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Subject: Deepwater gillnets

**Report: NWWRAC Focus Group meeting
CNP MEM - Paris, 27 June 2007 (10.15-13.00 h)**

Participants:

Jacques Pichon (Chairman)

Michel Goujon

Thomas Díaz

Jesús Lourido

Mercedes R. Moreda

Barrie Deas

Ian Gatt

Lorcan Kennedy

Gerard O'Flynn

Alexandre Rodríguez (Secretariat – rapporteur)

Niels-Roar Hareide (Scientist)

Isabel Parra (Observer)

Elodie Chene (Observer)

1. Welcome

The Chairman outlines the background leading up to the creation of this Focus Group, tasked with submitting ideas and proposals for discussion by the Working Groups and/or the Executive Committee.

- Adoption of the agenda

No comments having been made on the agenda, it is deemed adopted.

2. Setting of goals, actions and timetable for later meetings

The main purpose of this meeting is to decide how to move forward in identifying sustainable development measures for the furtherance of the NWWRAC's goals.

One of the short-term priorities pinpointed by a majority of participants is the framing and implementation of a joint protocol across all Member States to conduct observation campaigns on board commercial vessels (see item 7).

As regards timetabling, some participants argue for taking action as soon as possible (in response to traumatic past experiences); others, however, propose longer time frames that allow for further deliberation on what action to take, given that the monkfish and hake fisheries are presently open.

ACTIONS: The NWWRAC Secretariat will coordinate proposals and dialogue online to move forward with the definition of a specific scenario of objectives, actions and timetable in the coming months.

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3. Revision of provisions on marker buoys under Regulation (EC) No 356/2005 in connection with the safety of fishing ship crews and on-board personnel

The participants agree that the technical requirements for marker buoys prescribed by the Regulation have in practice proved dangerous to the safety of crews and even to vessels not using gillnets.

Thomas Díaz screened a video clearly displaying the practical difficulties faced daily by the crew of a *volanta* (hake-fishery) gillnet vessel in the handling of gear (rope, chains, buoys) and in conducting manoeuvres to lay and gather in marker buoys. It is argued that the statute is ineffectual and fails to achieve its intended ends. The meeting proposes that the requirements be suppressed and replaced with an electronic system of satellite positioning.

ACTIONS: The Secretariat reminds the Focus Group that in its reply of 17 February to a request from NWWRAC the Commission undertook to call a public tender for the performance of a study to examine international experiences and practices in passive gear marking and consider the possibility of revising the Regulation. The Secretariat will report the announcement and terms of the tender when available.

4. Revision of maximum net lengths in the deepwater hake fishery

The Focus Group examines the Commission's reply of 26 June 2007, which is acquiescent to the RAC's requests. The Chairman says the reply is positive proof that RACs can be an invaluable forum to take forward proposals to amend or revise Community legislation on fishery management.

It is therefore agreed that item 4 requires no further discussion.

5. Contribution to assessment of the real situation of cetacean by-catch

This item is passed over, owing to time limitations and the priority accorded to other issues.

6. Evaluation of the ghost fishing programme - Presentation of the DEEPCLEAN project (Nils-Roare)

A brief presentation is offered (see attachment), citing the partners involved in the DEEPCLEAN project and setting out two key goals: accurately to locate and quantify ghost fishing nets; and to retrieve lost, discarded and abandoned nets.

The presentation lists the main areas where the most nets are lost by species (hake, monkfish and deepwater shark), fishery and depth level in Community waters.

An account is given of Norway's ghost fishing-net retrieval programme as a pioneering experience (begun in 1999) that could serve as a model for the European Union. One of the reasons why the programme was successful was that reliably accurate information was obtained from interviews with fishermen.

The speaker asks the industry to cooperate with the collection of accurate information from fishermen on the area and the positions where they lost their gear. At the request of some participants, the speaker explains the system used to retrieve nets (hooks) and the technical and practical difficulties involved (incomplete or inaccurate information, coral on sea bottoms, etc).

ACTIONS: Request for published studies on the subject and a list of partners and of the network of experts involved in the project. Continue working through this network on the basis of close cooperation among this Focus Group and other groups (e.g., the STCEF scientific sub-group) to share information and disseminate results.

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7. NWWRAC contribution to the conduct of future observation campaigns

It is essential that an impartial body frame a general protocol of common standards of assessment so that specific observation campaigns are conducted in a standardised and coordinated way. This will guard against the suspicion and reluctance to recognise results that have arisen among countries in the past.

As to the procedure to prepare that protocol:

After debate, it is suggested that an in-person meeting or seminar be held in October among a small number of scientists from the research network and fishery industry representatives (fishers and producer-organisation experts) to write a joint report proposing future work and protocols. Decisions should be made on the basis of preliminary work to be done over the summer. This would make the process more transparent and help to achieve a consensus.

For carrying out this preliminary work, Michel Goujon is put forward as coordinator of gillnet-related actions vis à vis scientific bodies during the summer months (July and August). He will gather and compile the set of protocols for observations campaigns independently developed in 2006 by Spain, UK and France, together with the results achieved. He will transmit all this info to the scientific network for them to evaluate and ascertain the means of unifying these protocols and their results. He will finally regularly report any news to NWWRAC members through the NWWRAC Secretariat, and invite them to formulate any comments or remarks.

A proposal is tabled to conduct specific campaigns clearly delimiting the various types of gear and the special features of different gillnets (*rasco* [monkfish fishery], *volanta* [hake fishery], *gata*, etc) relating to different fisheries and set at various depths. It is further proposed to draw up a timetable in accordance with fishery seasons.

Examples of the proposed campaigns would include selectivity indices (mesh size, etc), identification and quantification of lost and abandoned nets, studies of deepwater shark by-catch at various depths around 600 m, accidental catches, hazards associated with marker buoys, and trials of different immersion times for monkfish nets (see item 9); etc. The scientific interest of the various trials must be validated by the scientific network, whether in summer or during the October seminar meeting.

Michel Goujon expressly proposes that the possibility be considered of allocating additional funding to compensation for loss of profit to fishing vessels with observers on board.

ACTIONS:

- NWWRAC will ask Nils-Roare for a list of persons in the expert network.
- NWWRAC will support and coordinate the preparation of protocols, lay down a timetable and work towards the setting in motion of observation campaigns conducted by Member States concerned.
- NWWRAC will draft out a protocol to be validated by scientists from the research network on this issue.
- Organization of a seminar on deepwater gillnets with the participation of scientists from the research network, fishing industry representatives and NGO.
- NWWRAC will appoint a chairperson for the in-person seminar and consider ways of funding it.
- Appointment of Michel Goujon as coordinator in the preparation of the seminar.

8. Resetting the immersion time threshold in connection with discards and by-catch

The Focus Group agreed to lay down the terms of an experimental campaign to set monkfish gillnets for a range of immersion times (e.g., 24, 48 and 72 hours) to determine the most suitable immersion time. The scientist expressly points out that his colleagues are willing to cooperate in this matter, given that collecting further data on the various fisheries is essential.

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9. Vigilance, monitoring and enforcement of current laws and regulations (Ian Gatt)

Ian Gatt acknowledges that the Scottish fishing industry is highly concerned about faulty marking leading to there being nets whose existence or location is unknown, mainly when there are no vessels in the vicinity of the gear. He demands stricter vigilance and tougher penalties for breach of the regulations.

ACTION: Continue discussion of this issue by creating an online forum of Focus Group members.

Other business - Conclusions

The key conclusions of the seminar are summarised. No further comments are made.

The meeting is adjourned at 13.00 h.