

REPORT

North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council Focus Group on Data Collection and Long-term Management Strategies 12/3/2008 Manchester (UK)

Welcome

The Chairman of the Group, Barrie Deas welcomed the members to the meeting and thanked the scientists for attending this meeting. In particular he welcomed the Chairmen of the ICES Northern and Southern Shelf Working Groups Rob Scott and Colm Lordan.

Discussion on outcome of ICES and RAC meeting in Vigo

The outcome of the meeting between the RACs and ICES in Vigo in January 2008 was discussed. In particular the following action points of the meeting were noted:

- NSRAC to set up a dedicated group to consider extending the North Sea fishers survey to other RAC areas
- ICES and RACs to explore whether coordination of focus groups and data compilation workshops can be achieved in 2008.
- ICES to explore the possibilities develop a “traffic light approach” for the quality of the ICES assessments.
- RACs to coordinate the requirements for scientific support in 2008 and specifically the requirements for ICES scientific support.
- ICES and RACs to continue support of the young fishermen participation at the ICES ASC.

It was noted that these annual meetings are extremely useful in fostering understanding between scientists and the fishing industry.

ICES new advisory structure and timing of advice

Colm Lordan presented on the new structure in ICES. He noted that these changes will allow ICES to present advice on the Stocks relevant to this RAC by the 27th of June 2008. A schematic explaining the roles and participation within various groups in the ICES Advisory Services framework can be found in Annex 1 of this document

Stakeholder observers are allowed to participate at a number but not all of these meetings and the following groups will be open to stakeholder participation:

- ACOM (Advisory Committee on Management)
- Advice Drafting Groups
- Review Groups
- Benchmark Groups
- Data Compilation Groups

It was noted that there are a number of significant changes; however this is very much an evolving framework that will develop over the coming years.

Calendar of future ICES workshops and seminars and stakeholders participation

Colm Lordan updated the NWWRAC on a number of meetings that members of interest to the NWWRAC and in particular:

- Southern Shelf Demersal Working Group meeting, 30th April-6th of May
- Working Group on Hake Monkfish and Megrim meeting, 30th April-6th of May
- Northern Shelf Demersal Working Group meeting, 15th-21st of May.

These meetings will be closed to RAC observers but the meetings which will review the outcomes of these working groups will be open to observers as follows:

- Review meeting by correspondence, 2nd-5th of June
- Celtic Sea Advice Drafting Group meeting, 9th-12th of June

Other meetings that will be open to observers will be:

- Workshop on Fishers Sampling of Catches, 10th-13th of June 2008
- Data Compilation Meetings, November 2008.
- Benchmark Working Group on Flatfish, 4th-10th of November 2008
- Benchmark Working Group on Roundfish, 4th-10th of November 2008

Further benchmark meetings down the line include those considering age and length information for species and also the input or use of industry data in assessments. These will be planned for 2009.

Some members asked about the meetings on Cod and Climate change. It was noted that there were a number of meetings planned by the Oceanography Committee for the 16th-20th of June. ICES secretariat should be consulted on access to this meeting.

Colm was thanked for both representations and it noted that there is ample opportunity for involvement of the RACs in the ICES system.

What data is needed by scientists from the stakeholders?

Rob Scott gave a presentation on this issue. It was acknowledged that the lack of data and knowledge of stocks Area VI and VII was becoming an ever increasing problem. Almost 50-60% of stocks in this area have inadequate data to provide an analytical assessment. A lot of uncertainty still existed in the assessments due to fleet changes in recent years, due to recovery programmes, redistribution of effort and decommissioning.

It was felt that industry could certainly help in increasing information used by scientists to produce the assessments. It was acknowledged that the quality of official statistics had improved with the introduction of buyers and sellers registration. Additionally, the industry could help by providing information such as:

- Retrospective information where available
- Information from Industry science partnership projects
- Self sampling and discarding schemes
- Information from processors
- Fishers' Questionnaire

Rob noted that the key to providing useful data is to establish a time series. Even retrospective data can be useful to help improve the assessment. However it was also noted that assessment methods don't handle rapid change very well and there was a need to spend time on reviewing assessment methods within ICES and this is where the benchmarking groups would play an important role.

The Chairman thanked Rob for his open and frank contribution to the debate and opened the floor for comments. There was a lengthy discussion on this issue. The following were the main points raised:

- There is a huge amount of scientific data that is being collected in the industry science partnerships and other similar projects in various member states but which hasn't been tapped into due to difficulty of trying to apply the data to the assessments. There is a real need to look at this in detail.
- It was noted that the information that is lacking varies from stock to stock and not all of this information would be available from the industry. It may be therefore better to prioritise the stocks that could be worked on.

- The fact that the TAC and quota system was not necessarily working was also raised. It was questioned whether it is worth putting this amount of effort into a system that hasn't developed the fishing industry in a sustainable manner. However while it was generally agreed that it is good to think outside of the box to come up with innovative solutions it was felt that we needed to work within the current guidelines of the CFP.
- The use of historical data to do the assessments and the discrepancies between what is noted on the ground and what the assessments return was also discussed. It was suggested that work should be done to overcome these differences and the use of reference vessels to update or fine-tune an assessment could be considered as is being trialled in France.
- It was noted that this is the start of a process and it would be best to take an iterative approach, whereby the scientists and industry could work together and fine tune the type of data needed; data available; and the delivery of this data.
- The mismatch between management units and assessment units for stocks was also raised (ie Cod and Plaice in the English Channel) and it was noted that this is a political rather than scientific issue and is something that should be looked into further with the Commission.
- It was noted that for many stocks discarding information is a major gap area. There is a facility to note this in the log sheets, but this is not uniformly done. It was considered that this could be something that the NWWRAC could help deliver on.

The following actions were agreed to be put forward to the Executive Committee:

- The NWWRAC will write to ICES regarding the discussion and outcomes of this meeting and stating their intention to participate in the proposed data compilation meetings in November.
- The NWWRAC should submit in writing, in advance of the data compilation meeting, a report to ICES clearly outlining the stocks that they wish ICES to prioritise and suggested ways forward to improve information on these stocks.
- The NWWRAC secretariat will circulate a call for suggested participation to the meeting and for suggested priority stocks in preparation for the report.
- The NWWRAC would coordinate with other RACs to develop as uniform approach as possible.

MSY update on for area VII and proposed way forward

Barrie Deas updated the meeting on the work of the NWWRAC on the development of long-term management plans to date. He noted that this discussion was largely concerned with the work needed for area VII but that similar work was ongoing for area VI.

There were two fundamental aspects to developing long-term management plans

1. Scientific data and analysis underpinning a range of options for achieving some proxy of MSY, in any event, stocks at a higher and more stable level than at present
2. The involvement of stakeholders in an inclusive discussion on the best way to move towards MSY (or some proxy of MSY)

The Commission had made clear its view that any scientific work required by the RAC should be undertaken through the Memorandum of Understanding between the Commission and ICES.

He reminded members that this work originated in a meeting in September 2006 when the NSRAC and NWWRAC met together to discuss MSY. It had been agreed at this meeting that the NSRAC would look to develop long-term management plans on a species by species bases and development groups were set up to do this. By contrast in the NWWRAC, it was agreed that it made more sense to consider this issues on a fishery by fishery bases and the work would be carried out in the working groups.

This work had been started through a DEFRA funded project. CEFAS had identified fishing fleets/areas on which to base long-term management plans. The project had had input from IFREMER, IMI and AZTI. A report had been completed and presented to the NWWRAC in September 2007.

It was now necessary to agree the next steps. Barrie proposed the following way forward:

- A Mini-Conference: A coordination meeting with ICES and the Commission to agree a framework for RAC input into LTM plans. At a minimum this would involve all the chairs of the Development/Working Groups. To prevent duplication this should involve all interested RACS
- Meetings of each Development/Working Group, with scientific assistance, to define the terms of our request to ICES for advice on the development of LTM plans
- Dialogue with the Commission on the regulatory impact assessment for each fishery; specifically discussion on the range of options to be considered for achieving movement to MSY and the involvement of STECF
- Once in possession of the options, elaborated by ICES, the Commission and STECF, a series of stakeholder meetings with the participants in each fishery, with the aim of finding an agreed consensus on a way forward.
- The formulation of draft RAC advice by each Development/Working Group based on the foregoing process.
- The adoption of formal RAC advice on Long Term Management Plans on a fishery by fishery basis

Although the Commission had made clear that it “wouldn’t pay twice” for scientific advice, it may be possible to secure community funding for the stakeholder engagement part of the project.

The floor was opened for comment:

- It was strongly suggested that socio-economic consideration be tied in to this process.
- Some members were worried about the NWWRAC taking this route and felt that this would be a very difficult thing for the industry to accept and endorse. It was noted that MSY was a political commitment and asked why this RAC would work to endorse such a commitment.
- However others felt that it would be imposed on the industry one way or another and it was better that the NWWRAC make suggestions now of how to get to MSY than it being decided later by others.
- It was considered that the route that the NWWRAC was taken whereby fisheries were considered as a whole is a very complex one and may be difficult to achieve. It was recommended however that the EFIMAS project be considered by the NWWRAC as a model that could be used.
- There was general agreement that the NWWRAC needed to be proactive rather than reactive on this issue and as a result the suggestion of a mini-conference was agreed to in the first instance but this would have to consider the socio-economic consequences of implementing LTMs.

The following actions were agreed to be put forward to the Executive Committee:

- A mini- conference should be set up to bring ICES, EU Commission and relevant RACs together.
- At a minimum the NWWRAC working group chairs would attend this meeting
- Hugo González agreed to explore possible hosting of this meeting in Santiago de Compostela.

Close of meeting

The chairman thanked the scientist and members for attending the meeting.

Chairman: Barrie Deas
Rapporteur: Patricia Comiskey