

**REPORT**  
**North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council**  
**Working Group 1**

**Madrid - 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2008**  
**9.30am-1pm**

**Introduction**

The chairman welcomed the members and noted apologies for Kara Brydson and Helen McLachlan. The report of the last meeting and agenda for this meeting were adopted without comment.

**ICES advice**

Martin Pastoors presented the outcome of the ICES stock assessments for 2008 and advice for 2009. At the beginning of the presentation Martin briefed the working group on the changes within ICES to improve the assessment process, these include:

- One advisory committee (ACOM) instead of the previous three (ACFM, ACME, ACE). This new method allows for joint planning and an integrated approach to advice. Mike Sissenwein is the new chair of ACOM.
- At the request of EC and Norway, ICES is now operating on new timing for the advice where 70% of the fisheries advice is released before the summer. This has meant a lot of pressure for expert groups but stakeholders have more time for consultations.
- The new advisory system has more direct links to expert groups
- There are still a number of measures to implement under the new systems within ICES these include:
  - Data workshops which will include stakeholders and scientists to discuss better integration of stakeholder knowledge/data into the assessment process. These working groups are planned for end of 2008/early 2009.
  - Better integration across fields- ICES are leaning towards a more fisheries focus approach (rather than stock) and to incorporate more information on catch composition, effort data, discarding
  - More ecosystem links- ICES will consider effects of environmental drivers on fisheries and equally effects of fishing on the ecosystem i.e. by-catch issues.

For 2009, ICES has not provided new advice for many stocks and has simply reiterated the advice from last year. This was done for stocks where the data is too poor to justify a revision. In addition a full assessment (with some changes) has been done for Nephrops and for the first time ICES is providing advice on Skates and Rays. Advice is as follows:

○ ***Cod in VIa***

The assessment for Cod in VIa is a catch-based assessment with catch data up to 1994. It is calibrated with Scottish ground-fish survey and includes estimates of unaccounted removals. In the past there have been significant non-reported landings but this has been recently improved through stricter enforcement. There has been a cod recovery plan in place since 2004 but there is continued low recruitment and low stock size however the 2005 year class shows some small improvements. In addition in this cod stock it is difficult to separate total mortality into mortality caused by fisheries and/or natural mortality and there are indications of increased natural mortality. Given this situation the ICES advice for this stock is for a zero catch rate.

○ ***Haddock in VIa***

The assessment for Haddock is based on landings and discards data calibrated with research vessel surveys. Catch data for 1995–2005 were not used in the assessment. The assessment shows that the stock is declining, there is low recruitment and the spawning stock biomass is below Bpa. However this does not seem to be driven by fisheries as fishing mortality is in and around Fpa. A similar situation is being seen in the Faroes Haddock stock and it seems to be driven by external environmental factors. However even in the absence of fishing, stock cannot be rebuilt to Bpa and therefore ICES recommends a closure of the fishery in 2009 and the development of a recovery plan as a prerequisite to reopening.

○ **Haddock in VIb**

This stock is doing well with spawning stock biomass well above Bpa and fishing mortality below Fpa. The assessment is somewhat 'noisy' but there is no apparent bias. ICES feels that there will be little gain to the long-term yield if fishing is increased and therefore recommends limiting catches to 6490 t in 2009 and landings to 4330 t.

○ **Nephrops**

The assessment used for this stock is a TV survey, however ICES intends to undertake a review of this assessment method in 2009, as it is felt that it cannot be used for absolute abundance estimates. The introduction of the "buyers and sellers" regulations in 2006 has considerably tightened up the levels of reporting for *Nephrops* and landings 2006/2007 are considered to be more reliable and in general TV surveys and trends in mean size suggest that the stocks appear to be exploited at a sustainable. The advice from ICES is that *Nephrops* fisheries should be not be allowed to increase relative to 2006-2007 and the following levels are suggested for the management units:

- ≤ 4100 tonnes for the North Minch stock.
- ≤ 5000 tonnes for South Minch
- ≤ 5700 tonnes for Firth of Forth

○ **Saithe in VI and IV**

Landings remain constant and fishing mortality remains low and below Fpa. Spawning Stock Biomass is increasing and is above Bpa, however there is difficulty in estimating recruitment. Landings in general are well below the TAC and it is recommended by ICES that an internationally agreed management plan should be put in place for this stock.

○ **Other species**

There is no new advice for the following stocks in west of Scotland:

- Anglerfish in IIIa, IV and VI
- Megrin in VI: advice
- Whiting (West of Scotland)

The information available for these stocks suggested no change in status from 2007 assessments and as a result the advice for 2009 remains the same as that for 2008. However there is recognition for stocks such as anglerfish that there is a lot of effort being put in by industry and Member States to improve data available for these fisheries. The information being put forward will assist the scientists to review and calibrate the assessments.

**Open Discussion and Recommendations**

The chairman opened the discussion and asked for comments from the members. The following comments were made for each species

**Cod:** It is important to note that a number of positive changes are taking place in this stock, recruitment is increasing and mortality is decreasing. It is also important to note that the mortality witnessed in this stock is largely natural. Also it is noted that what is seen on the ground is very different to what is coming up in the assessments.

It is recommended that an Fpa limit be set for this species and that ICES move away from advising based on biomass levels as it is widely accepted that the biomass levels such as Blim are set too high and are unattainable. It is also important that work commence on the causes and actual levels of natural mortality in this stock.

**Haddock:** There was a discussion regarding the status of the stock in VIa. ICES noted that it is difficult to explain what has happened to the stock, but note that it and the stock in the Faroes are following a similar trend which may point to impact of external environmental factors. Regarding the advice for the stock in VIb, there was general disappointment from the members of the working group; even though the stock is doing well cuts in TACs are still being proposed.

It is recommended that a long-term management plan be proposed for Haddock in area VIa. For Haddock in area VIb it is recommended that the Commission DO NOT reduce TAC levels down to levels of catches as this will mean a 30% cut in TAC it also interferes with relative stability.

**Whiting:** There was disappointment that the whiting stocks were not re-assessed given that there was general recognition by scientists and industry that the assessments performed were nonsense.

**Nephrops:** Again there was disappointment that the advice was based on maintaining level of catches rather than TACs and it was recommended that this should not be substantiated.

**Data workshops:** Finally it was recommended that the RACs and ICES work closely together to prepare for the ICES data workshops in late 2008/early 2009 to address the most relevant data gaps in the assessment and how the industry and RACs can work to ensure that these are filled.

### **Technical Conservation Measures**

The Chairman tabled the following two papers for discussion at the working group:

- COM(2008) 324 final Proposal for a Council Regulation concerning the conservation of fisheries resources through technical measures
- EC Non-paper on Specific Technical Conservation Measures for the North Western Waters

The Chairman invited Francois Theret of the EU Commission to explain the rationale behind these papers. Francois explained that the first paper has been presented to the Council for discussion and sets out general way forward for the implementation of TCMs in European waters. The second is a Non-paper which sets out specific conservation measures for the North Western Waters. It is not yet clear if this non-paper will be put as an annex to the regulation or will be published as a separate regulation.

Francois explained that as it is the Commissions intention to simplify and regionalise the TCM regulation they have grouped all legislation relevant to all species and fisheries in a zone together. While both documents need to be considered together the Commission would welcome comments on the non-paper in particular. He also stated that while it is unlikely that the non-paper will be converted to legislation before Christmas, initial comments would be welcome by September.

### **Open Discussion and Recommendations**

**Com 324 document:** As this document is at Council level it was agreed that members should be working via their Member States to make proposals or changes.

**EC Non-Paper:** A number of members made interventions on the detail within the non-paper and where this would need to be changes or amended to reflect the operational realities of the fleets in the area. These were noted, by the Commission but it was also noted that a more detailed examination of this paper would be needed over the coming weeks. It was agreed that the NWWRAC would establish a focus group to meet in September/October to discuss this non paper and formulate advice for the Commission. It was agreed that this focus group should be kept to a minimum and be comprised of practitioners and technical experts. The secretariat will be in touch to seek comments on the paper and to advise on the meeting date.

### **Fuel Crisis**

The Chairman introduced this item noting that it was an issue of great concern for all members of the fishing industry and stated that the NWWRAC should be working to develop tangible options to help manage or alleviate any consequence for the fishing industry. He welcomed the economist Sebastien Metz from Seafish Authority to the meeting and asked Sebastien to present an economic analysis of the situation. Sébastien's presentation is available on the NWWRAC website.

### **Open Discussion and Recommendations**

The members of the working group welcomed the analysis which they felt backed up their claims in recent months. They also welcomed Commissioner Borg response to this issue and recognized that great efforts were being made within the Commission to come up with solutions to overcome this problem.

The members therefore agreed that a letter should be submitted to the Commission and the Council before the 15<sup>th</sup> of July to urge that the proposals tabled by the Commission on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June last be accepted by the Council. The chairman agreed to write this letter and send it to the Secretariat to be circulated and agreed by the Executive Committee by the 15<sup>th</sup> of July.

**Meeting Close**

The Chairman closed the meeting and thanked members for coming.

Chairman: Bertie Armstrong  
Rapporteur: Patricia Comiskey