



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

Minutes

FOCUS GROUP on SEABASS

CNPMEM, Paris
Wednesday 3rd of February 2016
11:00 – 13:00

Chair: Daniel Lefèvre
Rapporteur: Jim Portus

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chairman (Daniel Lefèvre) introduced the subject by describing the decisions of the Council of Ministers in December 2015. Many within industry were unhappy with the actions taken. Although all agreed that bass is of strategic economic importance, there has been little or no progress towards developing a long term recovery and management plan because of the polarised views of the various stakeholders. The Council has now taken decisions, which have made the situation more problematic, considering the limits that were imposed, as well as the implementation of the Landing Obligation. The stock, although not managed by a TAC, is now subject to quantitative restrictions by métier. The need to discard excess catches of this very valuable species was not well received by fishermen. The chair agreed that there was a need to regulate the species but he indicated that the method imposed by the regulation is inefficient as it results in bass discards.

The Commission (Mr Markovic) indicated that figure of 1% under the bycatch rule was under review and may be re-considered by the end of March or beginning of April 2016. The Commission had been expecting advice from the AC in 2015 and reiterated the importance of the views of stakeholders for management.

The chair indicated his hope for agreement on a recovery strategy before 2017 (when he retires) and he asked Barrie Deas (NFFO), as a key participant in discussions in both the NWWAC and NSAC to provide a strong link between the stakeholders of both Advisory Councils.

The agenda¹ was adopted as drafted. Jim Portus offered to act as rapporteur for the meeting, which was agreed by all.

2. Update on recent events

- Outcome of the Fisheries Council (Commission)

The EC indicated that management, having not achieved MSY by 2015, was now aimed at reaching MSY

¹ All relevant documents to the meeting can be found at the NWWAC website: [link](#)



in a stepwise approach by 2017 according to the EC proposal for the TAC for 2016. A range of overlapping measures was agreed on in the December Council (see [EC infographics](#)): a general closure around Ireland, seasonal restrictions and closures for recreational fisheries. The EC considered that directed pelagic fishing for bass was unviable, and indicated that estimates included a small catch allowance for fixed gillnets and a 1% bycatch allowance for other gears. The stock was part of the Landing Obligation for pelagic fisheries, but not for demersal fisheries. As a result, the prohibition of catches in demersal fisheries means that bass cannot be landed and must be discarded. The EC stressed the urgency of the ICES advice for this stock and emphasised that a change in fisheries behaviour is needed to avoid catches and improve the stock status. The EC asked the AC for advice on measures to restore the stock.

The meeting agreed that a reduction of mortality was needed but industry members indicated that where bycatches cannot be avoided, discarding would ensue, which has negative implications for both the stock and fisheries economy. Industry members emphasised that the perceived 'obligation to discard' under the present regulations did not help build trust in the EC by fishermen. Members asked the EC and Member States (MS) to implement measures at a sensible pace in order to achieve both economic and ecosystem sustainability. The efforts made by Producer Organisations and fishermen to improve selectivity should also be acknowledged. The meeting also strongly urged the need for the evaluation of measures introduced in 2015 that had not yet occurred.

It was noted by Other Interest Group (IOG) members that the poor state of this stock had been discussed for over 10 years without implementing change and that ICES advice for catches had been consistently reduced over this period. Both industry and OIGs were frustrated about the state of the stock, but recognised that maintaining catches at the current level would not help the speedy recovery of the stock.

The EC understood the frustration that was voiced around the table, but stressed that ICES advice for 2015 was to restrict catches to 1,600t, and advice given for 2016 was to reduce catches to 500t. The EC was obliged to take immediate measures to implement this advice.

The French industry highlighted the fact that the 1% bycatch maximum per trip for demersal fisheries was a problematic rule because of irregular, unavoidable bycatch of bass. Information on catch data that were presented showed that catches of bass in the first 4 months of the year exceeded the 1% bycatch limit. The meeting was asked to consider that the AC should recommend a maximum of 5% discard each month to replace the 1% allowance by trip. The UK industry emphasised that a 5% allowance would not be an incentive to target bass, but that it would help reduce wasteful discards of dead but valuable fish.

The EC indicated their willingness to look at this option, particularly if it helped to control fishing mortality. Advice avoiding of misuse of such a measure and its implementation would be needed in order to discuss this option with Member States.

- Scientific progress

Mickael Drogue (Ifremer, France) presented the latest information on stock status and the ICES benchmark process. The meeting was informed that the seabass population in the Northeast Atlantic consists of 4 stocks but more tagging information is needed to define the boundaries between these

stocks. The state of the stocks is clear, however, with poor recruitment in recent years and an urgent need to ensure the survival of the spawning stock biomass and the recruitment of small fish to the stock.

The following ICES benchmarks are ongoing:

1. In 2016 a Methodology workshop (IBPBass) was set up to improve the assessment and data.
2. In 2017 a Benchmark is planned to improve the catch dataset (including recreational catch) and look into stock identity (tagging and genetic studies).

The meeting highlighted the long-term nature of these studies given that measures needed to be introduced and evaluated quickly, in order to avoid discarding and improve the state of bass stocks. With this in mind, the EC was urged to take measures to avoid discarding. In response, the EC indicated that any change to a Council Regulation would take a minimum of 3 months and would be subject to the trilogue process. If alternative measures were developed and recommended by the AC and could be shown to reduce seabass catches, the EC would certainly take such recommendations into account.

The UK industry indicated that measures taken already had eliminated directed (pelagic) bass fisheries. Measures taken in December 2015 were considered to have had dire economic consequences without helping the stock to recover. The meeting highlighted the facts that 1) the decision to introduce measures at the December Council had been made without conducting an impact assessment and 2) introduced measures take a long time to be recalled.

The EC indicated it would have preferred to act on the advice of the ACs, but in order to act on the ICES advice to reduce catches significantly, the EC was bound to implement the emergency measures.

One member from France highlighted the impact of the rule that maximised bycatches to 1% of seabass on each trip, which the industry considered would only cause more discarding of unavoidable bycatch. An alternative measure to maximise bycatches to 5% by vessel by month was proposed on the basis that this would not increase fishing mortality because otherwise these fish would be discarded. Since the state of the stock was considered low and not likely to increase in the near future, it was the opinion of industry members that bycatches of seabass would be low in any case. As fishermen were having great problems discarding bycatch of such high value, it was strongly advocated that management measures should be discussed as soon as possible, and that the AC should not wait until December to do so.

One member asked if relevant expertise had been engaged to consider what affects climate change and El Niño have on the stocks. Mickael Drogue (Ifremer, France) indicated that climate experts were not involved in the benchmark at present, because the ecosystem influence was difficult to assess for different stock areas. There was no ready answer on this point but this will be examined when reconsidering the stock definitions.

- Inter-AC liaison; NSAC Seabass FG meeting 13th October 2015 (Barrie Deas)

As a common member of NWWAC and NSAC focus groups on seabass Barrie Deas (BD) was asked to provide feedback on the latest NSAC Focus Group meeting. The outcome was described as frustrating, and only little progress was made. The meeting had agreed that fishing mortality had been too high and recruitment too low to sustain the stock. Both action to develop new measures and evaluation of

current measures was considered necessary.

Important points that were considered at the NSAC meeting:

- a. Finding an appropriate timeline for reaching MSY,
- b. Working with the scientific community is necessary to reach conclusions,
- c. Reducing fishing mortality should be a key priority,
- d. Designing methods appropriate for different métiers, including recreational fisheries and targeted fisheries,
- e. Management measures should not result in an increase of discards.

The next meeting of the NSAC group on seabass was scheduled to take place on 23 February. The Secretariat confirmed that invitations to this meeting had been exchanged between the NSAC, SWWAC and NWWAC.

The EC indicated that they would greatly appreciate advice from the ACs on this subject. Although the intention of the EC was to include seabass management in Multi-Annual Plans, the poor state of the stock dictated that management measures would need to be decided on at the first available opportunity in order to improve the state of the stock.

At the request of the chair, Barrie Deas agreed to continue as Inter-AC liaison on seabass

3. Terms of Reference

The meeting looked into the Terms of Reference that were drafted in September 2015. The chairman indicated that he would not be available to chair the meeting in future and asked Barrie Deas if he would be willing to take his place, given his engagement with discussions in the NSAC and NWWAC. Barrie Deas accepted the nomination and the meeting welcomed him as the future chair. The position of rapporteur was filled by Jim Portus for this meeting, who also accepted a nomination to continue in this position for future meetings.

The meeting agreed that a small meeting with scientists should take place in the 1st quarter of 2016 to draft advice for 2016 and 2017. It was the intention of the group to set up a written procedure for short-term advice (if relevant) and have a draft text for advice for 2017 ready for discussion at the July meeting in Edinburgh. The meeting should draft short term advice concentrating on current management options focusing on reducing fishing mortality without increasing discards. The meeting should also look into a process for drafting advice for 2017. This would include looking at options by métier, in cooperation with scientists. The scale of additional measures should reflect the outcome of evaluations of what is in place now eg MCRS increase, moratorium, bag limits etc. and the advice should be adapted according to each of those. There is a need to work closely with scientific experts.

A French representative asked if there would be a way to involve fishermen in this process since they were the experts at sea. The future chair (Barrie Deas) explained that an Advice Drafting Group needed to be small to be effective and should be representative. Members also needed to actively seek feedback from their organisations for such a group to be productive. The Secretariat advised members that although finances were restricted and small meetings were to be encouraged as more cost effective in delivering draft advice that can be sent out for feedback to all members, if more funding was needed for bigger meetings, a decision of ExCom would be required to reconsider priorities in



order to allocate supporting funds.

ACTION: Secretariat to set up a meeting for an Advice Drafting Group for seabass in March, to be chaired by Barrie Deas. The group would consider short-term advice proposals as well as the process for drafting advice for 2017 and beyond.

The group agreed that the following considerations would drive subsequent draft advice:

- Objectives of management;
- Preparation for a Long-term Management Plan for seabass in relation to MSY;
- Development of an approach for the review and evaluation of current management measures;
- Inclusion of the effects of the Landing Obligation on seabass fisheries, including discards;
- All métiers including recreational fisheries should be taken into account.

The Chair restated the importance of balanced representation for the group and requested that Members who wished to be part of this group should contact the Secretariat.

4. Plan of action

Secretariat to set up a meeting for an Advice Drafting Group for seabass in March, to be chaired by Barrie Deas. The group would consider short-term advice proposals as well as the process for drafting advice for 2017 and beyond.

Annex 1 – List of Participants

NWWAC members	
Daniel Lefèvre	Comité Régional des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins de Basse Normandie
Jim Portus	South Western Fish Producer Organisation
Bertie Armstrong	Scottish Fishermen's Federation
John Crudden	European Anglers Alliance
Debbie Crockard	Seas at Risk Organisation
Andrew Clayton	The Pew Charitable Trusts
Paul Francoise	Comité Départemental des Pêches et des Élevages Marine: CDPMEM 14
Romain Le Bleis	Comité Départemental des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins du Finistère
Caroline Gamblin	Comité National des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins
Olivier Lepretre	Comité Régional des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins du Nord / Pas de Calais / Picardie
Dominique Thomas	Coopératives Maritimes Etaploises & Armement Cooperatif Artisanal du Nord
Richard Brouzes	Copeport Maree OPBN
Francois Hennuyer	FROM Nord
Rachel Lagièrè	OP COBRENORD
Heather Hamilton	ClientEarth
John Lynch	Irish Fishermen's Organisation
Francis O'Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisation
John Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary
Hugo Boyle	Irish South and East Fish Producers Organisation
Eibhlin O'Sullivan	Irish South and West Fish Producers Organisation
Sean O'Donoghue	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
Irene Kingma	Dutch Elasmobranch Society



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Geert Meun	Stichting van de Nederlandse Visserij / Dutch Fisheries Organisation (2)
Severino Ares Lago	Fundación Rendemento Económico Mínimo Sostible e Social
Lydia Chaparro	Fundació ENT
José Luis Otero Gonzalez	Lonja de La Coruña S.A.
Juan Carlos Corrás Arias	Pescagalicia-Arpega-Obarco
Paul Trebilcock	Cornish Fish Producers Organisation
David Beard	Manx Fish Producers Organisation
Barrie Deas	National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations
Dave Cuthbert	New Under Ten Fishermen's Association
Ross Dougal	Scottish Fishermen's Federation (2)
Observers	
Emily Baxter	Cumbria Wildlife
Stéphan Beaucher	Consultant
Vera Coelho	The Pew Charitable Trusts
Mickael Drogou	Ifremer, Brest
Gonzague de Moncuit	Ministère de l'écologie, du développement durable et de l'énergie
Robert Griffin	European Commission
Ken Kawahara	Plateforme de la Petite Pêche Artisanale Française
Laurent Markovic	European Commission
Colm Osuilleabhain	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine,
Glenn Quelch	EFCA
Loes Vandecasteele	ILVO
Jerome Jourdain	CNPMEM
Patrick Murphy	IS&WFPO
Alan Addison	SWFPA, Skipper Venture II BF 326
Kirsty McGregor	Defra
Alan Boudron	University of Aberdeen
Jean Mitsiacis	FNPPSF
Kare Nolde Nielson	University of Tromso
NWWAC Secretariat	
Conor Nolan	Executive Secretary
Barbara Schoute	Deputy Executive Secretary
Sara Vandamme	Project manager and Communications officer