



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR  
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES  
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN  
WATERS  
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA  
LAS AGUAS  
NOROCCIDENTALES

## MINUTES

### WORKING GROUP 4 - IRISH SEA

**The Main Conference Centre – Dublin Castle**

**Thursday 05<sup>th</sup> September 2019**

**09:00 – 10:30**

#### 1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair, John Lynch, opened the meeting and welcomed the members, observers and COM representative to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Francis O Donnell and Hugo Boyle in advance of the meeting. The agenda was adopted as drafted.

Action points from the minutes from the previous meeting in Ghent on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2019 were discussed:

1. Update of the Choke Identification Tool by the Secretariat. The update should consider both new information on stocks situation and a toolbox of measures that can be used to avoid the choke effect.

This action point is addressed in item 2 of the minutes.

2. Advice Drafting Group to collect input/comments from members on the presented ICES advice to develop an advice on the fishing opportunities for 2020.  
(Members are invited to send their questions on the ICES advice to the Secretariat, who will forward to ICES)

The ADG met on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2019 in Dublin and their proposal will be discussed in the HWG.

3. Based on STECF recommendation on the requirements to support a *de minimis* exemption and a study evaluating the effects on the catch composition and economic impact of different selectivity options for whiting, the NWWAC would make further recommendation on selectivity options. The Secretariat to ask gear technologists from BIM to review all the relevant projects from the past 30 years and see if they can find those which would show good selectivity for below 20 cm. Someone should also present the results in Dublin.

This action point is addressed in item 2 of the minutes.

4. An overview to be presented on the effects and impacts of the eliminator trawl vs increasing mesh size to 120mm in TR1. The person who carried out gear trials for NI is not contracted anymore and there doesn't seem to be a replacement.

The Secretariat contacted the NI administration and received no response to date.

5. The Secretariat to ask COM to produce an evaluation of closed areas for conservation of cod in the Irish Sea.

This action point is addressed in item 2 of the minutes.

6. Need to look at stock IDs in a number of stocks in Irish Sea and Celtic Sea.

A member pointed out the quality assurance issue for some of the advices ICES is giving. For cod in particular, there was a major benchmark in the Irish sea two years ago which came up with a new analytical assessment, which significantly changed the advice for 2018 and 2019. In the advice for 2020, a non-analytical assessment was used again. At the moment ICES doesn't have a proper quality control system in place and has made numerous errors over the years and he AC should point this out, particularly in relation to some of the Irish sea stocks.

Some reference to this issue was made at the Advice Drafting Group yesterday.

**ACTION:** Identify a list of species for which the ICES advice is characterized by a quality assurance issue, pointing out the need for a proper quality control system in place. This list should be then communicated to the Commission which in turn advises ICES.

## 2. Input on the draft advice 'Addressing Choke Risk in NWW after exemptions' for WG1 stocks

The Secretariat presented the preliminary version of the Choke Identification Tool for 2020. The Secretariat had done an initial assessment of the choke risk and invited the members to provide their input to identify possible measures to implement to reduce the risk.

Cod in 7a, given that there is a substantial decrease in the advice, that the ICES advice for 2020 is significantly less compared to the one for 2019, and based on traditional catches, is a high-risk choke species. Catches for cod are about 2-3 times higher than the TAC proposed by ICES, which constitutes a significant problem.

Whiting in 7a still remains a high risk with 0 TAC advice. There are very limited exemptions in place for this stock. The new Technical Measures should help the situation. However, this is a very small fish which is hard to release from the nets. Even though there have been improvements in selectivity, this remains the species with the highest choke risk in the NWW. Removing the TAC is not a solution, so which is actually the way forward on this?

Haddock, Plaice and Sole are low risk species.

Skates and Rays stocks are included in the Celtic sea.

It was agreed in Ghent that the Secretariat should have asked the COM to review the performance of the closed area for conservation of cod in the Irish Sea. It was explained that STECF evaluated the area in 2014 and concluded that it was not effective in protecting spawning cod because of the too many derogations in place. In the new Technical Measures Regulation (EU) 2019/1241, the conditions of that closure were changed, and it is now a total closure for the same period and the same area as

before, with no derogations. There is a provision that if gears are positively assessed by STECF to give very low catches of spawning cod, then there might be the possibility of a derogation. However, as it stands for 2020, there will be no fishing in that area.

### 3. Technical Measures in the Irish Sea

Mr. Ronan Cosgrove from the BIM Gear Technology Section gave a presentation on the gear modifications to reduce bycatch of whiting in the Irish Sea *Nephrops* fishery.

There are some technical solutions but nothing without some sort of cost, either to the fishermen in terms of lost catches, or an environmental cost in terms of low level of survival of the fish after escaping the trawl net.

The Chair opened the floor for questions and discussion about the presentation:

- There seems to be a constant amount of discards in this fishery and the recruitment doesn't seem to be affected by the amount of fish caught. How is the recruitment staying so constant?

Ronan wouldn't be in the position of answer this, this is more a question for the Marine Institute.

- There is a viability issue due to the catch losses for fishermen to implement these gears. Are there any studies giving an estimate of the time frame needed for fishermen seeing their catches increase? Or would the downward trend continue?

There is no information on this at the moment. All that has been done so far is testing the gears, look at the effects in the catches. The key objective is to address the choke risk and the landing obligation, minimise unwanted catches to allow boats to continue fishing. Again, the Marine Institute would be more competent to answer this question.

- COM: setting aside the economic impact, would it help to change the minimum sizes of *Nephrops* to have bigger differences in size between *Nephrops* and whiting, to decrease the amount of 20mm smaller whiting being caught? If you make *Nephrops* size even larger (26, 27mm) would it be easier to design gear that are more selective?

The mesh size already increased from 70mm to 80mm. A change to 26-27 would not have much of an impact.

The COM highlighted the importance of the AC discussing and proposing solutions to tackle the whiting choke issue. The COM would benefit from receiving the AC proposal, with the different options explained and with an indication of which could be the least worse solution. For example, is it better to reduce the TAC or a technical measure which might make fishermen lose marketable bycatch? These are the things COM is looking guidance for.

A consideration was made by a member on the fact that, with a 0 TAC advice, which is in contradiction with the difficulty of avoiding smaller whiting, with the recruitment keeping at a high level, and with the possibility to be more selective, proposing a *de minimis* or the TAC removal could provide a solution for the choke risk.

OIGs strongly disagree with removing the TAC. Moreover, there has been a review by ICES on the TACs that could be removed, but whiting is not on this list. Therefore, only the *de minimis* proposal was added to the Choke ID Tool table.

A member asked whether those fish that aren't reaching marketable size are to be considered as recruitment. This is a question for the Marine Institute or for ICES.

Could industry consider spatial-temporal avoidance measures in those recognised area for small whiting? What Irish fishermen call “the Bay” for example, was an area where we know small whiting is present. Maybe for certain periods of the year, when there is a high concentration of whiting there, that area could be avoided.

The problem however is not in the Bay, is in the general fishery. The *Nephrops* and whiting are on the same fishing ground. Closures in the Bay would be beneficial for recruitment, but recruitment is already good. The main challenge is to keep the *Nephrops* catches and leave the whiting in the sea.

#### 4. Review of progress, summary of actions agreed and decisions adopted by the chair

1	An overview to be presented on the effects and impacts of the eliminator trawl vs increasing mesh size to 120mm in TR1. The person who carried out gear trials for NI is not contracted anymore and there doesn't seem to be a replacement. The Secretariat contacted the NI administration and received no response to date. This is on hold, alternative sources for this information should be identified.
2	Identify a list of species for which the ICES advice is characterized by a quality assurance issue, pointing out the need for a proper quality control system in place. This list should be then communicated to the Commission which in turn advises ICES.

#### Annex 1 – List of participants

NWWAC members	
David Curtis	European Anglers Alliance
Emiel Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Jenni Grossmann	ClientEarth
John Lynch (Chair)	Irish Fishermen's Organisation
John Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary
Sean O'Donoghue	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
NWWAC Observers	
Fintan Kelly	BirdWatch Ireland
Geert Meun	Dutch Fisheries Organisation
Gerard Hussenote	Blue Fish
Irene Kingma	Dutch Elasmobranch Society
Kenny Coull	SWFPA
Kevin McDonnell	West of Scotland Fish PO
Norah Parke	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
Patrick Murphy	Irish South and West Fish Producers' Organisation
Paul Macdonald	Scottish Fishermen Organisation
Thierry Kerzerho	CDPMEM 56
Other observers	
Jonathan Shrives	European Commission
Anthony Brogan	Press/media
Secretariat	
Michael Keatinge	Executive Secretary NWWAC
Mo Mathies	Deputy Executive Secretary NWWAC
Matilde Vallerani	Deputy Executive Secretary NWWAC
Monica Negoita	Executive Assistant (Finance and Administration) NWWAC