

### **Report from the meeting of WG3**

**Holiday Inn, Belfast,**  
**Wednesday, 13th June 2007**

**1. Agenda and Report of the meeting from Bilbao, 27<sup>th</sup> January 2007:**

Adoption of the agenda with no additions.

Adoption of the Bilbao report with no comments.

**2. Barrie Deas Presentation about the Inshore Sector from the UK perspective:**

Barrie Deas had agreed at the Bilbao meeting to prepare a paper detailing the characteristics and difficulties of this diverse sector that would be tabled this time for consideration and discussion. He apologised for not having prepared such a briefing paper, but had instead brought to the meeting Mr Paul Joy, Chairman of the Hastings Fishermen's Protection Society, to explain some of their concerns.

BCD explained that the sector is important in the UK in terms of employment numbers. The fleet is a major component of the channel fisheries yet the RAC, hitherto, has not considered them in its discussions. There are many cross-sector and issues common to all sectors, but some are sector-specific and distinct. The affects of the CFP have been experienced in different ways for this sector. BCD opined that the advice from the RAC to the Commission has to be credible and for a complete analysis this diverse sector has also to be considered.

He informed the WG3 that some inshore vessels are of traditional design and newer ones have been designed to out-fish older but larger vessels. Because of the UK license and registration regimes there is a large amount of latent effort in the fleet. Many registered boats are not used for fishing yet still have authority to fish. There is the potential for existing problems to become even greater.

In the UK and in France the weight of regulation is now impacting on the inshore sector. They have been largely unregulated in the past. BCD wondered whether this new burden is appropriate, fit for purpose and proportionate. Should the inshore sector operate under a different, light-touch regime? Could the RAC learn from the experiences of other Member States in relation to this sector? What impact do they have on the mortality of the fish and is it counted by ICES? Or is it minimal and of no consequence? Could it be managed better?

In general fin-fish catchers are affected by the rules of the CFP, but it seems the majority of these small boats exploit shellfish stocks and are locally managed. Undeniably there are many pressures in the inshore zone: competition for space, wind-farms, MPAs, aggregate dredging etc. They are also more than most affected by seasonal, weather and tide considerations. These vessels do, however, make significant social and economic contributions to their communities.

Of interest to the RAC, perhaps, is the relationship of this sector to long-term management of stocks and to the achievement of MSY. Before delivering any advice to the Commission perhaps the RAC firstly should attempt to identify the size of the fleet and its impacts on stocks?

BCD acknowledged that there are, of course, cost implications to the RAC if studies and focus groups are established.

**Paul Joy:** Reported the evident impact of the registration of fish buyers and sellers in the UK. The authorities in the past were obliged only to estimate catches, but now they must record accurately all landings. The true extent of activity and landings by this sector has now been revealed. Although the Hastings fleet (that he represents) submitted records going back to the 1960s, these were largely ignored. Now in the UK the share-out of the national quota is presenting challenges. The sector does understand that the Relative Stability shares are inviolate, but loss of livelihoods is a risk now that quota made available to them is too low compared to their exploitation levels. A NWWRAC opinion on how to deal with this problem would be most welcome.

**Bertie Armstrong:** offered the opinion that the troubles of this sector are influenced in the UK more by the way the Member State divides the quotas than by the EU regulations. It is a matter for the sector to take up with the national government and not a matter for the RAC. The number of vessels, the engine power and the amount of fishing effort they exert are not things upon which the RAC should comment.

**Daniel Le Fevre** commented that the sector is also large and varied in France. They too have seen a migration from larger vessels towards the inshore sector. Quota shortages and difficulties from high fuel prices have added to this drift to smaller inshore vessels.

**Eric Foucher, Ifremer:** Presented a PPT that is to be copied to RAC members. (See NWWRAC Website.) The French data appears to be comprehensive. Comments suggested that it would be of great interest to have a similar study of the UK inshore fleet presented to the WG3.

The ensuing discussions considered the impressive French data presentation and urged that comparable information should be collected for the other Member States so that similarities can be detailed. It was agreed that the next meeting should have presentations of the necessary data for due consideration.

Various contributors mentioned the ability of some very small boats in the inshore sector to out-fish larger vessels. The expansion of the use of gill-nets was offered as one explanation for the bigger impact today on fish quotas than in the years before the reference period. The Commission seems to have a narrow vision of the inshore sector as artisanal and of low impact, but collectively theirs is a major contribution to fishing mortality that should be better managed with due regard to their influence on the viability of the targeted stocks.

The Chairman expressed his concerns that the RAC is not able to comprehend all the fisheries activities in the round because there is a lack of data from CEFAS in the UK. It is imperative that we consider all data together. There appears to be a data vacuum for UK, Dutch, Belgian and Irish activity in the Channel. Ifremer responded that they do have the data for all Member State activity in the Channel. It is hoped that all such data can be presented at the next meeting. (VMS and catch data.) It was agreed that without all the necessary information the RAC cannot begin to provide proper advice to the Commission.

**3. Report regarding the long-term management plans for 7e Sole:**

Jim Portus presented a verbal report: There now exists a Council Regulation that was adopted in May 2007. 2007 is deemed the first year of a 3-year recovery plan, to be followed by a 3-year Management Plan. The target adopted is F0.27 as requested by the NWWRAC. The days at sea are set for the affected sectors for the next 3 years. The TAC 2007 (900tonnes) was set at a 10% reduction of F compared to 2006. For 2008 and 2009 the TAC will be set at a 20% reduction of F from the average F of 2003, 2004 and 2005. It is estimated that the TAC should be in the region of 850 to 900 tonnes in 2008.

A new Group of UK businesses will be seeking MSC Accreditation for 7e sole and other stocks. The Channel and West Sustainable Trawling Group will consider the Pre-Assessments and the recommendations for achieving MSC and will set out to achieve these targets in due course. French delegates expressed their reservations about the MSC Accreditation system. Paul Joy offered the opinion that MSC accreditation can be very difficult and costly to obtain. Increasingly consumers are demanding the standard, but it isn't an easy goal to reach. Caution was urged as the expectations of society don't always match the needs of the fishermen.

4. **MLS of Japanese Clam:** Stephanie Tachaires informed the WG3 about Japanese Clams: The MLS set in Regulation 854/98 is 40mm size. There are 150 plus fishermen dependent on them. It is financially important to the relevant sector. There is local demand for MLS 35mm. DG Fish has listened to the problem. They need the opinion of the NS and NWWRACs to progress this. Main beds are on Atlantic Coast. 35mm is well above maturity. TAC Regulation to propose 35mm for 2008 if the RAC gives the necessary support. After due consideration it was agreed to consider, through the electronic procedures, an Opinion drafted by Stephanie for the RAC Executive.

5. **Dutch-flagged Danish Seiners:** Dutch colleagues tabled an apology for their absence and asked for postponement of these important discussions.

The Chairman assured the meeting that there was no intention to make a decision, but he wanted to hear the views of the French who have raised this issue on more than one previous occasion.

Jacques Bigot: In 2006 he spoke to the Dutch owners about their new activities in the Channel. The Dutch appear to be intransigent. This issue has been discussed with DGFish and they passed it back for the NWWRAC to consider and advise.

It appears to be more about managing the resources than about access. Dutch-flagged Seiners converted from beaming under the pressures of the Cod Recovery Zone and because of the poor economics of heavy towed gear in recent times. Seining is a very efficient form of towed gear that can achieve savings of 40% on fuel. The French are concerned that these high powered craft can cover 64 km sq in a day. The French are not asking for this method to be banned, but would like to see it more regulated, modified and limited. Perhaps this activity is an ideal candidate for a study project?

The Dutch industry is urged to see the problem from the French point of view. The French inshore sector cannot compete for fish against them. In some ports there has been a 70% reduction of inshore fish landings. It was suggested that perhaps Ifremer might study this fleet over 6 months to estimate the resources taken, the impact on the bottom and on the fish and the socio-economic effects.

The Chairman opined that it is not in the interests of the resources to have a new activity that has an impact that is poorly understood. The impact should be assessed and the activity monitored. The Dutch RAC members will note that this issue has now been discussed.

BCD: Noted that a clear description of the French concerns has now been tabled. However, it is essential that the NWWRAC considers fully the issue from the Dutch perspective before any statement is made to the Commission.

JB: expressed the view that an opinion should be drafted for delivery by the end of this year. He believes that the activity is not sustainable and the credibility of the RAC might be damaged if the issue is ignored.

Luc Corbisier: offered the opinion that efficient, clean and effective fishing should be encouraged by the RAC. It is interesting that the Commission has encouraged Dutch owners to forsake beaming in favour of seining. What to do? Certainly direct actions by French fishermen in Boulogne against the Dutch should be deplored.

JP: voiced concerns about relative stability shares of quotas and effort limits under the Western Waters Agreement. Provided these vessels have allocations of W. W. Effort and are taking only the quotas they have then exploitation on non-TAC fish has to be accepted.

The discussions focussed on the efficiency of the gear technology, concerns for the stocks exploited and the evident risks to local (Channel-based) jobs. The view was expressed that while the non-TAC fisheries are evidently still sustainable steps should be taken to avoid excessive and uncontrolled transfer of activity from those that are over-exploited. This is a principle that should apply to any redeployment of activity to new fisheries and areas. It was agreed that a study should be undertaken promptly to establish baseline data to inform future advice.

The Dutch will be encouraged to attend the next meeting of the WG3 and more data will be gathered to assist the debate.

6. **Invest in FishSW:** Heather Squires presented an overview. Jeff Grainger gave a PPT about the model. (See NWWRAC Website) It was proposed that the model might become a useful tool for the RAC. It is, however, essential that data be provided from all relevant Member States in order for the model to be of the greatest utility.
7. **Scallop project:** Sam Lambourne: reported that the Executive Committee considered this matter further to the Bilbao meeting and the Scallop conference. The Secretary reported that the Exec' supported the research. The Commission is willing to support NWWRAC projects and a tender is expected at any time now. Institutes that were in the workshop in October are to be asked to put the project together with terms of reference as discussed at the conference.
8. **Crustaceans:** The Chairman reported Area 7 concerns. Meetings had been held in London and Dublin. There are a number of X-cutting areas and fisheries. Perhaps in time there will be scope for better management and perhaps EU Regulations? It was agreed there should be a specific Crustacean workshop. The budget cannot be set until after September. The event will take the form of round-table discussions. The secretariat reported that the Channel crabbers had not been in contact with the RAC with a view to joining WG3.
9. **AOB:** There is evident frustration that the lack of data from all Member States is inhibiting progress in the RAC with respect to making and delivering sound advice. The Executive Committee will be asked to prevail upon each responsible body within each Member State to provide their data as a matter of priority. It will then be shared amongst WGs and used to good effect for future work and projects.

The Chairman thanked the Secretariat, the translators and the members for attending a productive meeting of WG3. The next meeting is to be held at the invitation of the Dutch Administration in Holland.

Jim Portus,  
Rapporteur,  
25 June 2007