

DRAFT REPORT
NWWRAC Working Group 4 – Irish Sea
Bilbao, Spain
Friday 26th January, 2007

Chair: Lorcan Ó Cinnéide

Rapporteur: (NWWRAC Secretariat, in the absence of Alan McCulla)

The chairman welcomed all present and conveyed Mr. McCulla's apologies.

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted, with a minor sequence change of item 3 with item 4.

Report of the Last Meeting

The Chairman invited comments pursuant to the adoption of the report.

The Irish Seal Sanctuary asked that the report be amended to refer to the wish which was expressed by them at the meeting that commercial nets be excluded from areas adjacent to the shore. This was agreed.

The report was thus adopted.

Matters Arising from the Report of the Last Meeting

The Chairman offered his apology for not having followed up with Mr. John Woodcock of the Irish Seal Sanctuary regarding the latter's paper which had been placed before the working group at the previous meeting. The Chairman committed himself to rectifying this within the coming fortnight.

December Council

The Chairman outlined that the various recommendations and proposals from the Irish Sea Working Group had been duly presented to the Executive Committee for their ratification and decision, and the Chairman expressed his contentment, on behalf of all WG4 members, that the key discard project on the Irish sea was endorsed fully by the Executive Committee and was indeed pursued actively on behalf of WG4 members by the Chairman and Secretariat in the days leading to the December Council.

The Chairman reflected on the considerable work done by WG4 during 2006, which was duly reflected in the December Council decisions related to the discard project.

In general the December Council gave rise to a reduction in the no of fishing days available in the Irish Sea, and considerable reductions had been made in quotas for key stocks, including Cod, Haddock, Whiting. There was an increase in the Plaice quota.

The Isle of Man PO representative wished it to be noted that the Queen Scallop fishery, by dint of not having a Cod by-catch, did not receive a benefit in terms of additional days at sea in lieu of any participation in the discard programme.

Cod Recovery:

Great importance was given by members to the forthcoming joint NSRAC/NWWRAC Symposium on Cod Recovery. It is important that there be strong Irish Sea participation in the Symposium. Concerns were expressed relating to the timing of the Commission's forthcoming policy paper on Cod Recovery, due in April, and that the timing of the latter might be too early to allow the conclusions of the symposium and the review process to be factored into policy. It was noted that the Chairs of both NWWRAC and NSRAC had jointly written to the Commission to highlight the timing of this conference, and to urge the Commission to consider the deferral of their policy paper. It was suggested that this request be reiterated..

Disappointment was expressed by members concerning the intention to make all Cod catches by-catches at the December Council. It was stressed however that it was necessary to steer away from simply 'complaining' about Commission procedures and the compilation of scientific analysis and that the RACs need to be more systematic in our approach in these matters, to engage early with scientists and the Commission so as to have RAC views integrated into the process.

Update and Discussion on the Irish Sea Discard Project

The appreciation of WG4 members was conveyed for the work done by those involved in developing and pursuing this project. It was felt that the project could prove a valuable prototype for work to be done in similar areas. A special word of thanks was also conveyed to the environmental organisations who had supported the project.

The Chairman clarified that there had been justifiable delays in the progress of the project during the month of January (referring to the terrible tragedies suffered by the loss of key vessels). A meeting to be organised by the Irish Administration, (provisionally scheduled for 7th February) would provide a key opportunity to progress the discard project further.

The Chairman also clarified that the summary outline of the project, as circulated to WG4 members in advance of the working group meeting, had been further developed by the Marine Institute into a more detailed proposal, which will be discussed at the forthcoming meeting referred to above.

While some financial and resourcing issues were yet to be resolved, the group remained hopeful that they would also be able to call upon the national governments involved to provide the necessary resources.

The question of the composition of the Steering Group for this initiative had not yet been decided, but this question would be discussed at the forthcoming meeting involving administrations. The Chairman outlined that the project comprises of a self-sampling programme by vessels utilising an agreed protocol, to be validated by the involvement of an agreed level of scientific observer coverage.

It is envisaged that the implementation of this project would really take place from March 2007 onwards. The Chairman re-iterated his appreciation of the great level of support received for the project to date.

The Chairman expressed his hope that a result of the initiative might mean that the word 'uncertainty' will never again exist in the scientific advice provided in this area.

Reference was made to the Clyde Fisheries Development Project which WWF was partnering with the Northern Irish, Clyde and other fisherman. It was highlighted that, as this project utilises a self-sampling protocol, it might be worth considering this in the design of the Irish Sea project.

The Chairman emphasized the importance of receiving interim results from all projects, given that in the normal course of events, data which is being researched this year would not then appear on the table until mid 2008, which is too late for the next December Council.

A meeting is envisaged in Autumn 2007 to hold an initial assessment of the data, to enable the group to inform the people we choose to influence in this area.

In summary the Chairman proposed the following action on the Irish Sea discards project:

- A. That the NWWRAC Executive Committee communicate to the Commission, on behalf of the RAC, it's very strong imperative that the required resources be made avail by the member states and by the Commission to enable the Irish Sea project to achieve it's goals.
- B. That the WG4 members commit to keeping informed all of those affected by the project in the coming months.
- C. That the Irish Sea group ensure the establishment of an interim reporting mechanism, which can ultimately contribute to our deliberations.
- D. That the Chairman of WG4 would revert to the Irish Seal Sanctuary regarding their query about representation on the Steering Committee, once the composition of this group was decided upon.

Separately the Chairman committed himself to consulting the Clyde project regarding their model to see what knowledge/experience could be shared. The work done by CEFAS on their discards study (results due out in March) would also be investigated similarly.

Additionally, the Chairman urged all WG4 members to encouraging the relevant practitioners and fishermen to attend the joint NSRAC/NWWRAC Cod Symposium.

Presentation on Long-term Management Proposals (Steve Mackinson, Cefas)

In advance of Steve's presentation, the Chairman invited WG4 participants to consider the relevant questions arising for the Irish Sea within the presentation. The following points/comments arose:

A query arose regarding the quality of the STECF data obtained by the ICES working group on Cod. Steve clarified that any future doubts around the quality of data used in such studies could potentially be allayed considering the new quality control measures being introduced via the Commission which would attempt to 'standardise' the type of data which is initially compiled by the Member States in each case.

Steve answered this by describing the new quality control measures coming in which standardise the type of data compiled by member states.

A query arose as to why the study did not include statistics pre-2003 which would have been provided from log-book data provided by Irish Sea fishermen even prior to 2003.

In addressing all of the above points, attention was drawn to the first ever RAC/ICES dialogue meeting which was held during January 2007. It was suggested that, to enable the RAC members to 'break out of the cycle' of simply complaining about the quality of the scientific data provided, that a more pro-active approach be adopted, ie: that RAC would work closely with ICES in developing long-term objectives under the MOU, to 'spell out' in great detail exactly what RACS require from ICES.

It was felt that perhaps a 'dialogue meeting' with the scientists would enable RACS to frame the right questions for ICES. RACs need to define a 'shopping list' of needs for the scientists. Ultimately this would provide RACS with a scientific model which is more accessible. Once data is received, it would be crucial to have subsequent 'dialogue' phase where this data is communicated appropriately to RAC members. The RAC would need to clarify in which format this feedback would take place, eg. via Working Groups?

The Chairman thanked Steve Mackinson for his presentation which was deemed to be a 'useful tutorial', as was the Invest in Fish economic model, presented to the other RAC working groups.

AOB.

At this time the Chairman invited the WG members to consider items for inclusion in the Irish Sea Work Programme for 2007. He invited contributions from members present, and encouraged members to submit items which arose between meetings via the Secretariat. The Chairman stressed the need for outputs from the group.

Items suggested for the 2007 Work Programme/ Agenda for the Irish Sea included:

- Barrie Deas' suggestion of refining our RAC 'shopping list' of scientific needs, to enable ICES to help the NWWRAC
- Joe Maddock's suggestion on how to tackle horizontal/overlapping issues between the NWWRAC Working groups, to avoid repetition. Mr. Maddock suggested the possibility of the RAC Chairman chairing a 'horizontal issues' group during the Working Group meetings.
- A request by the Irish Seal Sanctuary that 'Fuel Management / Fuel Costs' be added onto the forthcoming agendas for this group. The ISS agreed to draft a paper for consideration at the next working group meetings.

The Chairman expressed a word of thanks to the interpreters and organisers. A special word of thanks was conveyed to Victor Badiola and his host organisation OPPAO, as industry hosts for the NWWRAC Working Group meetings. Grateful thanks were also expressed to the Sinaval Exhibition organisers, the Spanish Government and Basque Regional Government for their hospitality.

Finally the Chairman concluded with a word of heartfelt thanks on behalf of the Irish fishing community to all those from other countries who had been so supportive in recent weeks of the families of the victims of the recent tragedies at sea off the south coast of Ireland.

[Ends]