



North Western Waters Advisory Council

19 June 2015

ADVICE

Towards a Management Strategy for the sustainable exploitation of the stock of sole (Solea solea) in ICES Division VIIId (East Channel)

Background

The [June 2014 advice](#)¹ from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) indicated that for two successive years (2012 & 2013) recruitment for the sole stock in ICES Division VIIId was very low. Recruitment has always fluctuated without trend and there is no obvious explanation for this present evident drop in recruitment compared to recent years of good recruitment. Since 2005, fishing mortality (F) has been above F_{pa} (0.4) but below F_{lim} (0.55), with a noted increase in 2013. The SSB was at its highest level in 2012 since 1982, well above $MSY B_{trigger}$, but showed a steep decline in 2013. From 2011, ICES advice moved away from being based on F_{pa} (0.4) in transition to F_{MSY} (0.29), the Fishing Mortality deemed necessary for long-term maximum sustainable yield. Stock sustainability objectives of the CFP aimed to achieve F_{MSY} by 2015, or as soon as possible thereafter. Other objectives of the CFP should also be observed, such as those in Article 2 that “fishing... activities are environmentally sustainable in the long-term and are managed in a way that is consistent with the objectives of achieving economic, social and employment benefits, and of contributing to the availability of food supplies”.

At the December Council 2014 the French authorities committed to implementing as of 1 January 2015 a set of management measures aimed at those vessels targeting sole in VIIId. These include a specific licensing permit scheme for sole fishers, a 10% reduction in the number of days at sea compared to 2014 for the static gear and beam trawl metiers, and the obligation for the vessels with a sole-licence to use VMS, and, the setting of a maximum net length for all static gear metiers and the year-round closure to fishing of four inshore sole nursery areas.

The Belgian authorities committed to increasing the mesh size in the lengthening piece from 80 mm to 120 mm for beam trawlers targeting sole in VIIId and joined France in supporting the closure of the four nursery areas.

¹ Advice ICES. 2014. Sole in Division VIIId (Eastern Channel). In Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2014. ICES Advice, 2014. Book 6, Section 6.4.1.

DG Mare contacted the NWWAC by letter (Ref. Ares(2015)2062834 - 18/05/2015) to indicate the need for further work, taking into account the current transitory measures and expanding them to cover all relevant métiers and Member States. This is especially relevant since early indications for ICES advice are for a further decrease of the TAC. The NWWAC is asked to design an advice on a proposal for management measures for this stock by the middle of June, in time for preparation of the STECF plenary 6-10 July. This would allow for a finalized, refined proposal in time for the December Council.

Scope

Sole stocks in the North Sea, the Western channel and the Bay of Biscay (Area IV and Divisions VIIe and VIIIab) are managed through (proposed) management plans. These plans are unique to the stocks but the NWWAC is aware of these plans and the positive results of plans that were developed in cooperation with stakeholders and scientists. The NWWAC would be looking for management based on voluntary stakeholder input as is done for sole in the Bay of Biscay. Learning from the experience of a rigid plan as used for the Western channel, annual adjustments of management should be possible to avoid unintended consequences arising from rigidity of multiannual objectives.

The Eastern Channel sole stock may be influenced by potential mixing of North Sea and western sole into the area. It is anticipated that the fishable biomass for sole in the area will respond well to the recovery of biomass in the North Sea and Western channel sole stocks.

Multi-annual plans (MAPs) are an objective in the CFP. For the North Sea, work is in progress on a MAP using a multi-species approach. In the views on how to address stocks from adjacent areas it is intended to include Sole VIIId in the North Sea plan. Being part of a multi-species plan means that F_{MSY} ranges for this stock will be assessed instead of pinpointed reference points.

Management should encompass all métiers that fish for sole in the Eastern Channel. In respect of applying different measures to different gears it is up to Member States holding Sole VIIId quota to define their national static gear, beam trawl and other trawls.

Objectives

The NWWAC considers management should aim to achieve the CFP objectives for this stock by 2020 at the latest by means of proportionate and appropriate measures.

Additionally, further improvement of the exploitation pattern (avoiding juvenile sole by means of improved selectivity or adapted fishing patterns) should be an objective within a management strategy for Sole in the Eastern Channel.

Measures in place in 2015

1. Cod management plan ((EC) 1342/2008): for the Eastern Channel in combination with the North Sea effort restrictions are in place for all métiers implied in the plan.
2. French measures (licensing, effort restrictions and nursery closures as mentioned above)
3. Belgian measures (technical measures and nursery closures, as mentioned above)
4. Relevant to fisheries management in the area, in the UK there are Sussex IFCA Byelaws, with certain exceptions and for the purposes of protecting juveniles of all fish species, prohibiting trawling within 0.25 miles seaward of the line of Lowest Astronomical Tide from 1st May to 31st October each year. Similarly the UK Southern IFCA Byelaws with certain exceptions prohibit trawling within 1 mile of the coast between 1st May and 31st August. Around 45% of the UK quota (9% of the TAC) is MSC certified through the Hastings sole fisheries.

Advice

The work of the NWWAC was helped by an evaluation of different management measures for the Eastern channel Sole stock prepared by IFREMER². The NWWAC advises to focus on a TAC management strategy in the IFREMER document targeting F_{MSY} by 2020:

- A. Reduce the TAC in 2016 to 3000 t (14% reduction).
- B. Keep the TAC constant to reach F_{MSY} in 2020 at the latest.

The NWWAC considers that management measures should not preclude the taking into account any new circumstances or availability of updated information.

Additionally, technical measures as the evaluated by STECF should be considered if these are considered appropriate such as:

1. Closed nursery areas on the French coast as already defined,
2. Nursery areas on the UK coast to be defined, to be closed seasonally or year-round, taking into account that Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) that may benefit sole stocks are being established by the UK in this area in 2015,
3. For beam trawlers – if fitted, a lengthening piece should consist of at least 3 meters of 120 mm, as evaluated by STECF³,
4. Length of static gear should be maximized to avoid increase (like 1 km/m vessel length),

² Vermard Youen, Savina-Rolland Marie, Biseau Alain (2015). Evaluation de mesures de gestion pour le stock de sole en Manche est. Réponse de l'Ifremer a la saisine DPMA 15-8452. 18p.

³ Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – 48th Plenary Meeting Report (PLEN-15-01). 2015. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, EUR 27220 EN, JRC 95802, 75 pp.



5. Biomass safeguard – in case the TAC rule in itself would not be evaluated to reach F_{MSY} as planned, then a biomass threshold could be included in the rule under B in order to reduce risks of depleting biomass to less than 5%,
6. Recreational sole fisheries may be restricted or closed,
7. Redress lack of scientific data/surveys – the NWWAC promotes cooperation between industry/science to improve data collections. Reinstating the international contribution of the UK-YFS is advised by ICES to improve the assessment.

Conclusions

- This first advice for a management strategy has been prepared in a fast track to be available in time for the STECF plenary session in July 2015 and the NWWAC would appreciate an evaluation of the measures.
- NWWAC welcomes the opportunity to be involved in further development of a management strategy in order to come to a conclusion in time for the December Council 2015.

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