

**Minutes of the North Western Waters Executive Committee Meeting
Brussels**

22nd of November

1. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed all members of the Executive Committee and introduced Willy Vanhee and Alvaro Fernandez- Scientific representatives from Belgium and Spain respectively.

Apologies were made for Luc Coribiser by Benoit Beernaert who attended instead of him.

The agenda was adopted with a change suggested by the chair that Working Group membership be discussed with the budget issues. The minutes of the last meeting (30/9/05) were adopted.

2. Reports from the Chairman on meetings with the Commission

o *RAC Co-ordination meeting on the 11th of October*

The Chairman informed the meeting that the RACs established to date had their first meeting with the Commission to discuss work programmes and timetables for 2006. The RACs agreed that timetables for 2006 for each RAC would need to be co-ordinated to avoid overlap of time and issues. The next inter-RAC meeting will take place on the 20th of December.

o *RAC meeting on TACs and Quotas 18th of November*

Michael Keatinge and Jacque Pichon who attended this meeting, reported that most of the meeting was focussed on the TAC and quota proposals for 2006 and the amended Annex IV [which is now called Annex III].

o RAC Meeting with the Commission on the 23rd of November

The Chairman informed the meeting that he and Jacque Pichon would be taking the recommendations made at this meeting forward to the Commission for consideration on the 23rd of November.

3. Report from the Working Groups

Working Group 1 West Coast of Scotland ICES area VI

Bertie Armstrong Chairman briefly summarised the outcomes of Working Group 1 as:

- o WG1 proposes that for 2006 should identify practical action to help improve the quality of data, and to encourage scientific involvement in WG1 to assist in making rational choices on the management of all species of interest to this working group.
- o WG1 recommends more accurate data collection on *Nephrops* based on new methodologies, which could lead to alternative and improved methods of stock management and an increase in the TAC. Under these circumstances an effort cap on this fishery would be acceptable to the industry.
- o WG1 proposes a new approach to the management of monkfish, which is a unique stock with unique problems (bycatch etc).
- o WG1 calls for a review of Annex IV in relation to Area VI, which is a distinct area by character and may not suit the current 'one size fits all' approach. Some members feel Annex IV is demonstrably not working and is in fact counter-productive.
- o WG1 calls for urgent action to address the problems surrounding the impact of bottom set gillnets in deepwater fisheries including that the Commission should fund and implement a large-scale clean-up of lost and discarded nets immediately. Industry members suggested sanctions against problem fleets rather than a total ban. Some industry members were against setting the precedent of banning a gear type. However 'other interest group' members urged WG1 to support the emergency closure.

Working Group 2 Celtic Sea and Western Approaches ICES area VII (except VII a, d&e)

Hugo Cristantino Gonzalez Garcia and Paul Trebilcock .summarised the outcome of Working Group 2 as:

- o WG2 spent much of its meeting discussing the Industry led initiative to close three ICES statistical rectangles (30E4, 31E4 and 32E3), outside of the six-mile limit of UK and Ireland, to all demersal fishing during the months of February and March. It was agreed that because the closure only applies to demersal fishing, potting vessels should be permitted to continue to fish with pots for crab, whelk and lobster. It was also agreed that the impact of the closure should be assessed including with respect to other species such as sole, plaice, nephrops and other gadoids. Potential displacement of fishing effort should also be carefully monitored. Those present at the meeting reached a consensus, but there was a dissenting opinion expressed by proxy.
- o WG2 proposes an increase of 15% in TAC for hake and monkfish. It was noted that for these stocks the recruitment is stable, and the fishing mortality is decreasing, and the spawning stock biomass is increasing.

- On the Deepwater Gillnet fishery issue the rapportuer of WG2 has produced a paper to be considered further under item 4 of the agenda today.

Working Group 3 English Channel ICES area VII d&e

Jim Portus summarised the outcome of Working Group 3 as:

- The main item of discussion in WG3 was the Sole Recovery Programme. It was proposed a long term management plan should be implemented, leading to $F=0.31$, and that cuts in the TAC and in the number of available days at sea that were set for 2005 should be maintained for 2006.
- WG3 also devoted a lot of time to the work programme for 2006 and have set out some initiatives for discussion. Included are the development of management plans for non-quota species which make up to 80% of the catches in the area. It was agreed to circulate the suggested programme to the WG3 members.

Working Group 4 Irish Sea ICES area VIIa

Lorcan O'Ceinnede and Alan McCulla summarised the outcome of Working Group 4 as:

- A large amount of the meeting was devoted to discussing the Cod Recovery Programme in the Irish Sea. The conclusions of these discussions were very clear- the Irish Sea can no longer be managed by the lowest common denominator which is cod. Since 2000 there has been a cod recovery programme in place for the Irish Sea and nothing has been done to assess the effectiveness of this programme. However each year more stringent management measures are put in place. The WG4 are calling for a recess for 2006- so that the recovery programme may be revised and a more appropriate management plan put in place that takes into account the specificity of the area. The need for derogations to the recovery programme for fisheries that do not catch cod was noted, for example the Queenie fishery in the Isle of the isle of Mann.

4. Responses to the Commission

Response to ICES Advice and the Commission proposals for TACs 2006

Because the Commission proposals for TACs had only been released on the 18th of November the Working Groups had not had time to consider them. It was agreed that for this meeting the proposals would be considered on a Working Group basis. These recommendations would be presented to the Commission on the 23rd of November. In addition to the Working Group advice, the Chairman asked that members consider points to be raised which are horizontal issues within the RAC - one such item proposed was the Commissions failure to 'frontload'. The Chairman stated that others would materialise over the course of the meeting, but asked representatives of the Working Groups to put forward priorities to be presented to the Commission

The Priorities for Working Group 1 were agreed to be the following:

- Nephrops: The Nephrops TAC for area VI should be increased by 30% to improve the quality of fisheries data and bring it more in line with positive indications for this stock from non fisheries data [burrow counts]. This should be done in accordance with effort capping. It was emphasised that the proposed increase in TAC would not increase 'the take' in this fishery.
- Monkfish: A 15% increase in the TAC was proposed to improve the quality of fisheries data. Again this would not increase the take. A comprehensive scientific assessment of the stock in 2006 was also proposed
- Cod Recovery: The Cod Recovery Programme for this area is not working and has relatively little impact on the state of the stock. A fundamental review of the Cod Recovery Programme for this area must be carried out in 2006.

The Priorities for Working Group 2 were agreed to be the following:

- Cod Closure: The Industry led initiative to close three ICES statistical rectangles (30E4, 31E4 and 32E3), outside of the six-mile limit of UK and Ireland, to all demersal fishing during the months of

February and March was supported by all members of the Executive Committee.¹ It was also agreed that there should be a full scientific assessment of the impacts of the closure on other species such as sole, plaice, nephrops and other gadoids and that effort displacement should be monitored and assessed as was the case for the 2005 closure. The WG considered the proposed 15% TAC decrease to be unjustified because of the cut in mortality associated with the closure.

- TAC cuts based on Member State uptake levels: The system whereby TACs are cut based on Member State levels of uptake rather than on biological status is not supported by the NWWRAC. It was pointed out that even if a Member State is taking up less than 60% of a quota, individual POs within that Member State may be taking up 100% of their share of that quota, and therefore any cut will cause real difficulties to fishermen.
- Megrim and Plaice: The proposed cuts of 15% to Megrim and Plaice must be reviewed and increased. These broad-brush decreases are unjustified in effort particularly because of the inevitable cut in effort associated with the fuel price crisis for the beamer fleets targeting these stocks.
- Hake: The TAC should be increased by more than 3%. The current increase in TAC of 3% will yield an increase in SSB of 5%; an increase of 11% will yield an increase in SSB of 2%.

The Priorities for Working Group 3 were agreed to be the following:

- Sole VIIe Recovery Plan: The proposed 9% increase in TAC and associated 10% cut in effort were accepted by the NWWRAC. Furthermore the NWWRAC proposes that a sole recovery plan for the channel be implemented with a stepped reduction towards $F_{0.31}$ where each step has a 3-year holding pattern and that 2005 should be considered the first year of these steps. It was noted that this fishery is likely to have a cut in effort in excess of 10% because of the fuel price crisis and in addition the UK is considering a vessel decommissioning scheme for 2006 that will affect this fishery. Finally any effort limitation scheme should not apply to netters whose catch of Western Channel sole is from very low to zero.
- Removal of VIId from the Cod Recovery Programme for the North Sea: The NWWRAC considers that VII d should not be subject to the North Sea Cod Recovery Programme. Cod for this area is assessed as part of area VIIIb-k for TAC and quota management. Furthermore the vessels that target Sole in VIId, have a very low by-catch of Cod and should not be subject to effort control.
- Plaice in VII d&e: The NWWRAC believes that the Commission proposal to apply a 15% cut for 2006, will lead to serious discarding. This stock is primarily taken as a bycatch by the beam trawlers targeting Sole and Anglerfish and therefore TACs for Plaice should be brought more in line with those for Sole in this area. The comments regarding effort reduction for SoleVIIe also apply to this stock.

The Priorities for Working Group 4 were agreed to be the following:

- The Cod Recovery Programme: The Irish Sea Cod Recovery Programme measures have been in place since 2000, yet no real assessment has been made of the impact of the recovery programme to date. The lack of data is resulting in fishing opportunities for other species, such as Nephrops (the most important commercial stock in the Irish Sea) being held artificially low. ICES assessments for 2005 for the Nephrops, Haddock and Plaice stocks in the Irish Sea were favourable, yet the Commission has proposed cuts of 11-15% due to the state of cod. This is not acceptable; the whole area cannot be managed by the lowest common denominator. The NWWRAC recommends that the Commission undertake a comprehensive review of the Cod Recovery Programme in the Irish Sea and maintain a status quo in the area to allow for some breathing space in 2006 while the review is being conducted.

¹ This was agreed on the basis that the NWWRAC also support the initiative to remove VIId from the Cod Recovery Programme for the North Sea.

Advice on Annex IV and effort management

The Chairman stated that Annex IV had now become Annex III and asked for comments, noting that it was difficult to comment as the paper had only been released on the 18th of November. Generally the NWWRAC welcomed the new presentation of different fleet segments effort in one table, but is concerned how the effort will be allocated on a vessel by vessel basis for periods of less than 1 year, and for vessels using different gear types during the year. It was however felt that although it was simpler to read it was more punitive and did nothing for the recovery of the cod.

Deepwater Fixed net Fishery

It was noted that WG1 and WG2 had reached similar conclusions. There was a majority view against the ban but a distinct minority among the Other Interest Groups and some of the Fishing Sector in favour of the ban. However it was unclear when this issue would be raised at Council. The Chairman agreed to seek clarification from the Commission on the status of this issue and a paper expressing the views of the RAC would be submitted.

It was agreed that the following three issues be considered at the next meeting.

- o Non- Paper on implementing sustainability in EU Fisheries: strategies for growth and employment.
- o Non Paper on Technical Conservation measures.
- o Communication from the Commission: Perspectives for simplifying and improving the regulatory environment of the Common Fisheries Policy {SEC(2004) 1596}

5. Incorporation of Scientific advice into the Executive Committee

The NWWRAC want to ensure that in the future scientific advice is not provided on an ad hoc basis although that provided to the WGs and the Executive already has been most welcome and useful. To achieve this the NWWRAC propose the following:

- o A formal relationship with ICES and a seat at ACFM as observer.
- o Request from the Commission a member of STECF to present scientific advice to the NWWRAC from a neutral position [not necessarily the same member on all occasions].
- o Develop an inter RAC position on obtaining independent scientific advice.

6. Review of Budget

The Secretariat presented the budget and informed the members that as of the 21st of November the budget spend stood at €48,657. This did not include reimbursements for the Working Group meetings. The issue of most concern to the Secretariat was that of membership of the Working Groups as 21 members per group had been budgeted for, but to date each working group had nominations in excess of this number. It was agreed that the Secretariat would produce a paper on various scenarios of funding a membership of more than 21 for each WG so that no nominees would be excluded. This would be thoroughly discussed and resolved at the next meeting.

7. Work Programme

It was agreed that the work programme for the NWWRAC would be discussed and signed off at the next Executive Committee meeting.

It was agreed that the next Executive Committee meeting would be held on the 31st of January. Location to be advised.

It was agreed that the next working Group meetings would be held on the 28th of February and the 1st of March. Location to be advised.

8. AOB

Meeting closed 1815 hrs.

Participants

Chairman

Sam Lambourn

Secretariat

Patricia Comiskey

Conor Nolan

Michael Keatinge

Christine O'Connor

Executive Committee Members

Andre Guegen

Jacques Pichon

Sean O'Donoghue

Jason Whooley

Hugo Crisanto González García

Victor Badiola

Barrie Deas

Bertie Armstrong

Anton Dekker

Jesus A Lourido

Steve Park

Margaret Downey Harrington

Jacques Bigot

Kara Brydson

John Crudden

Claire Pescod

Brendan Price

John Coleman

David Wall

Beroit Beernaert

Observers

Miriam Garcia Ferrer

Bernadette Clarke

Konstantinos Kalamantis

Jim Portis

Paul Trebilcock

Lorcan O' Cinneide

Beatrice Harmel

Alan McCulla

Mike Parry

Alan Coghill

Alverno Fernandez

Andre le Berre

Joe Maddock

Ernid Utterwulghe

Willy Vanhee

Borja Veldsco

Olof Williamson