

MEETING REPORT

Focus Group on a Long Term Management Plan for West of Scotland Haddock

Pentland House Edinburgh

8th April 2010

Chairman: Bertie Armstrong

Rapporteur: Tony Hawkins

1. Background

- 1.1 The Focus Group met to discuss a management plan for haddock in Area VIa & EC waters of Vb. The aim of the Focus Group was to develop the plan further and to recommend a position for adoption by the NWWRAC.

2. Biological assessment of Area VIa Haddock

- 2.1 Norman Graham of the Marine Institute of Ireland described the state of VIa haddock, basing his observations on the 2009 ICES assessments, which employed data collected up to and including 2008. The NW Ecosystem Working Group will meet in May to carry out more up to date assessments. The fishery is mainly an otter trawl fishery taking place to the NW of the Hebrides & on Stanton Bank. There are some elements of commonality between west coast and North Sea haddock stocks and trends are likely to be similar but there are much larger landings from the North Sea.
- 2.2 Landings in VIa have fallen from a peak of ~25kt in the late 80s to ~3kt in 2008. The landings are divided between the UK (64%); Ireland (32%); France (3%) and Norway (1%). The TAC for 2010 was 2673 tonnes (to be taken from areas VIa and Vb. In 2008 the uptake was low at 45% of the TAC (2734t from 6120t). However, a number of factors had affected uptake including effort restrictions under the cod recovery plan (especially for the fleet targeting whitefish), vessel decommissioning and displacement of the fleet to more profitable fisheries.

Discarding is a problem in the fishery, with more than 50% of haddock being discarded, including fish from the 1, 2 and even the 3 year age groups. The mesh size for the whitefish fleet had been raised through an emergency measure to 120mm for large vessels and 110mm for smaller vessels. The patterns of discarding are variable, perhaps because of changes in the fishery. Management of the fishery is largely driven by measures taken to protect cod, including days at sea restrictions, the measures taken in 2009 to increase selectivity, catch composition rules, and area closures. All of these measures are likely to have had a significant effect on the haddock fishery.

- 2.3 The assessment of the fishery is largely based on the results of research vessel surveys. The analytical methods were developed for cod and are based on Time Series Analysis (TSA) of the survey data. Although the estimate of fishing mortality (F) has wide confidence limits the method is quite good for estimating recruitment and spawning stock biomass. Data from three surveys are available but the data used are those from the Scottish Q1 & Q4 surveys.
- 2.4 The haddock stock is characterised by a low level of recruitment with occasional strong peaks. The last peak was in 2005 and recruitment was quite poor in 2007 and 2008. Because the forecast gives total catches or removals it is difficult to apportion the output to natural mortality, discards and landings. In the past there were conflicting signals between the surveys and commercial catches at age, perhaps because of misreporting, and the catch data has not been used. However, the data are now converging and the intention is to reconsider the use of catch data at the next ICES Benchmark Meeting in 2011. Observer data on discards are needed for this fishery
- 2.5 The most recent estimate of F for the fishery (dating from 2008) was 0.46 which is less than the precautionary F of 0.5. However, the 2009 estimate of SSB was 20,271 tonnes which is below the B_{LIM} of 22,000t. Taken together with the poor recruitment the short term prognosis for the stock is not good. The ICES advice from 2009 was that no fishing for haddock should take place in area VIa. ICES suggested that a management plan should be developed.
- 2.6 In summary, the TSA model is used to assess the stock in the absence of commercial catch data. There is a need to reevaluate the commercial catch data for inclusion in the assessments, especially since we are moving to an F based management plan. Discarding patterns are variable and observations at sea are required to establish the actual levels. It might be possible to refine the commercial landings per unit effort information using VMS data. The spawning stock is low, and although fishing mortality is below F_{PA} there are wide confidence limits attached to its estimation.

- 2.7 Sean O'Donoghue from Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation wondered whether the discrepancies between the surveys and commercial catches shown in some years might result from flaws in the methodology, rather than real differences. Alan Coghill from the Orkney Fisheries Association was also concerned that the results from the surveys were leading to the conclusion that discarding was high.

With many whitefish vessels moving to 120mm mesh nets and with the introduction of square mesh panels it is unlikely that there is a high level of discarding. Fishers also believed that recruitment is higher than the surveys indicated. Norman Graham thought that if there had been any changes then these should be picked up by the 2010 ICES Working Group. Coby Needle from Marine Scotland Science confirmed that it is difficult for the surveys to cover all parts of the west coast. The methods being used do have their problems but there are good reasons for that. ICES needs good catch data with a lack of misreporting and good information on discarding. Better observer coverage is required. The F value of 0.46 is reasonable but Spawning Stock Biomass is below B_{LIM} as earlier large year classes have departed from the stock.

- 2.8 Sean O'Donoghue wished to know whether the issue of overlap with the North Sea stock is going to be resolved. What happens on the west coast might not be driving the stocks. Coby Needle said that the stock dynamics were much the same but the Spawning Stock Biomass was much smaller on the west coast. It would be inappropriate to have separate management plans for the west coast and North Sea if they were in fact the same stock. This question might be resolved at the 2011 Benchmark Meeting. The two plans might then have to be consolidated and decisions taken on the allocation of TACs. The chairman concluded the discussion by remarking that there was a strong desire on the part of the fishing industry to resolve the problems of the haddock fishery.

3. ICES reply to Commission's request to evaluate the LTMP for haddock in VIa and EC waters of Vb

- 3.1 Coby Needle recapitulated the development of the haddock long term management plan. The plan had emerged from the NWWRAC Focus Group meeting last July and after discussion within the RAC had gone to the Commission. The Commission had then asked ICES to evaluate the consequences of applying the harvest control rules contained within the plan.

3.2 The plan discussed by the NWWRAC required:

- A TAC to be set consistent with a fishing mortality rate of no more than 0.3 for appropriate age-groups, when the SSB in the end of the year in which the TAC was to be applied was estimated to be above 30,000 tonnes (B_{PA}).
- Where the TAC deviated by more than 15 % from the TAC of the preceding year, the TAC would be confined to being no more than 15 % greater or 15 % less than the TAC of the preceding year.
- Where the SSB was below B_{PA} but above 22,000 tonnes (B_{LIM}) the TAC would not exceed a level which would result in a fishing mortality rate equal to 0.3-0.2.
- Where the SSB referred was below B_{LIM} the TAC would be set at a level corresponding to a total fishing mortality rate of no more than 0.1. This is the current situation.

3.3 The plan was not quite so easy to evaluate as the equivalent North Sea plan, because the assessment is largely survey based, with large unallocated removals. ICES had to assume that the discard rate is fixed – although this is known not to be the case. Another difference is that whereas in the North Sea it is assumed that a large recruitment will occur once every 10 years or so, recruitment fluctuations on the west coast may not be so pronounced. The assumptions made in simulating a time series for recruitment may not be appropriate.

3.4 ICES advised ***‘that a harvest rule with a target fishing mortality of 0.3 and a TAC constraint of $\pm 15\%$ is consistent with the precautionary approach (with a high probability of SSB being above B_{LIM} by 2015 and beyond). In addition, simulations suggest that this harvest rule has the best chance, among those tested, of producing a combination of low risk to biomass and high cumulative yield. Thus it conforms to the goal of achieving long-term maximum sustainable yield from the stock’.***

3.5 The evaluation was first carried out in November 2009 and feedback was then subsequently received from ICES reviewers. The plan has gone through a more abbreviated review than would be the case for most management plans. However, the results are plausible.

3.6 Sean O’Donoghue asked whether TAC constraints were less relevant than other factors. Coby Needle replied that the TAC constraints had less impact than the target fishing mortality, but that once stocks were above B_{PA} it would not make a lot of difference. With good recruitment there is a risk of discarding, as the TAC would be constrained and would not follow the population increase.

Application of the management plan might be too conservative in those circumstances. Bertie Armstrong thought that the plan ought to be able to cope with a recruitment spike. In that situation there would be problems in managing fleet behaviour to avoid high levels of discarding. Coby Needle said that fluctuations in recruitment on the west coast were not as large as those in the North Sea.

- 3.7 Alan Coghill drew attention to the fleet displacement caused by the cod recovery plan, which would have an effect on quota uptake. Coby Needle added that the model assumed full uptake of quota. It is not able to take account of fleet dynamics
- 3.8 Kenneth Patterson from the European Commission noted that last December the harvest control rule had been amended by Council to include a 25% constraint on TAC changes. ICES had subsequently been asked to simulate this alteration in the TAC constraint for all circumstances, including those when SSB was below B_{PA} . This message had not been passed to Coby Needle and in practice the simulation had not covered all circumstances.

The statement concerned (number 9) is worded:

**“Ad Haddock in EC waters of zones Vb and VIa
Council and Commission Statement**

The Council invites the Commission to propose a long-term plan for the management of this stock as soon as practicable. The Council and the Commission agree that until such a plan is adopted, it would be appropriate to set the TAC for this stock according to the same rule that applies to the stock of haddock in the North Sea, using the precautionary spawning biomass and the limit spawning biomass appropriate for this stock, and limiting inter-annual TAC variations to no more than 25%.”

- 3.9 Coby Needle would carry out the required additional simulations in the next few days. In the meantime the Commission would ask STECF to consider these simulations at its plenary meeting.
- 3.10 Colin Faulkner said that the North Sea management plan for haddock was up for review in 2010. Was there anything that might change for the North Sea which would affect the west coast plan? Coby replied that the review would re-run the models with updated data. There was no intention of doing anything radical in 2010. After 2011 the stock assessments might change following the ICES Benchmark Meeting.

4. Report from the Commission on timetable and legal procedure for the adoption of a LTMP for West of Scotland Haddock

- 4.1 Kenneth Patterson said that the procedure which had been foreseen for adoption of the plan was that STECF would be asked for an economic assessment by April. STECF had been requested to:

“Assess economic consequences of implementing the various options advised by ICES compared to continuing to fish under current arrangements. STECF is particularly invited to liaise with ICES on the compatibility of evaluation systems”.

The Commission would then do a full impact assessment in May with an internal assessment in June. The plan would be prepared in July, translated in August and a proposal put forward in September. However, STECF was currently over-burdened. It was contracting out work to outside experts. In the case of this plan, those experts were from the SFIA (Seafish). For legal reasons Seafish was unable to carry out the work. Marine Scotland would contact Seafish to ascertain the position, but it was likely that a recent Appeal Court decision over the funding of Seafish would stand in the way of rapid resolution of this difficulty. In the meantime, the Commission had asked STECF to carry out an economic assessment in the margins of its plenary meeting. If it was not able to do so there would be a delay in assessing the plan. A critical part of the procedure might be blocked.

- 4.2 Sean O’Donoghue pointed out that the management plan would now have to go through co-decision-taking with the Parliament as a result of the Lisbon Treaty. Agreement to the plan might therefore take as long as two years rather than 2-3 months. Kenneth Patterson confirmed that there was still active discussion on how LTMPs would be dealt with; it seems unlikely that Parliament will give up powers to scrutinise LTMPs. Sean O’Donoghue asked whether we could achieve the adoption of the essential elements through a Council declaration. This would require consideration of the impact of different values of F in the catch options tables prepared as part of the ICES advice. Could we get the full range of options included by ICES?
- 4.3 Coby Needle said that he could certainly carry out the necessary work and provide the required options but ACOM might take a different view. Bertie Armstrong said that it was important to make progress on two fronts. Firstly we would need to get through the economic impact assessment and publish the plan, so that the relevant harvest control rules could be put into the proposals for the west coast for 2011. We would also need to persuade ICES to include within their catch options table the full range of outcomes arising from the LTMP, including the F0.3 option with a 25% constraint on TACs regardless of biomass.

It was agreed that the NWWRAC would seek this outcome from ICES, through the Commission. Kenneth Patterson would take note of this decision.

5. Open discussion: management measures for West of Scotland haddock

- 5.1 It was agreed that a full discussion of socio-economic aspects of the plan had taken place at the last meeting. From a fishing industry perspective the major current problem was the imposition of catch composition rules for the three key species; cod, haddock and whiting. Vessels fishing the west coast were severely constrained by these rules and by the days at sea restrictions imposed under the cod recovery plan. Discarding was now taking place directly as a result of the regulations. Fishers were doing their best to reduce the discarding of haddock and whiting. Discarding of cod was less of a problem because of conservation credits, the windsock closure, and real time area closures. However, management is not best served by the current arrangements. Sean O'Donoghue underlined the very broad impact caused by automatic effort reductions, moving the fishery towards very few days at sea. The economic consequences were all too obvious. We had to tackle the effort regime.
- 5.2 Kenneth Patterson said that there were ways of reducing effort restrictions under the cod recovery plan. The cuts in effort were not set in stone. Vessels which caught less than 1.5% cod could gain exemption. There were also provisions in Article 13 for offsetting reductions in fishing mortality on cod against effort reductions. The mechanisms for achieving reductions in F would have to be documented and passed through STECF but essentially solutions were in the hands of the member states.
- 5.3 Alan Coghill said that the impact of effort restrictions were disproportionate. Vessels now had to travel great distances and alter their fishing patterns to avoid closed areas. Economic burdens were reaching a point where the fishery was no longer viable. Yet cod was recovering and there should be clear recognition of that.
- 5.4 Bertie Armstrong remarked that cod avoidance and reduction of cod discarding was being pursued with vigour in the North Sea, where there were supporting data available. Similar measures were also being taken on the west coast but it takes time to get the results through the system.
- 5.5 Louise Cunningham added that the West of Scotland Task Force had commented on the catch composition rules. They believed there was a need for an end-point to the current restrictions. If haddock reaches a certain level it should be lifted out of the catch composition restrictions.

Bertie Armstrong commented that we could end up with a large enough TAC but might still have to discard because of the catch composition rules. Could we build an end-point into the LTMP?

- 5.6 With respect to catch composition rules, Kenneth Patterson said that traditionally LTMPs had included TACs and effort controls but not technical conservation measures. However, consideration could be given to a relaxation of catch composition rules in a LTMP, conditional on the stock reaching Bpa.
- 5.7 Sean O'Donoghue asked whether provision to remove the catch composition rules could be included within a December Council statement. David Brew from Marine Scotland thought not. They would have to be lifted as part of an amendment to the technical conservation regulation – and that meant the procedure would be affected by co-decision-taking. Sean said that the regulation would run out of time in due course and would need to be renewed. Also, since TACs were handled by the Council then catch composition rules might be treated as a TAC issue. Kenneth Patterson said that the Parliament took a different view. The December Council is limited to discussing 'fishing opportunities'; that did not include the catch composition rules. David Brew remarked that the UK had tried to accelerate discussion of the roll-over of the technical conservation regulation but the Commission has not yet agreed to that. Bertie Armstrong concluded that we should argue that the catch composition rules could be included under 'fishing opportunities'.
- 5.8 David Brew asked what would be required to persuade the Commission to consider a proposal to remove catch composition rules under an emerging LTMP and partial adoption thereof. A proposal might also be presented to bring forward, on an early time course, some aspects of the review of the technical conservation regulation. At what point would the Commission be able to consider such a proposal – the early summer? Sean drew attention to a Council declaration that gives an undertaking to come forward with technical measures proposals for the west coast. The actual declaration (number 10) is worded:

**“Ad Technical measures whitefish Zone VI
 Council and Commission Statement**

The Council and the Commission take note of requests by some Member States to modify existing technical measures for the ICES Zone VI in advance of the agreed overall reform of the technical measures rules for mid 2011. The Commission will consider these requests and where appropriate present relevant proposals, if possible in the course of first half of 2010.”

- 5.9 That statement effectively gives an undertaking that the Commission in 2010 will consider coming forward with proposals.

However, the NWWRAC and member states concerned would need to contact the Commission immediately to ensure that removal of the catch composition rules came into consideration. The request would be to ask the Commission to consider removing the catch control rules now, with a fall-back position of including provision for their removal within the emerging LTMP.

6. Agreed proposals for a management plan to be put forward to the Executive Committee

6.1 The rapporteur summarised the meeting.

6.2 The plan, as modified by the Commission was now framed in the following terms:

- A TAC to be set consistent with a fishing mortality rate of no more than 0.3 for appropriate age-groups, when the SSB in the end of the year in which the TAC was to be applied was estimated to be above 30,000 tonnes (B_{PA}).
- Deviations in TAC from one year to the next would be limited to a fixed percentage when the stock was above B_{PA} . The effects of various percentage limits were to be tested.
- Where the SSB was below B_{PA} but above 22,000 tonnes (B_{LIM}) the TAC would not exceed a level which would result in a fishing mortality rate equal to 0.3-0.2.
- Where the SSB referred was below B_{LIM} the TAC would be set at a level corresponding to a total fishing mortality rate of no more than 0.1. This is the current situation.

6.3 It was agreed that these proposals for the LTMP, which had now been evaluated by ICES, could go forward for agreement by the NWWRAC.

6.4 The Chairman thanked Kenneth Patterson for his valuable assistance during the meeting.

7. Action points

| Para. No. | Action | Responsible agent |
|-----------|---|---|
| 3.8 & 3.9 | STECF will be provided with additional 25% TAC simulations. The Commission will ask STECF to consider these simulations at its plenary meeting. | Coby Needle Kenneth Patterson |
| 4.3 | Every effort will be made to ensure that the economic impact assessment for the LTMP will be carried out for or at the STECF plenary so that the plan can be published and relevant harvest control rules put into Council proposals for the west coast for 2011. | Marine Scotland to contact Seafish |
| 4.3 | ICES will be asked by the NWWRAC through the Commission to include within their catch options table for VIa haddock the outcome arising from the LTMP, including the F0.3 option with a 25% constraint on TACs. | NWWRAC Secretariat Commission to note that a request will be forthcoming Sean O'Donoghue to draft the request |
| 5.6 | Progress within the Commission in implementing declaration 10 for 2010 will be investigated NWWRAC members will consult with member states with the intention of asking the Commission to consider a proposal to remove catch composition rules in area VI in advance of the agreed overall reform of the technical measures rules | Kenneth Patterson NWWRAC members & appropriate member states |
| 6.3 | The long term management plan will go forward for consideration by the NWWRAC | NWWRAC Secretariat |



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8. In attendance

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| Bertie Armstrong | Scottish Fishermen's Federation (Chairman) |
| Anthony Hawkins | Loughine (Rapporteur) |
| Alan Coghill | Orkney Fishermen's Association |
| Sean O'Donoghue | Killibegs Fishermen's Association |
| Lorcan O'Cinnéide | Irish Fish Producer's Organisation |
| Norman Graham | Marine Institute |
| Coby Needle | Marine Scotland Science |
| David Brew | Marine Scotland |
| Louise Cunningham | Marine Scotland |
| Colin Faulkner | Marine Scotland |
| Kenneth Patterson | European Commission |
| Jane Sandell | Scottish Fishermen's Organisation |
| Louize Hill | WWF Scotland |
| Rory Crawford | Birdlife International |
| Rory Campbell | Scottish Fishermen's Federation |