



North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council

REPORT

Focus Group – Irish Sea (VIIa) Fisheries Management The Coach House, Dublin Castle Thursday 19th September 2013

Chairman: Alan McCulla
Rapporteur: John Crudden

1. Welcome by the Chairman

The Chairman, Alan McCulla, opened the meeting at 09:00 and welcomed all attendees. He extended a special welcome to representatives from DEFRA, AFBINI, SFPA and Client Earth.

- Introductions: The participants at the meeting made brief introductions. The list of participants is set out in Annex 1
- Apologies: Apologies were received from Sean O'Donoghue, KFO.
- Adoption of the Agenda: The agenda as circulated was adopted without change.
- Adoption of the Report of the last meeting: The report from the last FG meeting of 7th of June 2013 was adopted without change.
- Setting the scene: Alan McCulla delivered a short presentation in relation to a data gathering exercise undertaken by one of a number of Northern Irish boats operating in the Irish Sea. Five tows were conducted over a ten-hour period which resulted in 100 boxes of large cod being caught and few discards. This fully-observed exercise was conducted with highly selective gear operating in a semi-pelagic fishery. He emphasised the need for fisheries managers not to abandon this lucrative fishery for one that discards large percentages because of management measures.

2. Key Issues with the Science for Irish Sea stocks

Pieter Jan Schön (AFBI) delivered a presentation on key scientific issues with the stocks in the Irish Sea. Benchmark Workshops were undertaken on Irish Sea Cod in 2012 and Haddock in 2013.

2.1. Irish Sea Cod

Very low recruitment observed in the last 20 years resulting in decreasing biomass. A slight increase was observed in 2010 from a good year class, but this was still below average. The advice is for zero catches and no directed fishing. Mortality has been high in Irish Sea cod over the entire time series, even in early part of time series from the 1970's. As a result the whitefish fleet has dropped away to just a sentinel fishery with three boats participating. Despite the decrease of fishing effort mortality remains high.

The issues affecting cod in the Irish Sea are:

- Lack of recruitment - significant spikes in recruitment observed in the Celtic Sea and West of Scotland fisheries have not been replicated in the Irish Sea.
- Climatic effects – recently published paper suggests that there is a lack of optimum temperature for growth at younger ages before the fish start recruiting into the fishery.
- Natural versus fishing mortality – The ICES benchmark workshops have looked at various models, but this has just resulted in increasing the population estimate with generally higher estimates of natural mortality at younger ages and is thus not the answer.
- Historic misreporting problem

2.2. Irish Sea Haddock

Good data series exist for haddock, with the exception of the discard time series. The time series is short, but discard estimates improved significantly in the last few years. There have been natural fluctuations in productivity in recent years. Data sources indicate a flat mortality trend, which prevents the production of a reliable assessment. The advice is to try to keep it average catches at a constant level in relation to MSY and to avoid discarding.

2.3. Data deficiencies for single stocks

Four stocks in the Irish Sea are categorised as data deficient: Haddock, Plaice, Sole and Whiting.



Model refinement is still suggested for cod, haddock and plaice, but is unlikely to change the perception for these stocks. The current scientific assessment for sole and whiting is not good in terms of stock status, but these stocks have historically not received the same attention as cod. Haddock and plaice are not data poor, but restricted by the methodology of transcribing available assessment outcome into quantitative management options.

2.4. Fisheries Management Concepts

A mixed fisheries approach is the recommended option using either a choke species approach or wider technical advice. The choke species option may not be the best option for the Irish Sea and a wider technical interaction advice taking into consideration spatial and technical effects across species assemblages might be more appropriate.

Account should be taken of plausible ranges for MSY for the main species and adopt a precautionary approach for the rest. It is not possible to achieve MSY for all species at the same time. It is possible to go for spatial management as there is not a lot of overlap between the various fisheries.

2.5. Exchange of views from the floor

Barrie Deas made the point that the current management measures enhanced with a spatial dimension together with the landing obligation will affect vessel behaviour and result in less discarding but it should not be done through legislation.

P-J Schön replied that selectivity had improved in the Irish Sea fisheries, but a point of eliminating all discarding will never be achieved through gear selectivity measures. The only option is to look at spatial and temporal trends and fishing behaviour.

Michael Keatinge said that signs of recovery were evident with some stocks through reduced TACs and effort. P-J Schön stated that these measures have not yet been proved effective for cod. All data sources, including data from the sentinel fishery, tell the same story of high mortality and low biomass showing little signs of recovery. It is never going to be possible to reduce cod fishing mortality to zero other than for managers to consider the closure of fisheries. The current cod long-term plan might eventually lead to that and we should consider the effectiveness of these measures and look at alternatives.

Emiel Brouckaert said that there was no new information on the ILVO VIIa Sole project.



Johnny Woodlock said that closing all fisheries in the Irish Sea won't guarantee the recovery of cod.

Alan McCulla said that we got all the data for cod and haddock that we need and more data will not change the trends. The dramatic reduction in fishing effort, especially TR1, is having an effect but we do not know why cod drops out of the Irish Sea at 4 years of age. He referred to a report from DEFRA in relation to and cod/haddock relationship which states that cod recovery is being stymied because of predation by a pelagic stock.

John Lynch said that the reduction of effort in the TR1 fleet has not helped the recovery of cod, but only increased discarding and we should now encourage the use of TR1 gear in the Irish Sea.

Barrie Deas said that unaccounted mortality seems to be the key with what is happening with cod. ICES has been asked to look again at doing an audit on Cod. A suggestion of a tagging study did not seem adequate.

P-J Schön replied that the tagging programme was worthwhile but needed to be big scale and trans-boundary. There were big cost implications as a result. Pelagic stock predation on cod eggs is not a new comment.

3. The View from the European Commission

Roy Griffin, DG MARE, said that the position of the Commission has not changed and another evaluation of the Cod Management Plan is not planned anytime soon. The focus is on mixed fisheries by regional management plans. If the objective is to move away from cod management the Commission would have serious problems accepting that unless there is clear evidence that an alternative is sustainable. On the subject of an increase of the TR1 fleet the Commission would accept this but again only if it is sustainable.

Alan McCulla replied that we were not suggesting ignoring cod from Management Plan. All stocks would be included.

Michael Keatinge said we needed to concentrate on the successful fisheries and not just to manage cod alone. We need to reverse the emphasis. The task of this group is to redefine the objectives of what we want to achieve. Look at each fishery and define each one but keep cod in mind.



Barrie Deas referred to the STECF meeting in Varese. A point was made on control in the context of the landings obligation which should also involve the removal of effort restrictions that would undermine compliance. Spatial management is undermined by effort restrictions.

Alan McCulla said that there is a good haddock stock in the Irish Sea but cannot be targeted because cod is a choke species in the fishery. Boats in Kilkeel are using spatial planning to avoid aggregations of cod - self adjustment is taking place.

Roy Griffin said that self-adjustment development is limited by effort controls in the current Cod Management Plan regulation.

4. Development of a proposal for an Irish Sea Multi-Annual Management Plan

4.1. Elements of the proposal

Alexandre Rodríguez, NWWRAC Secretariat, said that the Celtic Sea plan had been amended to suit the Irish Sea and circulated to the group for comments. One reply had been received and included. There was no need for further review.

4.2. Overview of national fisheries/science partnerships

Alan McCulla said that there were no new developments in this regard

4.3. NGO views – presentation by Johnny Woodlock, Irish Seal sanctuary.

Johnny Woodlock opened his presentation by saying that a lot of what we were discussing is contained in his letter to the Secretariat. The presentation concerned a fishing trip in the Irish Sea on an inshore boat and showed the results of three tows using a net with a square-mesh panel near the codend. More than 60% of the catch contained juvenile and undersized fish and was discarded. The only solution in his opinion was for a complete closure of inshore areas to trawling to improve stocks.

In relation to fully-documented fisheries he expressed the view that full observer coverage was the only workable solution. He referred to the experience in the Clyde and to a paper written by Dr Calum Roberts.



Industry representatives questioned his use of the Clyde fishery as an example and that of the credentials of Dr Roberts in relation to fisheries matters.

Alan McCulla said that there was an observer programme in place in Northern Ireland for 200 trips. A closure of inshore areas would have a very damaging effect on fishermen's livelihoods. He suggested that the paper be withdrawn and encouraged the ISS to broaden its scope by including all the arguments presented to the group and bring it back to a meeting of WG4.

Michael Keatinge said that a ban on trawling could not be a part of the proposed way forward.

Bertie Armstrong said that the proposal from Mr Woodlock would effectively mean to shut down an entire viable economic fishery.

4.4. Industry perspective on Fully Documented Fisheries (FDF)

Barrie Deas said that full observer coverage was a very costly option. CCTV was less costly by was not user friendly. Reference fleets were relatively homogeneous and suggested we explore the possibility of using this method. This was a low cost option. We need to find a form of FDF that works for each specific fishery.

Alan Coghill said that some fishermen are being trained up as observers but agreed with Barrie that full observer coverage was not an option.

4.5. Socio-economic Impact Assessment for the fleets

Michael Keatinge, BIM, gave an update on progress to date. The discussions today have started to get us focussed on what we have to do. We need to keep in mind two key points. The plan being developed for the Celtic Sea can be easily applied to the Irish Sea and we need to gather and include Socio-economic data.

In relation to the latter point a call for tender will be announced in October with a start date in November for an economist. The project is fully funded for three years and has the support of Seafish in the UK.



4.6. Next Steps

Arrange a meeting in November to include the experts in the Celtic Sea to show us the way forward in the Irish Sea. We need to select a start date to get the ball rolling. We also need to decide the central point of the plan and what the fisheries we intend to focus on are.

Barrie Deas said that we need to be mindful that the plan is fit for purpose in the new reality. It would be a waste of time producing a plan that would be out of date on the day it's published.

Michael Keatinge clarified that the funding is in place up to the end of 2015 for a Project Manager and an Economist for both the Irish Sea and the Celtic Sea projects. The plan must include new thinking on mixed fisheries, on a multi-species and an ecosystem approach. It must include managing discards, achieving MSY and managing capacity and effort issues.

5. Summary of conclusions and actions by the Chairman

Michael Keatinge and Alan McCulla will draft a work schedule to be appended to the minutes of the meeting.

The Secretariat will arrange a date, close to the end of November, for a small Working Group meeting which will include representatives from UK, NI, BE and IE.

The Chairman, Alan McCulla expressed his thanks to the participants at the meeting, the interpreters, the technical staff in Dublin Castle and the Secretariat for their professional conducting of the meeting.

With no other business to discuss he closed the meeting at 11:00.

ANNEX I. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

NWWRAC MEMBERS		
<u>Name</u>	<u>Surname</u>	<u>Organisation</u>
Alan	McCulla	ANIFPO – Chair
John	Crudden	European Anglers Alliance – Rapporteur
Bertie	Armstrong	NWWRAC Chairman
Emiel	Brouckaert	Rederscentrale Belgium
Alan	Coghill	Scottish Fishermen’s Federation UK
Luc	Corbisier	SDVO Belgium
Dave	Cuthbert	New Under Ten Fishermen’s Association UK
Barrie	Deas	NFFO UK
André	Gueguen	OPOB France
Daniel	Lefèvre	CRPMEM Basse Normandie France
John	Lynch	Irish Fishermen’s Organisation
Eibhlín	O’Sullivan	Irish South & West FPO
Jacques	Pichon	ANOP – Pecheurs de Bretagne France
Caitlín	Uí Aodha	Irish South & East FPO Ireland
John	Ward	IFPO Ireland
John	Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary



NWWRAC OBSERVERS		
<u>Name</u>	<u>Surname/s</u>	<u>Organization</u>
John	Daly	Irish Seal Sanctuary
Iain	Glasgow	DEFRA – United Kingdom
Robert	Griffin	DG MARE - European Commission
Michael	Keatinge	Bord Iascaigh Mhara - Ireland
Colm	Lordan	Marine Institute - Ireland
Coilín	Minto	Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
Jennifer	Mouat	Scottish Whitefish FPA
Colm	Ó'Súilleabháin	DAFM – MS Ireland
Brendan	Price	Irish Seal Sanctuary
Pieter-Jan	Schön	AFBI – Northern Ireland
Liane	Veitch	Client Earth
Borja	Velasco	MAGRAMA – Spain

NWWRAC SECRETARIAT		
Conor	Nolan	NWWRAC Executive Secretary
Joanna	McGrath	Executive Assistant, Administration and Finances
Alex	Rodríguez	Executive Assistant, Policy and Communication