

Report from: Kenny Coull

Report date: 13 June 2014

Event: Advice Drafting Group Celtic Sea (ADGCS)

Place: ICES, Copenhagen, Denmark

Date: 9 - 13 June 2014

Organiser: International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)

Participants: Asgeir Agein (Co-Chair), Floor Quinijns (Co-Chair), ICES Secretariat, Sam Truesdell (Chair - Student Review Group), several invited experts, Maximilien Simon (Observer – French Ministry), Kenny Coull (Observer - NWWAC), Alex Wiseman (Observer - Pelagic AC), Sean O'Donoghue (Observer - Pelagic AC)

Purpose: To prepare draft advice for fish stocks in the Celtic Sea and West of Scotland Ecoregion.

BACKGROUND

The annual ICES advice process for fish stocks consists of several stages. The Advice Drafting Groups consider the reports from the (stock assessment) Expert Groups, together with the outcomes from the Independent Review Groups and prepare draft advice for consideration by the Advisory Committee. Stakeholders are permitted to attend the Advice Drafting Group meetings as Observers.

REPORT

Introduction and Briefing by Chair and ICES Secretariat

The opening presentation by ICES Secretariat outlined the guidelines for presenting catch advice in relation to the forthcoming Landings Obligation Regulation (EU) No 1380, 2013. Following consideration of a series of questions relating to availability and accuracy of data on catches, landings and discards, advice would be presented as:

0 - Advise on Catch

A - Advise on Catch, except with survival rate

B – Advise “Catch unknown, landings no more than ...”

The format of the meeting was for the Advice Drafting Group to consider Assessment Working Group presentations on each stock (where available) and, generally, the advice would be accepted unless there were clear reasons not to do so.

The ADG would then review and update the text accompanying the science advice and supporting information sheets.

Student Review Group

During the course of this meeting the outcomes of the Student Review Groups work was briefly presented in relation to a group of stocks: The task of the RG is to provide a technical review of the scientific findings and results presented in Expert Group report(s) and for fisheries assessments based on the information available on the Stock Annex. Technical minutes of the Review Group for the Celtic Sea Advice Drafting Group were made available. Seventeen stocks were originally scheduled for review but 2 were postponed pending update from autumn surveys and 2 were not reviewed because they were not posted on the ICES Sharepoint site.

Of the 13 stocks reviewed, 6 assessments were accepted, 6 were accepted with caveats and one was rejected.

Presentation on Advice

For each stock, the Chair from the relevant Expert Group (Assessment Working Group) provided a brief presentation or insight which described the stock, assessment and basis for advice. This was generally accompanied by a series of relevant standard graphs and plots as well as highlighting key issues relevant to the assessment and advice. This was then followed by a summary from the work done by the Student Review Group for each stock.

Drafting of Advice (and Summary Information)

Initial preparation of Advice and Supporting Information sheets had been conducted prior to the meeting (ICES Secretariat, Expert Groups and allocated member of ADG). The Advice Drafting Group visited each stock in turn. After confirming the top line advice was in line with the defined protocols, consideration was then given to the information contained in the Stock Status section. The group then considered the text, tables and figures provided and where appropriate agreed on required changes and updates.

Data-Limited Stocks

Where stocks are regarded as data limited, they were categorised according to adopted ICES approach which is intended to move in the direction of sustainable exploitation, having due regard for the species biological characteristics and uncertainty in information. Advice could then be fixed for a specified time period unless important new knowledge changed the perception of the stock. The development of this process has allowed for more flexibility to provide appropriate and relevant advice. The continued evolution of the DLS approach allowed for more interpretation and flexibility which was used on occasions to justify the non application of further precautionary reductions. However, concern was also raised about the application of the method for a long lived species (anglerfish) where the outcome suggested a 20% increase of catches on a stock that showed recent reduction in SSB.

The group recommended that ICES give further consideration to this for future reference. The matter was resolved in this particular case by applying DLS rules separately to the biomass for the two species of anglerfish.

Landings Obligation

While it was agreed that text relating to the “landing obligation” should only be presented in the general advice sheet and not included in each stock sheet it was recognised there were different approaches taken by different Advice Drafting Groups. It is likely that a more consistent approach will be agreed between ADG’s.

Summary

With the Advice Drafting Group following well defined protocols, there was generally a very high level of acceptance of the top line advice on catches and landings. Opportunity was provided for frank and open discussion on text contained within the advice and supporting information sheets. Observers from the Pelagic Advisory Council participated only on day one. In line with input to the North Sea Advice Drafting Group amendments were made to text which reflected recent perceptions on changes in selectivity and discard rates in the Scottish cod and whiting fisheries on the West of Scotland. Additionally, there was recognition that a parallel observer sampling scheme run by the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation should be more closely aligned with that of Marine Scotland to provide more robust data to be used for ICES assessments.

There was a great deal of discussion on the advice for haddock at Rockall as adopting the MSY approach generated implied increase in catches which seemed rather excessive. With the Management Plan not having been adopted it seemed inappropriate for the group to recommend this option (ahead of the MSY approach). Following further consideration the reference point for F_{MSY} was changed to 0.2 (in line with ICES comments in last years advice) resulting in a significant increase in predicted catches.

While detailed notes were taken on outcomes for each stock, these will not be distributed as further consideration within the ICES structure has to be given before advice is released.