



NWWAC Summary Note

Outcomes and Actions

Inter-AC Sea Bass working Group – Dublin September 18th 2014

1. Biology of the stock – quick overview

- Slow growing.
- Up to 28 years of age.
- Late maturity (first spawn at 4-7 years). Natural mortality relatively low.
- Recruitment is heavily dependent on environmental conditions and successive years of poor recruitment are common.
- Have been overfishing at double F_{msy} (~ 22% per year) since 1980s.
- Immediate action necessary to reduce F – one-step or staged.
- EU Minimum Landing Size (MLS) 36 cm – which is below first spawning size.
- The seabass 'stock' (management area) from Channel, south of North Sea and Celtic Sea has analytical assessment.
- The rest of the management areas where there is ICES advice (e.g. BoB, Iberian waters...) are qualitative (trends-based) assessments.

2. Some key ideas

- The Inter-AC workshop laid the foundations for a common approach to look at a management framework for seabass stocks in the different fisheries in the EU.
- The three Advisory Councils (North Western waters, South Western waters and North Sea) are well placed to provide evidence-based advice to inform policy decisions as they represent the majority of stakeholders involved in this fishery. The Commission, Member States and also the European Parliament are willing to receive advice from the ACs. In terms of output, this could take the form of an individual advice of each of the 3 ACs concerned or a joint one (preferred option).
- Any future management measures must be in line and follow the scientific advice released by ICES and analysed by STECF.
- The timeframe is critical here given the poor state of the seabass stocks: there is undeniable urgency to put in place short term management measures at the December Council and the ACs must react as quickly as possible.
- There is a diversity of views and actors, from commercial to recreational fishermen, with different fleet segments (inshore and offshore) and different national regulations.



We have a big challenge ahead and the questions to ask ourselves are:

How do we arrive to a consensus position given the diversity of views expressed?

How do we resolve the tensions perceived amongst the participants?

3. Elements identified as basis for agreement

We can build a common vision: there is a shared understanding of the conservation status of the stock and the declining trends within the stock both in terms of SSB/R and F. All concerned stakeholders are committed to contribute to rebuild the stocks but it is important as well to maintain the socio-economic fabric of stakeholders – although rebuilding stocks should be the priority for long term security of stocks.

This is translated as follows:

- A 60% reduction in the commercial catches is needed to rebuild the stock – one of issues to address is the timeframe over which this reduction is made;
- It is important to look at the sources of mortality and allocate proportionally the burden of this reduction (“equity of burden”) over the time series during which the fishery has been prosecuted, i.e. in 2014 30% of catch is recreational; 30% in targeted fisheries; 40% is part of by-catch in mixed demersal fisheries;
- We need to think about how we manage the reduction in catches in terms of management tools: selectivity, how improve catch profile, exploitation pattern, improving conditions of R and discards survival, spawning areas and aggregations.
- We must try to understand the impact of measures before implementing them, i.e. we need to know where these measures will lead us to.
- The ACs have received a request for advice from the Commission in a letter with date 1 August 2014: all management options are open to discussion.
- The TAC approach is perceived as the “worst case scenario” considering the lack of track records from some national fleets (e.g. Ireland) and the potential inclusion of this stock as a result of being a quota species in the landing obligation.
- The effort control approach is neither satisfactory as there is no lineal correlation between reductions on fishing effort and reductions in F;

The following tools were agreed to be discussed:

- A minimum landing size for all fleets adapted by fishery;
- Catch limits for commercial vessels at vessel and/or fishery level;
- Bag limits for recreational fishers and equivalent measures (catch and release policy); Spatial and temporal closures and catch avoidance measures; (e.g. seasonal closure for spawning aggregations);
- Improvement in selectivity of catches (mesh sizes)
- Effort restrictions and licensing



4. How to achieve this? Actions and timeframe

The Secretariat will prepare a template sheet with a description of the possible management tools suggested: every participant/stakeholder will then reply with their views on the suitability and justifying reasons. This template will be circulated amongst all workshop participants as well as concerned AC members.

The suggested procedure is a stepwise approach, gradually and progressively through a series of stages throughout the last quarter of 2014:

Late September/early October

1. Drafting/Expert group to meet and identify the affected fleets (midwater pelagic trawls, bottom (pair) trawls, gillnetters, longliners, recreational anglers and commercial rod and line fishermen...) and list the management measures to be implemented (Secretariats/key reps/scientists)

October

2. AC members/stakeholders to complete a questionnaire on management measures and identify pros and cons;

November

3. An InterAC working group to be convened and look at all the contributions received; formulate a proposal or “package of measures” to address fishing mortality.

End November/Early December

4. Agree a document by providing an improved understanding of both the fisheries involved and the selected options from the “toolbox”.

If the ACs and stakeholders don't react quickly, it is likely that the Commission will take unilateral action and likely propose emergency measures (6 months) effective from January 2015



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5. Other issues for reflection

- There is a substantive problem with control and compliance in terms of IUU and “black market” both unlicensed illegal commercial activity and legal, unrecorded sales – such as the exemption from the Control Regulation for transactions for private consumption of up to 30kg – specifically highlighted in both the ICES June 2014 advice on sea bass and the STECF plenary report, July 2014]
- There is a lack of dedicated funding in EMFF for data collection for seabass; e.g. DCR bass was excluded from the compulsory stock in the Netherlands. Need to spend money to bring these figures into the DCF.
- Compliance with, and enforcement of policies, whether voluntary or legally binding, is an issue across all fleet segments.
- The aquaculture could be a solution for the supply of EU markets.

6. Long term approach (3-5 years):

- Develop a long term multiannual management plan at regional level to ensure the level playing field and apply non discriminatory measures;
- Improve quality of data (both from estimates of recreational and commercial catches) – e.g. studies on population genetics, migration and discards data by IFI in Ireland; or project BARGIP in France.
- Look at socio and economic impacts for each of the management measures adopted and in this case it will be very helpful the outcomes of the STECF study commissioned by the EC.

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