

## North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council

### REPORT

#### Working Group 4 – Irish Sea - ICES Area VIIa CNPMEM - Paris, 7<sup>th</sup> November 2013 11:00 – 12:30

Chairman: Alan McCulla  
Rapporteur: John Crudden

#### 1. Welcome

The Chairman, Alan McCulla, opened the meeting at 11:00 and welcomed all participants. He made note of the new structures for Working Group meetings which meant a 30 minute reduction in the time allocated for the meeting

- Apologies: Apologies were received for non-attendance at the meeting from Tom Bryan-Brown (Manx FPO – WG4 Vice-Chair), Luc Corbisier (SDVO), Michael Keatinge (BIM), Colm Lordan (Marine Institute) and Ian Glasgow (Defra).

In keeping with the precedent set at the previous WG meeting the participants introduced themselves to the meeting. The full list of participants is shown in Annex I.

- Adoption of the agenda: The agenda as circulated was adopted without change.
- Adoption of the report from the last meeting: The report from the last WG4 meeting held in Dublin on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2013 was adopted without comments or changes.

#### 2. Mixed Fishery Management Plan for the Irish Sea

The Chairman opened the debate on this item by proposing that we would discuss all sub-headings in block. He briefed the meeting on progress to date. Funding has been secured under EFF to recruit a project coordinator to drive the plan. The coordinator will oversee both the Celtic Sea and Irish Sea Management Plans. A tender will be issued shortly by BIM and the coordinator should be in place by mid-December. In the meantime we should try to gather as much economic data from the fleets as possible.

The collection of economic data has been done in the UK fleets, including the Northern Ireland fleets, for many years and he hoped that this data would be shared with the project.

#### Exchange of views from the floor

Barrie Deas expressed the view that this was good news going in the right direction. There has been a problem in the past with the lack of data for most stocks in the Irish Sea. He put it to the meeting that we should consider taking a business plan approach for the different fleets which would tie biology to profitability.

Alan McCulla questioned how we could produce business plans at the local level if there were question marks with quota availability into the future. There would have to be a great deal of flexibility with the development of these business plans.

Sean O'Donoghue said that the framework and objectives that WG4 drew from the Celtic Sea Management Plan is in effect a business plan and we should concentrate on this rather than developing separate business plans. We need to ensure that the economics of the fleets are included in what we do and the appointment of the project coordinator at the earliest opportunity is essential for this.

Emiel Brouckaert said that as regards the Belgian fleet the Irish Sea fishery is only part of their area of operations so a business plan is not an option for them in this context.

Alan McCulla reminded the meeting that we were indebted to BIM for sourcing the necessary funding for the coordinator and to the GAP2 project for its offer for financial support should the need arise.

Conor Nolan said that access to economic data could create a bottleneck in the development of the plan. He suggested we should try to access this prior to the appointment of the coordinator. **(See action list).**

Paul Trebilcock asked if the coordinator would be shared between the Irish Sea and the Celtic Sea Management plans. Conor Nolan replied that we need to confirm with Michael Keatinge if this was the case.

Sean O'Donoghue raised the issue of the scientific uncertainties in cod mortality and asked for an update. Roy Griffin, DG MARE, replied that the Commission had been expecting advice from ICES in this regards on 31<sup>st</sup> October. No information has been received to date and the matter is being followed up on by the Commission's Coordinator with ICES.

Alan McCulla asked the Commission for clarification on the reason behind the deferring of advice for Vlla Plaice in the Fishing Opportunities for 2014.

Roy Griffin replied that the Commission was concerned about the Sole and Plaice stocks. The Sole stock is in decline; however, Plaice is in a relatively healthy state but is heavily discarded in the Sole fishery. The Member States concerned have been asked for their opinion on how the Commission should deal with this and to date only one reply, from Ireland, has been received. In relation to Nephrops, the advice will come by way of a non-paper and it should be expected that it will follow the MSY advice.

Emiel Brouckaert said that he was not aware that a response was required from the Belgian administration. He would talk to his government representatives about this.

Sean O'Donoghue raised concerns about ICES. The advice system was creaking at the seams because of the lack of available resources and they have not been able to deliver advice to several requests coming from the RACs. We need to be careful about sending requests for advice to ICES via the Commission as it could well be down their priority list.

Roy Griffin agreed with the problems of capacity from ICES to deal with all requests from the EU.

Alan McCulla said that ICES had agreed some time ago that it would deliver advice earlier in the year than was previously the case so slippage in this agreement is not acceptable. The issue of plaice in the sole fishery was not anticipated. It was however anticipated that the advice for Nephrops would be later in the year because of the request from this RAC that the outcomes of the underwater camera surveys could be taken account of and incorporated into the assessment.

Barrie Deas said that ICES had flagged its inability to deliver advice in a timely fashion last year. The landings obligation will depend heavily on timely advice and if the situation remains the same then we could be looking at the closure of many fisheries because of "choke stocks". This is a serious situation.

Eibhlín O'Sullivan said that we had anticipated getting the Nephrops advice in September but now delayed because of resource issues at ICES. This will have an impact in delivery of management advice.

Sean O'Donoghue proposed that the Working Group should formally ask why the RAC had not been consulted in relation to the Plaice communication **(See action list)**.

Alan McCulla proposed this RAC should record its concerns on the inability of ICES to deliver advice in a timely manner. **(See action list)**.

Alan McCulla delivered a clarification in relation to a slide he used in his opening presentation to the Irish Sea Focus Group meeting in September. The photograph was one from Calum Roberts and he was happy to acknowledge the assistance of Johnny Woodlock in clarifying this.

### **3. Review of the Cod Recovery Plan in the Irish Sea.**

Alan McCulla said that little progress had been made since the last meeting on this matter. The existing impasse at the EU institutions was holding up progress and the matter was now at the European Court of Justice for resolution.

Roy Griffin said that there remained possibility that the effort regime could be reviewed by either the Council or the European Parliament in their treatment of the two current amendments of the Cod Plan. However this would be an issue for the co-legislators.

Sean O'Donoghue said that the broader picture is about the decision-making process between the Council, the Commission and the Parliament. Talks are taking place under the Chairmanship of MEP Struan Stevenson and we should expect some progress to be achieved early in 2014.

Alan McCulla asked if effort reductions could be set aside. He expressed the hope that there would be no repeat of further reductions in effort which for this RAC means the Irish Sea and West of Scotland.

Roy Griffin said that the Commission is bound to propose the reductions in effort as required under the legislation of the Cod Plan on the basis of the stock advice by ICES. The legislation adopted by the Council last year allows for the setting aside of these effort reductions by the Council.

The meeting agreed to seek clarification on the state of play of the Cod Management Plan.

**(See action list).**

### **4. Commission proposal on Fishing Opportunities for 2014**

Alan McCulla opened the debate on this item by calling on the members of the Working Group to set aside their national priorities to come up with a recommendation to the Executive Committee for a RAC position on the TAC proposals based on scientific evidence.

- Cod VIIa

Alan McCulla said that it is not clear in what context the advice is presented whether by MSY approach, Precautionary approach or Management Plan. We are obliged to comply with the Management Plan with no directed fishery and a further 20% cut in the TAC. He referred to the presentation given by Alessandro Ligas (AFBINI) at the Focus Group meeting in Dun Laoghaire on 7<sup>th</sup> June in relation to data deficiencies. He posed the question on how these can be addressed when we have cuts in the TAC year on year.

Emiel Brouckaert said that he wanted to add sole to the comment as it was a similar situation.

Bertie Armstrong reminded the meeting that the NWWRAC must not lobby the Commission on specific figures but rather the principles behind the advice. We should summarise the effects of the reductions in TAC on top of other issues.

Sean O'Donoghue said that when the unaccounted mortality is added in it makes no sense to follow these rules which don't take account of the changes in the recent past.

Barrie Deas said that we must be clear about the amount of pilot work that needs to be done to mitigate the effects. We are limited to 2% additional quota for scientific studies. He would advocate additional quota for these studies that is F neutral.

Liane Veitch, Client Earth, said that she does not agree that by lowering the TAC we will get less reliable data. If data on catches, discards, and effort are collected and reported, there would be no decrease in data if TACs decrease, and would actually represent an improvement on the status quo that would be useful in preparing for the landing obligation.

Alan McCulla said that there was no suggestion of all round quota uplift. Rather maintain the status quo and land everything so that we can get a clear picture to collectively address the issues.

Alan Coghill referred to trials on selectivity in Scotland. The pilot project used was a total disaster for the fishermen taking part as they could not source the necessary quota.

Bertie Armstrong said that the fishing opportunities for 2014 are all based on single species advice. There is no flexibility to allow for trials. The reality is that the entire fleet would be shut down after 6 weeks.

Alan McCulla said that 2 further trials to look at the cod situation will take place in UK waters in the Irish Sea in 2014: a fisheries-science partnership project in the spring and a sentinel fishery in late summer/early autumn.

- Haddock VIIa

Alan McCulla said that there is a 17% year-on-year increase in the SSB which would suggest an increase in the TAC. However the opposite is the reality with a cut of 52% in landings advised.

Sean O'Donoghue said that the TAC for VIIa haddock is a sub-component of area VII. There is a problem with the scientific model being used. It does not take into account the natural fluctuations in recruitment over an approximate 7 year cycle. He referred to the assessment method being used in Iceland which takes account of these fluctuations. It is accepted by ICES and the advice will be based on this new method. The advice for the Irish Sea is not fit for purpose. He proposed that STECF were requested to have another look at the advice (**see action list**).

Roy Griffin said that the stock assessment methodology is a matter for ICES.

Paul Trebilcock said that the advice for haddock in the Celtic Sea and the Irish Sea is not fit for purpose. How do we make progress if the Commission approves our request?

Alan McCulla asked how we will improve data quality if the TAC is cut year on year.

Barrie Deas referred back to the statement by Bertie Armstrong that we need to the principles behind the advice. In this case it is the spikes in recruitment we should focus on.

- Whiting VIIa

Alan McCulla recalled a time when the annual advice was for a TAC of 10,000 tonnes. The advice for 2014 is for an estimate of 5.5 boxes per week for the entire fleet.

- Plaice VIIa

Alan McCulla said that plaice was a good news story. The stock is increasing but the advice is for a 69% cut in the landings to 497 tonnes which is confusing.

Emiel Brouckaert said that this is an example of the change from advice on landings to advice on catches. The catches last year did not come up to the available TAC.

Alan McCulla said that the approach being taken is to "use it or lose it". The problem here is the low market price for plaice.

Roy Griffin said that ICES have previously provided a TAC based on previous catches – whereas the actual TAC adopted was significantly higher. The TAC proposed by ICES is close to the 2012 TAC but includes a high percentage of discards.

Alan McCulla proposed we should ask the Commission to clarify what numbers it is using in terms of discard rates in the Irish Sea (**see action list**).

Roy Griffin said that there is a difference between ICES and STECF estimation of discards. The data used in development of the proposal is based on the ICES assessment, hence follows ICES estimates but STECF advice on discards must be taken into account. Currently ICES and STECF looking at how they develop common discard estimates

- Sole

Alan McCulla said that mortality has been reducing since the 1980's and is stable for the last few years. The issue here is poor recruitment rather than mortality.

Emiel Brouckaert made the point that there is a difference in the perspective of the industry to that of the science in relation to stock abundance. We have already asked to look at data deficiencies similar to the cod request.

Alan McCulla asked for an update on an action point from the Irish Sea Focus Group in relation to the RAC request to ICES for clarification on its advice in relation to spawning sites for pelagic stocks and if the same advice should apply for demersal stocks.

Alexandre Rodríguez said that the request had not yet been sent but would be acted on in the coming week (**see action list**).

Eibhlín O'Sullivan raised the issue of the participation by members of the NWWRAC in ICES Expert Working Group meetings. She said that most of ICES work is already done in previous working group meetings which are not open to RAC observers.

Sean O'Donoghue made the proposal that the RAC should look to having a half day meeting with the scientists prior to the Expert Working Group meetings and a half day meeting afterwards (**see action list**).

## 5. Management of Skates and Rays

Roy Griffin gave an update on the request to ICES for advice in relation to Spurdog and Porbeagle. ICES have been asked to identify when they will be able to make a substantive response. In relation to the evaluation of the seasonal closure for Skates and Rays if the RAC has a method of assessing the effect of a short term voluntary closure then the Commission will consider evaluating this.

Eibhlín O'Sullivan, Chair of the Focus Group on Sharks, Skates and Rays said that we would have to wait for a response from the Commission before we could make progress. The Irish industry is currently preparing a draft management plan for these stocks in the Irish Sea. It was agreed to park this item until the next working group meeting.

## 6. Summary of actions agreed and proposals for the Executive Committee

### 1. Mixed Fisheries Management Plan for the Irish Sea

The Chairman and the Secretariat will follow up with BIM on the status of the appointment of an economist and coordinator for the development of the Irish Sea Management Plan.

### 2. Advice for VIIa Plaice

Ask the Executive Committee to write to the European Commission to enquire why the NWWRAC had not been consulted for the maintenance of VIIa Plaice as a pm stock (i.e.no TAC proposal) while it was discussing the issue of discards of plaice in the sole fishery with the Member States.

### 3. Delivery of ICES Advice

Ask the Executive Committee to write to the Commission to record the concerns of the NWWRAC in regard to the inability of ICES to deliver timely advice for some stocks.

### 4. Cod Management Plan

Ask the Executive Committee to seek clarification from the EU institutions on the current status of the Cod Management Plan.

### 5. Area VII Haddock

Ask the Executive Committee to make a request to ICES through the EU Commission to re-evaluate the assessment methodology for Haddock in Area VII bearing in mind assessment methods in other jurisdictions.



6. Discard data in Vlla Plaice

Ask the Executive Committee to write to the Commission seeking clarification on the source of its figures for discard rates in the Plaice fishery in the Irish Sea.

7. ICES Advice for Pelagic stocks

Ask the secretariat to follow up on an agreed action point in the Irish Sea Focus Group to ask ICES through the Commission for clarification on its advice in relation on pelagic stocks that certain activities such as offshore marine constructions that have a negative impact on spawning habitats should not occur and whether this advice should apply to other stocks in the Irish Sea.

8. NWWRAC participation in ICES Expert Working Group Meetings

Ask the Executive Committee to consider a proposal that the RAC should look to having a half day meeting with scientists prior to ICES Expert Working Group meetings and a half day meeting afterwards, given that according to ICES Protocol the Working Groups are closed to observers.6.

### **Close of the meeting**

With no other business to discuss the Chairman thanked the interpreters for their professional manner, CNPMEM for hosting the event and all attendees for their participation.

**The meeting was adjourned at 12:30h.**

## **ANNEX I. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

<b>MEMBERS</b>		
<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Surname/s</u></b>	<b><u>Organization</u></b>
Alan	McCulla	ANIFPO – <b>WG4 Chairman</b>
John	Crudden	EAA – <b>WG4 Rapporteur</b>
Bertie	Armstrong	NWWRAC Chairman
Dave	Cuthbert	New Under Ten Fishermen’s Association
Barrie	Deas	NFFO UK
John	Lynch	Irish Fishermen’s Organisation
Francis	O’Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisation
Sean	O’Donoghue	Killybegs Fishermen’s Organisation
Caitlín	Uí Aodha	Irish South & East FPO
Liane	Veitch	Client Earth
John	Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary

<b>OBSERVERS</b>		
<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Surname/s</u></b>	<b><u>Organization</u></b>
Giles	Barlett	World Wildlife Fund / GAP2 Project
Emiel	Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Stephen	Cederrand	European Fisheries Control Agency
René-Pierre	Chever	CDPMEM 29
Alan	Coghill	Scottish Fishermen's Federation
Roy	Griffin	DG MARE - European Commission
Ian	Lawler	BIM – ACRUNET Project
Laurent	Markovic	DG MARE - European Commission
Eibhlín	O'Sullivan	Irish South & West FPO
Paul	Trebilcock	Cornish FPO
Pieter Louwe	Van Slester	Dutch Fishing Organisation

<b>NWWRAC SECRETARIAT</b>		
Conor	Nolan	NWWRAC Executive Secretary
Joanna	McGrath	Executive Assistant, Administration and Finances
Alex	Rodríguez	Executive Assistant, Fisheries Policy and Communication