

REPORT

North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council Working Group 1 – West of Scotland (ICES Vb and VI)

Manchester, Tuesday 11th of March 2008
14:00-17:30 h.

1. Welcome

The Chairman welcomes Kristel Adriaenssens on behalf of all the members of WG1 as new member of the NWWRAC Secretariat.

The agenda and the report of the last WG1 meeting (Brussels, 31st of October 2007) were formally adopted.

2. Review of EC Response to NWWRAC Advice on Fishing Opportunities for 2008

The working group made comments and agreed actions on the following specific stocks:

- Cod: The members expressed their disconformity with the Commission advice for the decrease / setting up a low TAC and on quotas based on institutional discards rather than real conservation or sustainability of the stocks.

→ ACTION: To seek more support from the Commission and try to work earlier or give advice/ influence at an earlier stage of the process taken into account the new timing of scientific advice and stock assessment planned for 2008 (frontloading)

- Rockall Haddock: Commission advice in relation to management plan was deemed as satisfactory in general terms.

→ ACTION: To submit a new letter to the EC asking them to arrange a meeting with the Russian fleet representatives to overcome their lack of engagement in the management plan.

- Monkfish: Members express their concern about reduction of monkfish and megrim in area VI, and fears that the EC will follow on this tendency by strictly applying precautionary approach due to data uncertainty. Ian Gatt informs the Group about the results of the three surveys held last years and that a decision of undertaking new surveys is pending for 2008.

- Megrim: Similar concerns than with monkfish (scarce data, precautionary approach...), identifying a problem on the new regulation of 5% limit of by-catches.

- Whiting:

→ ACTION: Ask for advice and work on improvement of selectivity and TCMs.

- Issues related to other species: some members ask for the possibility of dealing with the problem of the 5% by-catch for spurdog fishery. The Secretariat precises that this issue was initially intended to be dealt with exclusively at WG4 (Irish Sea) but, due to the relevance of the issue for all WGs, it will be treated there as a horizontal issue.

- Underutilized data and deficient stocks: It was reflected that it exists a problem of communication misunderstanding between the RACs and the Commission in this issue

→ ACTION: Improve communication with EC in this issue, via Focus Groups, informal meetings and exchange of letters.

GENERAL ACTION: To sum all the conclusions in relation to the EC Response in a letter to be sent to the Commission, after approval or adoption by the Executive Committee. To re-address the discards issue by submitting a proposal to the EC on specific measures targeting the reduction of discards, by gathering studies and supporting selectivity trials in co-ordination with Member States with on-going projects.

3. Development of Cod Avoidance Plans in Area VI:

- Review of reports and actions from Focus Group: The Chairman reminded that the main aim of this Focus Group was to develop and draft a concrete Cod Avoidance Plan for implementation. This result was not fully achieved there due to many reasons, being the most important one the lack of incentives for fishermen offered by the Commission under the current Regulation on TAC and Quota, not providing any extra incentives (such as more days at sea...) out of Point 12 of Annex IIa of TAC & Quota Regulation to swift to this alternative initiative.

Victor Badiola, on behalf of the Spanish fishing industry, asks for clarification on the extent of the implementation of this plan as presented in the report drafted by Dominic Rihan and discussed during the Focus Group meeting. He reminds that the Spanish trawlers have never targeted cod nor have by-catches of this species and therefore they should not be bound by any measure adopted under the CAP. He shows his reluctance and disapproves the concept of real-time closures as stated in Dominic paper as he believes that they might be eventually adopted relying on political rather than scientific decisions and they could be incompatible with the current EC Regulations. He reaffirms that the Spanish delegation will not support real-time closures nor be affected by them.

The Chairman and industry representatives from other Member States (UK, Ireland, France) stress that CAP are a leaded-industry voluntary initiative and think that it would not be regarded as an element of conflict but as an opportunity to continue building a culture of trust and cooperation in "good faith" between all the NWWRAC members in order to help rebuilding the stock and decreasing cod fishing mortality. They do not perceive real-time closures as a potential danger nor believe that goes against EC Regulations insofar as they must follow a strict pre-defined procedure and be based on strong scientific evidence before being adopted and taken into place, as it is being done under current initiatives carried out in North Sea and West of Scotland waters. Moreover, they conclude that those vessels not catching cod, due to its fishing patterns and species targeted, will not be affected by these plans. The Chairman invites the Spanish delegation to contact the Scottish Administration to have more information about Scottish pilot projects on real-time closures.

The NWWRAC Chairman expressly supports the further development of these CAP and suggests that we should seek alternative sources of incentives if European Commission does not provide any other else (e.g. sponsorship and funding coming from the own fishing industry), in order to ensure its viability and consistency.

→ ACTIONS:

- To ask for suitable technical advice to develop a first pilot scheme of Cod Avoidance Plans for 6 vessels (2 per country for France, Scotland – UK and Ireland) in Area VIa.
- To agree a date to meet with vessel operators participating in these pilot projects to explain them in detail how these trials should be correctly performed.
- To address the Commission the issue of giving a more effective incentive structure.
- To convene a meeting of a “mini-group” (around 6 people max.) of NWWRAC members and technical and scientific experts to discuss the progress done and to adapt the existing three overarching proposals of CAP to the specifications of each particular vessel participating in this voluntary scheme.
- To scratch regulations to find additional ways of funding for such kind of initiatives apart from existing EC incentives.

4. MPAs and consultation on proposed NATURA offshore sites in UK waters

Ian Gatt summarizes the main outcomes and conclusions of the Joint-RAC Workshop on MPA held in Edinburgh the 5th and 6th of March. It is reminded that the timetable is pretty clear and all the concerned coastal Member States must submit their proposed sites for designation to the EC before the end of this year. It is also remarked that legislation on this issue is still very vague, and therefore a bottom-up approach should be followed in order to meet conservation aims while ensuring broad stakeholders participation in the consultation procedure. It is advised to read the Commission Guidelines for Implementation of Natura 2000 in the CFP to better understand the whole procedure. It is finally pointed out that a process of review of these sites is needed after some period of time.

→ ACTIONS:

- To compile all the individual responses (once they have been completed) sent by the NWWRAC members directly to JNCC, together with any relevant document (e.g. STCEF report from October 2007).
- To draft a letter addressed to JNCC asking for extra time (deadline due the 14th of March) in order to have time to pull together the convergent arguments coming from the individual proposals addressed by the NWWRAC members from the national fishing industries.
- To discuss the possibility of adopting a more flexible “fast-track” written procedure to submit proper advice for key issues having a tight timetable in due time, whenever quality of the advice is backed with strong scientific evidence.

5. Update on Long-term Management Proposals: Presentation by Ian Napier (NAFC)

The presenter gives an overall summary of the NAFC Marine Centre Handbook titled “*Review of Available Information on the Fish Stocks and Fisheries in ICES Sub-Area VI (West of Scotland & Rockall)*”, submitted to the NWWRAC in August 2007 (for more information, see whole report and presentation in the website)

In the round of discussions, it is felt by the majority of the members that this comprehensive study is very helpful to define fisheries as a first step for looking at long-term management Plans in a context of multi-specific fisheries and Maximum Sustainable Yield, but it would need to be summarized in order to clearly identify critical information by areas, fisheries and species which are relevant to the NWWRAC.

Some members also ask for some time to submit their observations and correct some factual inaccuracies that have been detected on the study before being made it public.

Finally, Helen McLachlan expressly thanks DEFRA for funding this project and encourages other Member States to provide accurate data and information to Ian Napier as project coordinator.

→ ACTIONS:

- To set up a time scale of two weeks for submitting corrections in relation to any factual inaccuracy which it might be eventually detected in the whole report.
- To decide how to undertake a summary of this study containing only those data and information which are relevant for the NWWRAC.
- To define and precisely agree which questions we as NWWRAC want to ask to ICES and STCEF in relation to this issue, in order to move to next step of adopting a management approach. In this particular, the NWWRAC Focus Group on Data Collection and MSY to be held on Wednesday 12th of March would be useful to extract some relevant conclusions.
- To ask for funding to the different Member States Administrations in order to develop another project to pull together all relevant data and keep updated and support the NAFC handbook.
- To think about how to plug into ICES system of data provision and advice through the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between this organization and the European Commission.

6. Proposals and Recommendations to put forward to the Executive Committee

- To send a letter to the Commission including all relevant requests about the different stocks in area Via made by members in point 2. in relation to the EC Response to NWWRAC Advice on TAC and Quota for 2008, both in an individual basis (specie by specie) and commenting general issues such as collaboration with EC in improving quality of data or reduction of discards.
- To fix a date and venue for a "Mini-group" of 6 people (NWWRAC members + scientists + technical experts) to adapt the CAP to an individual "vessel-by-vessel" context.
- To find out and identify the ways of funding for Cod Avoidance Plans in order to provide an attractive incentive structure for the fishermen to join this voluntary initiative.
- To submit a letter to JNCC asking for an extension of the deadline for giving our opinion about MPA proposed sites in offshore UK waters.
- To discuss the possibility of adopting a more flexible "fast-track" written procedure to submit proper advice for some priority issues.
- To draft a letter asking for funding of further projects on LTM plans following NAFC one.

7. AOB

Victor Badiola notes that he will give a brief presentation on blue ling closures in area Via within Working Group 2, in order to be discussed within the Review of the Focus Group on Deepwater Species and to be after submitted to the Executive Committee as a formal proposal if the Working Group members agree so.

The meeting is adjourned at 17 h.

March 2008

Chairman: Bertie Armstrong (SFF)
Rapporteur: Alexandre Rodríguez
(in absence of Mark Ruskell)