan to change the timing in pelagic stock.**

→ **OUTCOME: ICES indicated that they already try to put some graphs in the advice to be more understandable by managers and the industry, but they recognized that they could improve their work on this topic. ICES noted that it was a working group on summary papers, and the French proposal would be circulated among their members for their consideration.**

- Requests of scientific advice or exchange of views with RAC:

The RACs still feel the need for a more direct access to “science”, although they acknowledge that the Commission has been reasonably responsive on forwarding their requests to ICES.

On deepwater species, both SWWRAC and NWWRAC expressed their willingness to cooperate and work together with scientists in the improvement of data quality for these stocks already before the end of this year. One possibility would be to arrange a meeting with WGDEEP. It was reminded that the industry has been collecting a wide range of data which are useful for scientific processing and validation and this should be analyzed and discussed with scientists to improve quality of advice.

→ **OUTCOME: A workshop involving RACs and ICES is being planned to address data and science needs in preparation for 2010 advice on deepwater fisheries.**

- Some RACs noted that language is a problem in the communication of ICES advice (English is difficult for many of their members).
- Support for “Young fishermen” at ICES Annual Science Conferences:

RACs praised this initiative. Everyone was pleased with the participation in 2007 (Helsinki), but disappointed with 2008 (Halifax) (poor presence of only 1 representative because it is too far). The 2009 ASC will be held in Berlin. The MIRAC continues to endorse a program for fishers’ participation in ASCs, although the criteria of “young” may not be appropriate.



Also, it may be unrealistic for active fishers to spend an entire week at ASCs. The RACs need to consider those candidates that are able to share their own experiences broadly with the RAC community. NSRAC proposed to concentrate the participation on fishermen concerned by the area where the conference takes place.