

REPORT
North Western Waters Regional Advisory Committee
Working Group 2
03rd July 2008
14:00-17:30
Madrid (Spain)

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted by consensus.

Adoption of Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of WG 2 meeting held on 12th March 2008 were adopted by consensus.

Review of ICES Advice 2008 for TAC & Quotas VIIbcfghjk

Martin Pastoors from ICES gave a general presentation on the new ICES advisory process. The presentation is available on the meetings section of the NWW RAC website (www.nwwrac.org) for information.

The key points were

- The establishment of one single advice group (ACOM) that assesses the fisheries, ecosystems and environment elements in the development of ICES advice for the Commission.
- New earlier release of the advice, in the main before the summer for most Community stocks.
- System of not updating the advice for every stock every year, for those stocks where there is no change in the assessment perception or very little new information available. The ICES advice would be the same as the previous year.

Proposed changes still to come:

- Establishment of data compilation workshops aimed at assessing information from all sources including fishermen were planned to start in late 2008/early 2009.
- Implementation of better integration of data and information on fisheries with an ecosystem focus assessing environmental changes and where effects of fishing on other parts of the ecosystem are taken into account.

The presentation then moved on to give an overall picture on the advice for the stocks concerning Celtic Sea and Western Approaches which was very similar to last years advice in many cases, therefore the ICES advice remained the same as that given in 2007.

It was noted that there was ICES advice on certain species of Sharks and Rays for the first time in 2008.

New advice on Cod VIIe-k was presented. It showed decreasing fishing mortality on this stock and some improvement in the spawning stock biomass in recent years. It was noted that fishing effort in the main fleets targeting this stock had decreased significantly in recent years. There were issues of uncertainty surrounding discards and the level of recent recruitment.

Members of WG2 commented that this was positive advice and that the scientific advice was beginning to reflect the perception of fishermen. Some comfort was taken from the fact that the reality had partly been reflected in the assessment for this year but it was clearly stated that there was still a lot of work to be done to address the issue of uncertainty in recruitment and discard information which remained at odds with fishermen's perceptions.

Members of WG2 commented that it was likely that effort would fall further as various Member States fleets were in the process of decommissioning large parts of their fleets that had worked in this area and that this should be noted.

It was felt that more efforts should be made to integrate stakeholder data into the scientific assessment process and advice development. It was requested that ICES should describe the format of presenting data from industry sources prior to the data compilation workshops due to be held later in 2008 or early 2009 to ensure that new and additional data coming forward was useful and could contribute effectively to the process.

It was stated that ICES hoped to have more participation from stakeholders going forward and that it was an open process in which fishermen's information would be integral.

Overall it was noted that there had been improvements in this assessment and once again it was stated that Cod VIIe-k was showing positive signs and therefore the draconian proposals of extending the existing Cod Recovery measures from the Commission were unjustified.

New advice on Plaice VIIfg was presented. The following points were noted: that there was no inclusion of discard rates, the assessment was 'noisy' and that there was a strong upward bias in last years assessments.

In conclusion it was reported that the stock size and recruitment of Plaice were low leading to advice for a strong reduction of F , in the region of 75%.

New advice on Sole VIIIfg was presented. The following points were noted: that there was a tendency to overestimate fishing mortality and underestimate of spawning stock biomass. In conclusion it was reported that there was reasonable recruitment and stock size. The advice was status quo fishing mortality that equated to landings similar to 2008.

New advice on Northern Hake was presented. The following points were noted: that discard estimates had not been included, there were issues regarding aging of hake that had not been resolved and there was a tendency to overestimate stock size. Fishing mortality was estimated around F_{pa} and spawning stock biomass was around B_{pa} . Overall the advice was similar to 2008 although the TAC advice was a reduction of 3% due to the overestimation of the stock biomass in 2007.

There was no new advice for Anglerfish, Haddock, Whiting or Megrim so the advice from ICES was the same as the advice for 2008.

It was noted that there had been an improvement on quality of the landings data on Area VII Nephrops (mainly due to reliability of data coming in as a result of Buyers and Sellers Regulations in UK and Ireland).

Members of WG2 noted that that there were issues surrounding some of the Functional Units assessments of this stock and that further analysis of discard rates in the different Nephrops fisheries in Area VII was required. The dangers of basing TAC advice on average recent landings were once again highlighted.

WG2 were informed that a STCEF review of discard rates in relation to Nephrops fishery was due in a couple of weeks and it was requested that this is circulated when it is released.

EU Joint Data Collection Between the Fishing Sector and the Scientific Community in Western Waters

Mike Armstrong from CEFAS gave a presentation on the project. The presentation is available on the correspondent meetings section of the NWW RAC website (www.nwwrac.org) for information.

It was noted that there were three broad work areas:

- More detailed description on fisheries and response to regulations
- Self-sampling programmes
- Improve involvement of stakeholders in interpretation of data

In terms of the Celtic Sea the objectives included:

- Providing better information about definition of Celtic Sea demersal fleets
- Analyzing how different fleet sectors have been affected by different management measures such as the Trevose closure, and how their behaviour has changed.
- Documenting spatial and seasonal distribution patterns of undersized fish to help discard reduction
- Improving use and interpretation of data from fishing industry

Potential Benefits might include:

- Development of industry-led management measures
- Enhanced input of stakeholder data to stock assessment process
- Development of a productive working relationship between scientists and fishermen

WG2 agreed with the overall aims and objectives and requested that they be kept informed of progress. WG2 were informed that contributions and detailed comments would be welcomed at anytime and should be fed through the NWW RAC secretariat.

Cod recovery in Celtic Sea

The Commission representative gave an overview of the Commissions proposed cod recovery measures for 2009, which included Area VIIe-k Cod.

In relation to Area VIIe-k Cod the Commission highlighted that there were low levels of recruitment in recent years and that there seemed to be substantial benefits to gain from agreement on moving towards a Fishing Mortality target at around MSY (0.40).

WG2 made a number of key points:

- Fishing Mortality had fallen significantly in recent years and at present was around 0.6
- Spawning Stock Biomass was increasing and was above precautionary limits
- There has been a huge reduction in fleets targeting cod in the Celtic Sea
- The rationale for including Cod VIIe-k in the Commissions proposals was flawed as this stock was different.
- It was likely that further reductions in effort will occur due to decommissioning schemes in various Member States
- The inference from the proposals were year on year reductions of 25% in fishing mortality which seemed excessive in a stock where the trends were going in the right direction.

- Finally it was stated that the trends in the assessment of this stock were relatively positive and certainly different to those seen in other cod fisheries such as the Irish Sea or West of Scotland, again suggesting this stock should not be included within the general cod recovery plan designed for other areas

ICES commented that the amount of young fish was increasing whilst the amount of older fish is decreasing in this stock according to the landings and assessment data. Therefore a lower exploitation rate could be beneficial in the longer-term.

The Commission stated that 25% reductions in Fishing Mortality were maximum reductions and would only be applied in worst case scenario. It was suggested that the proposals could be called a Long Term Management Plan and the Commission remained open to stakeholder input.

Further comments from WG2 followed:

- Any measures should be targeted without discrimination to any fleet targeting or catching significant amounts of Cod
- The Spanish delegation was explicit in that they did not support real time closures and that those responsible for Cod mortality should be those affected by any measures.
- There was a lack of clarity regarding the term 'recovery plan' and 'long term management plan'

It was agreed that in light of the discussions the paper produced by WG2 on Cod would be refined and put to the NWW RAC Executive Committee to be endorsed by electronic means under an urgency procedure in order to submit it before the forthcoming Council of Ministers meeting (15th of July), where this topic will be dealt with as an agenda item (in-year rising revision of cod TAC at Celtic Sea after ICES new advice has been released stating a higher stock size of cod)

Fuel prices

The Chairman and members of WG2 highlighted the effects of high fuel prices to the Commission Representative for their information. However it was agreed that this issue would be covered in detail as an horizontal issue within WG1.

[The rapporteur had to leave the meeting at this stage. Alexandre Rodríguez, from NWWRAC Secretariat completed the last part of the report]

Horizontal Issues

Discussions on Discards & Incentives for the Nephrops Fishing Fleet

The Commission representative sets the scene by giving a general overview of the Discards policy within the EU. He acknowledges that a new approach has been adopted by the Commission towards a closer participation of fishing industry representatives and other stakeholders in defining sensitive measures aiming the reduction of discards. An initial timeframe of five years is proposed to achieve a drastic reduction of the discard rates (going from 50 to 10% for some species and fisheries).

The NWWRAC members disagree about the Commission proposal to analyze the Nephrops fishery in area VII as a whole area. Given the different discards patterns existing in several sub-areas, it would be more realistic to look at the specific nature and characteristics of each nephrops fishery within area VII (different gears, typology of discards, etc.). The CIEM representative agrees with that view and thinks that discards for nephrops should be better delimited at geographical level (i.e. by functional units) in accordance with the stocks. Therefore, the Commission proposal should take into account an overall reduction of discards per functional units or specific areas rather than to area VII as a whole.

The NWWRAC Secretariat reminded that the deadline given by the Commission to give advice to this consultation process was already overdue (30th of June) and that a draft response had been circulated among General Assembly (19th of June) and Executive Committee members (26th of June) for comments and endorsement. Due to the wide variety of comments and responses received and the difficulty to conceal some of them, the Secretariat requested to the Commission an extension of the deadline and it was agreed to re-circulate the latest version of the response among the Executive Committee Members so they can submit concise comments and endorse the paper by electronic means in at least two working days.

Information points

Report of main conclusions and actions of Joint NSRAC – SWWRAC - NWWRAC Meeting in Lisbon on Deep-sea species management

Jacques Pichon, Chairman of the Joint RAC Meeting held in Lisbon the 16th and 17th of June, briefly summarized the main outcomes and actions agreed for each session of the meeting -black scabbard, blue ling, deepwater sharks and general comments on ICES advice on deepsea stocks-.

Due to confusion arisen from some members, the NWWRAC Secretariat explained the general conclusions reached at the meeting and the main actions to be put forward. The Secretariat explained that the meeting report would be accordingly reviewed to make this point clear and the final version would be available for all members in the website in the following days.

Report and conclusions on Northern Hake Management Plan

Jesús Lourido, Chairman of the last NWWRAC-SWWRAC Focus Group on Northern Hake Management Plan celebrated in Madrid the 22nd May, thanked the Secretariat and the members to have included this issue as an agenda item and invited the members to read the general report of the meeting to see in detail the main conclusions reached there (report available on the meetings section of the NWW RAC website). He also reminded that the NWWRAC and the SWWRAC had submitted a joint response to the EC Consultation procedure on Hake Management within the agreed deadline (13th of June), and that we were waiting a response from the European Commission in relation to this issue.

Joint RAC meeting on LTM/MSY

Patricia Comiskey, from the NWWRAC Secretariat, informed the present members that five Regional Advisory Councils (Pelagic Species, Baltic Sea, North Sea, North Western Waters and South Western Waters) would co-host a seminar on Long-Term Management Plans in Nantes (France) the 11th and 12th of September. The main aim of this Seminar is to give a general overview and reach common grounds about the biological, political, social, economic and environmental implications of the implementation of long term management plans in European fisheries.

She announced that the Secretariat would launch a call of interest seeking participation of a maximum of ten participants per RAC in the following weeks.

Update on review of mesh size in Deepwater Gillnet Fishery

Alexandre Rodríguez, from the NWWRAC Secretariat, reported the members on the status of the request made by the NWWRAC to the Commission and STCEF in a letter issued the 1st of May (see publications section of the NWW RAC website) in relation to the impact assessment of a potential harmonization of the rules regarding mesh size on hake gillnets in ICES areas VII and VIII. He precised that no response had been received up to now but STCEF meeting to be celebrated next week in Helsinki could bring some light on this issue.

One of the members asked about the timing and actions to be undertaken in relation to this issue, but the Chairman of Deepwater Gillnets Focus Group and the rest of the members convened that it was too early to think in any action in particular to be taken until the final advice from STCEF is not available.

Specific Proposals and recommendations

Agreed proposals to put forward to the Executive Committee

- Review of ICES Advice on TAC & Quotas for 2008

To develop a draft paper containing the NWWRAC advice on the different stocks taking into consideration the scientific information presented and provided during this meeting by Martin Pastoors.

- EU Joint Data Collection

It was agreed that WG2 would work closely by submitting contributions and detailed comments about how to improve data to assess all stocks on this fishery. The relevant information would be fed into the project through the NWW RAC secretariat (participation in forthcoming joint meetings between project coordinators, dissemination of relevant information and news among members...)

- Cod Vlle-k

More efforts should be made to integrate stakeholder data into the scientific assessment process and advice development. It was requested that ICES should describe the format of presenting data from industry sources prior to the data compilation workshops due to be held later in 2008 or early 2009 to ensure that new and additional data coming forward was useful and could contribute effectively to the process

- Cod recovery in Celtic Sea

It was agreed that in light of the discussions the paper produced on by WG2 and Executive Committee members on Cod –Draft Opinion on COM (2008) 162 final- would be refined and put to the NWW RAC Executive Committee to be endorsed by electronic means under an urgency procedure in order to submit it before the forthcoming Council of Ministers meeting (15th of July), where this topic will be dealt with as an agenda item (in-year rising revision of cod TAC at Celtic Sea after ICES new advice has been released stating a higher stock size of cod)

- Discards and Incentives for Nephrops Fishing Fleets:

It was agreed to re-circulate the latest version of the draft NWWRAC response among the Executive Committee Members so they can submit concise comments and endorse the paper by electronic means in at least 2 working days.

The final NWWRAC proposal will be sent to the Commission as soon as a formal agreement is reached.

Chairman: Hugo C. González García
Rapporteurs: Paul Trebilcock and
Alexandre Rodríguez