

## **North Western Waters Advisory Committee**

### **Irish Sea (WG4)**

### **MINUTES**

**Thursday 13 November 2014**

**14:00 - 15:30**

**CNPMEM, Paris**

**Chair: Alan McCulla**

**Rapporteur: Alex Rodríguez**

#### **1. Welcome and Elections**

- Apologies:

Luc Corbisier (SDVO, Belgium) and Michael Keatinge (BIM / NWWAC Director)  
The list of participants and attendees is appended (Annex I).

- Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes

- Adoption of the report from the last meeting held in Edinburgh, 2 July 2014

The report of the last meeting was adopted without change

- Election of the Chair, Vice-Chair and Rapporteur for the next term of office; 1 Oct 2014 – 30 Sept 2017

The Chair (Alan McCulla) announced that this would be his last meeting as Chair of the Irish Sea Working Group. He informed the meeting that he nominated Francis O'Donnell as Chair. The nomination was seconded by Barrie Deas and Francis O'Donnell accepted the position to chair the group for an initial 3 year term, should the members agree. Alan McCulla indicated that he was willing to act as Vice-Chair and rapporteur of the Group, given the retirement of John Crudden. The Chair also thanked John for his commitment to the group and his excellent work as rapporteur over the last 3 years and wished him well for his future career.

The Chair also thanked Alex Rodriguez for his work in the Secretariat and wished him every success in his future position as Executive Secretary of the Long Distance Advisory Council.

- Opening remarks by the Chair (Allan McCulla)

The Chair expressed his frustration having read a recent press release by the Irish Seal Sanctuary containing alleged accusations of illegal fishing by Irish and Northern Irish vessels. In his opinion, such action was against the goodwill and spirit of cooperation and dialogue within the NWWAC as a stakeholder's forum and that the forum existed for the discussion and exchange of views to take place on issues of concern to members, such as this.

John Woodlock (Irish Seal Sanctuary) explained that unaccounted mortality in the West of Scotland is not due to seal predation and the contribution is almost negligible in comparison to logbook infringements. Eibhlin O'Sullivan remarked that this was not an appropriate remark and that it would raise complaints at PO level. This position was supported by Sean O'Donoghue who fundamentally disagreed with the statement and referred the Irish Seal Sanctuary to advice provided by ICES which indicated that seal predation has an impact particularly for cod populations that cannot be underestimated.

The Chair reflected on the fact that the working group had experienced open disagreement between industry and NGOs in the past but restated his belief that the NWWAC was a helpful forum to achieve mutual understanding and iron out problems. The Chair summarised the opinion of members indicating that the press release was unhelpful and encouraged the Irish Seal Sanctuary to talk to the industry before issuing such press releases.

**ACTION:** *Francis O'Donnell elected as Chair for the Irish Sea WG. Alan McCulla elected as Vice-Chair and rapporteur. Term of mandate: 1 Oct 2014-30 Sept 2017*

## **2. Implementation of landing obligation (LO) for demersal stocks**

### Definition of fisheries

It was the general opinion of members that although the implementation process was underway the application of the LO was not without risk and could have unintended consequences if Member States did not consider all eventualities.

Members agreed the importance of a phased approach to fisheries management to avoid pitfalls and learn through the experience over time. Broad agreement was expressed that progress had been made achieving high levels of compliance through a stepwise approach and that this type of approach should be a feature of Discard plans.

It was the opinion of some members (IFPO) that the industry and AC needed additional time and that the AC should make this request to the MS, Council and Commission in its submissions. In the interim, the working group proposed that a small, horizontal, steering group be convened to address this issue by the end of January.

**ACTION:       The AC to convene a small, horizontal, steering group to address this issue by the end of January.**

The UK (DEFRA) supported the view regarding phasing, the control of risk and learning from experience throughout the phasing period between 2016 and 2019. Members were informed that the MS group was getting closer to a consensus position and paper on phasing. Both MS and members were of the opinion that a big bang in 2016 was not a preferred option.

Members attention was directed (KFO) to the fact that the mix of species in the Irish Sea posed a bigger problem even than that of the Celtic Sea. It was recommended that the approach should be made by fishery with species defining the fisheries. It was considered important that this group request the establishment of a crisis cabinet or hold a management meeting with MS in order open dialogue on the issues in advance of discard plans being introduced. As Irish Sea stocks are trans-zonal the establishment of this type of group was considered a good idea and received the support of the Chair.

The fishery-based approach was seen as the only way forward for the industry sector and there was broad endorsement of a phasing, based on species defined fisheries.

The Secretariat agreed to circulate a letter from EAPO. It was noted that the Pelagic AC was on the Implementing Group chaired led by EC to review discards plans and that this group was composed of MS, Stakeholders, Advisory Councils and key members.

Members were advised (Clientearth) that much of the data required for the construction of AC opinion is available and that there was a need to get a discards officer in place to advance the work of the AC particularly as the MS have asked the AC for assistance defining the fisheries.

The complexity regarding the definition of fisheries was outlined (NFFO). It was noted through example, that there were 81 permutations for area/gear/target species in the North Sea. In conclusion, the definition of fisheries without proper categorisation and methodology was considered to be unmanageable.

Discussion regarding the definition of fisheries questioned the metrics used (e.g. weight of catch) and categorisation problems (e.g. Vessels within a category changing fishing pattern). It was noted that the scale of the issues involved would be easier to comprehend using discards atlas data but it was recognised that these data are unevenly distributed. In such cases (e.g. North Sea) 45% of total discards data were determined using extrapolated data. In Western Waters this figure was estimated to be between 15% and 85%.

Members noted that although the métiers were known, the most difficult issue was to determine the factors that what defined the fisheries and then examine the consequences of the landing obligation.

The UK (DEFRA) informed the meeting that the UK Discard atlas was expected to by the end of the month.

Given the complexity of the area, the difficulties discussed and the short time-frame, it was suggested to the group (Rederscentrale) that a request for more time should be made in order to develop an appropriate plan.

From an Irish perspective (KFO) it was noted that fisheries defined by species and gears needed to be determined in order to identify the specific problems and how they can be addressed. Discard atlases were identified as being of particular importance in this context.

It was noted that such a meeting should take place before the end of the year and could take place in BIM. Barrie Deas (NFFO) and Alan McCulla (ANIFPO) volunteered to be part of this group. The Secretariat was requested to pursue the recruitment of a discards officer or project coordinator, as soon as possible, in order to maximise the output of such a group.

It was the general opinion of members, that primary task of the drafting group would be to narrow down the issues, define fisheries and move from the abstract to the concrete. It was also of importance that any potential solutions maintained the viability of the industry.

The group was also advised (ISWFPO) that a fallback position should be developed and that the work should be conducted without delay.

**ACTION:**      *To set up a small (5-6 people) Drafting Group to work quickly to define the fisheries and their specificities and then to revert back to a Plenary*

### 3. ICES Advice and EC Fishing Opportunities for 2015

- Cod, Haddock and Whiting

It was noted (ANIFPO) that the recruitment of cod was up, the SSB was above average and Fishing mortality was reduced. The frustration was expressed that despite all these good trends there was a perceived need to cut the TAC by 20% because of the terms of an outdated cod plan.

The Commission also recognised that the Cod plan was not ideal and that it was the first time that there was not an automatic reduction in effort in the table. The Commission were happy to move away from the MAMP for Cod but still proposed automatic reductions, which followed the science rather than any other interpretation.

It was noted (ANIFPO) that the industry had been struggling for the last 15 years with the Irish Sea MAMP. The problem is not that the fishery is data poor as 9 surveys feed the analysis with different data but is identified as an issue with interpretation of those data.

It was also noted (Clientearth) that if evidence showed that the stock was still in trouble, that there should be a continuation in the reduction of fishing effort.

As the TAC was already very low level it was acknowledged (Irish Seal Sancturay) that any further decrease of the TAC would only increase problems under the Landing Obligation and that the volume of discards would increase. With SSB increasing the problem will increase proportionally.

As a result, whiting in VIIa could be a choke species for Nephrops fishery (ANIFPO). It was a possibility that this species was maturing and spawning at an earlier age and it was requested that the MCS for these species be reviewed.

The framework applied by ICES was also questioned for Haddock in VIIa. Whereas the ICES advice indicated a very high level of recruitment and an average stock size, which is 22% higher than the last 2 years and is higher than the previous 3 year average, this stock was subject to a proposed reduction of 20% by the Commission.

The Commission (DGMARE) indicated that ICES advice was used to provide direction in the determination of TAC proposals.

- Sole VIIa

Data and scientific advice appears to the opposite of that observed by Belgian interests in the Irish Sea, even though very few Belgian fisheries remain in this area (Redercentrale). There is good cooperation with ILVO and a Fishery Science Partnership initiative designed to feed data into the assessment advice even though it is based on a small number of vessels.

It was brought to the attention of members that the current EC proposal for VIIa sole means that the Belgian fleet would not have enough quota to continue with the Fishery Science Partnership. As such, the group was asked to endorse a request for scientific quota to allow the continuation of the Fishery Science Partnership.

The Commission noted that the current position follows the scientific advice and for any change to occur data and evidence must be provided.

- Sharks, skates and rays

It was noted (IFO) that after 5 years of observer trips and studies that the fisheries for skates and rays in the Irish Sea were still considered to be data deficient. On the basis that there had been no results or outcome from these studies the TAC for skates and rays should

remain unchanged. This view was supported by the fact that catch levels of these species have remained stable over the last 10 years. It was also noted (NFFO) that there had been year-on-year reductions in the TAC for these species due to fisheries being data limited. The opinion was also voiced (ISWFPO) that reductions in the TAC would only lead to regulatory discards.

It was brought to the surprised attention of the members (MI), that the 20% precautionary buffer for these species should only last for three years;

When asked why the TAC was for all Skates and Rays rather than in accordance with ICES advice for individual species, the meeting was informed that this level of advice was very recent and that the Commission proposal was in development significantly before such information became available.

**ACTION:** *NWWAC should ask the EC to review its proposal for skates and rays and base it on the most recent advice.*

#### 4. SUMMARY OF ACTIONS AGREED

##### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LANDING OBLIGATION

- Members agreed the importance of a phased approach to fisheries management to avoid pitfalls and learn through the experience over time. Broad agreement was expressed that progress had been made achieving high levels of compliance through a stepwise approach and that this type of approach should be a feature of Discard plans.
- It was the opinion of the group that the AC needed additional time to produce advice and that the AC should make this request to the MS, Council and Commission in its submissions.
- To set up a small (5-6 people) Drafting Group to work quickly to define the fisheries and their specificities and then to revert back to a Plenary.
- The Secretariat was requested to pursue the recruitment of a discards officer or project coordinator, as soon as possible, in order to maximise the output of such a group.
- The Secretariat to circulate the letter from EAPO/Pelagic AC on the idea of setting up an Implementing Group chaired by EC to review of discards plans but composed of MS, Stakeholders, Advisory Councils and key members.

##### EC FISHING OPPORTUNITIES FOR 2015

##### Cod VIIa

- Given the recognised the flaws in the existing Cod management plan the group requests the Commission to follow the scientific advice rather than an interpretation of it.

## Skates and Rays

- On the basis that there had been no results or outcome from 5 years of observer data and other studies, the TAC for skates and rays should remain unchanged.
- NWWAC to request the EC to review its proposal for skates and rays and base it on the most recent advice.



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR  
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES  
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN  
WATERS  
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA  
LAS AGUAS  
NOROCCIDENTALES

## ANNEX I

### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

MEMBERS		
Name	Surname	Organisation
Bertie	Armstrong	Scottish Fishermen's Federation
David	Beard	Manx Fish Producer's Organisation
Emiel	Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
John	Crudden	European Angler's Alliance
Dave	Cuthbert	New Under Ten Fishermen's Association
Barrie	Deas	NFFO
John	Hermse	Scallop Association
John	Lynch	Irish Fishermen's Organisation
Alan	McCulla	Anglo-North Irish FPO
Francis	O'Donnell	Irish Fish Producer's Organisation
Sean	O'Donoghue	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
Caitlín	Uí Aodha	Irish South and East FPO
Liane	Veitch	Client Earth
John	Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary





OBSERVERS		
Name	Surname	Organization
Stéphan	Beaucher	Fisheries Consultant
René-Pierre	Chever	CDPMEM du Finistère
Angus	Cragg	DEFRA
John	Daly	Irish Seal Sanctuary
Marta	García Merchán	Spanish Ministry
Iain	Glasgow	DEFRA
Irene	Kingma	Dutch Elasmobranch Society
Colm	Lordan	Marine Institute
Laurent	Markovic	DG MARE - European Commission
Geert	Meun	Dutch Fisheries
Miquel	Ortega	Fundació ENT
Eibhlín	O'Sullivan	Irish South and West FPO
Jim	Portus	South West FPO
Glenn	Quelch	European Fisheries Control Agency
Paul	Trebilcock	Cornish FPO

NWWAC SECRETARIAT		
Conor	Nolan	Executive Secretary
Alex	Rodríguez	Executive Assistant; Fisheries Policy and Communication
Joanna	McGrath	Executive Assistant; Finance and Administration