

DRAFT REPORT

North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council Focus Group on Cod Avoidance Plans 13th February 2008 Clarion Hotel Dublin Airport

Attendees:

Bertie Armstrong

Chair

NWWRAC Members

Barrie Deas

Helen McLachlan

Hugo González

Ian Gatt

John Hermse

John Crudden

Luc Corbisier

Marc Ghiglia

Sean O' Donoghue

Scientists & Experts

Alvaro Fernández

Dominic Rihan

Alain Biseau

Alastair Beveridge

Emmet Jackson

Nick Bailey

Patrick Daniel (EU Commission)

Robert Scott

Norman Graham

Observers

Michael Walsh

Joe Maddock

Colin Faulkner

Secretariat

Patricia Comiskey (rapporteur)

Kristel Adriaenssens

Introduction and update of issues

The chairman welcomed the members and thanked the scientists and the experts for coming to the meeting to discuss the proposed cod avoidance plans. The Chairman stated that after this meeting he would like to be in a position where he could provide the NWWRAC Executive Committee with a detailed plan of what exactly is a cod avoidance plan is and how the NWWRAC should put it forward to the Commission. He recognised that there was general understanding that the theory is that cod avoidance plans will move towards industry led management within defined limits and targets that obtain real reductions in cod mortality.

Review of Documentation

Participants of the meeting had been sent the following two papers to help provide background and frame the discussion at the meeting:

- EC Response to NWWRAC Advice
- Discussion Paper on Cod Avoidance Plans

Regarding the EC response, it was generally felt that the Commission response to the initial proposal of Cod avoidance plans by the NWWRAC was a positive if very general one.

Regarding the Discussion Paper on Cod Avoidance Plans, the author, Dominic Rihan of BIM was asked to summarise. Dominic informed the meeting that he had simply taken the concept of discard or Cod avoidance plans as he saw it and considered the practical issues regarding their implementation. He listed a number of questions or concerns which he felt could be dealt with by this group and could form the bases of the discussion. It was agreed that the paper was very useful and raised many pertinent questions that need to be addressed but not all of them could be done in one day.

The areas that were concentrated on were:

- Member States, fisheries and areas that should be targeted/Involved
- Size of the pilot study
- Resources needed and the provision of them
- Tools or incentives that may be used.
- Appropriate regulatory framework to implement the plans
- Development of the plan

Member States, Fisheries and Areas that should be targeted/involved

It was agreed that the majority of Cod landed in area VI was by UK, in particular the Scottish, France and the Irish vessels. It was noted that there was little or no Cod caught by the Spanish Hake and the Belgian fleets operating in the area. Therefore it was proposed that an initial study should include vessels from Scotland, Ireland and France.

After reviewing data it was also agreed that vessels fishing along the shelf edge in particular should be targeted as this was where the majority of cod catches were historically taken.

Size of the pilot study

The meeting discussed the appropriate size of the pilot study. It was generally felt that a limited pilot plan should be rolled out for the first year and it was agreed that 2 vessels per Member State should be targeted to give 6 vessels in total. It was agreed that the relevant POs would source and put forward the vessels.

Resources needed and the provision of them

It was acknowledged that the NWWRAC did not have the resources to pay for this work and the Commission were asked to comment on possible methods of funding. The Commission recommended that funds be sourced from EFF or DCR. However it was felt by the NWWRAC members that this would mean individual Member States funding and running individual programs- although it was recognised that this could be done, a joint program with joint funding would be more desirable. However it was agreed that this could be further explored by the NWWRAC with the Member States.

Regarding resources such as observers, it was noted that it was very costly and difficult exercise to ensure that good observer coverage is provided for schemes. The appropriate roles and responsibilities of the observers were also discussed in general. In the end it was agreed that while the responsibilities of the observers were as yet unclear, it was agreed that for the cod avoidance plans at least 10% observation should be sought, as is recommended by the Commission in Annex II of EC 40/2008*. Self-sampling was also discussed as a possible method of collating data.

Tools or incentives that may be used

• *Tools*

While it was recognised that the nature of discard/cod avoidance plans was to simply set targets and then leave the individual vessel to decide on the best method to reach these targets, it was noted that there is currently a scheme being run in Scotland called the Conservation Credits Scheme, which could run side by side with a proposed cod avoidance scheme and which should be discussed.

The Conservation Credit Scheme was explained by Ian Gatt as a scheme which uses the incentive of increased days at sea for Scottish fishermen who observe closed areas, mesh sizes and other regulations. As real-time closures are included in this scheme and it could potentially be running in the same area as the cod avoidance plan it was agreed that vessels in the cod avoidance plan should sign up to the real-time closures that are being implemented by the Scottish. Other tools such as selective gears, tie ups etc could also be implemented by the vessels involved in the cod avoidance plan but it was recognised that these plans should be adaptive rather than prescriptive and so it was agreed that the plans would not limit the tools that can be used by an individual to reach their target.

*COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 40/2008 of 16 January 2008 fixing for 2008 the fishing opportunities and associated conditions for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks, applicable in Community waters and, for Community vessels, in waters where catch limitations are required OJ L19.

- *Incentives*

It was agreed that increased days would be the main incentive for fishermen to take part in the cod avoidance plan. Under this point it was noted that in Annex II of EC 40/2008* the Commission proposes 10 additional days for vessels participating in cod avoidance plans in area VIa. It was felt that this would not be sufficient to encourage vessels to partake in Cod avoidance plans, particularly if they were to be part funded or resources were needed for observers.

Appropriate Regulatory Framework

Annex II of EC 40/2008* and the stipulations regarding Member States Cod Avoidance reference Fleets was discussed as possible method to put forward these plans. It was noted that the Plan would need to be approved by STECF, who will be meeting in April, June, July and November. Another suggestion was made that the plan may be eligible in accordance with Article 43 of 850/98**, if it was out carried out as scientific research. Following discussions on incentives available under Annex II of 40/2008, it was agreed that the latter method would be preferable. It was agreed that the Commission would consider this proposal and revert to the NWWRAC with its advice on whether it would be possible to implement a cod avoidance plan under 850/98.

Development of the Plan

It was agreed that Barrie Deas, Dominic Rihan and Sean O'Donoghue would develop the first draft of the plan provided that realistic incentives for participation were confirmed by the Commission as available

Next meeting

It was agreed that the Chairman would brief Working Group 1 on the 11th of March on the outcome of this meeting and allow time to further the discussion of this group.

Agreed Actions and timelines:

1. Commission to confirm the possibility of implementing a cod avoidance plan under article 43 of 850/98 before the 11th of March
2. Follow on discussion at the Working group meeting on the 11th of March
3. Depending on outcome of point 1 and 2 above development of draft plan
4. 2nd meeting of Group 2 in 2nd quarter of 2008.

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COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 850/98 of 30 March 1998 for the conservation of fishery resources through technical measures for the protection of juveniles of marine organisms OJ L 125