

## Minutes

### Joint NWWAC/NSAC Focus Group Skates & Rays

#### Virtual meeting via Teams

14 October 2022 | 09:00 – 10:30 IE | 10:00 – 11:30 CET

#### Participants

Marta del Avellanal Ballesteros	Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación
Pauline Delalain	CNPMEM
Paulien Depickere	Vlaamse overheid, Departement Landbouw en Visserij
Carol Forrest	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine Ireland
Erik Lindebo	DG MARE
John Lynch	IS&EFPO
Mo Mathies	NWWAC
Geert Meun	VisNed
Sander Meyns	Rederscentrale
Solène Prévalet	FROMNord
Dominic Rihan	BIM
Amerik Schuitemaker	Nederlandse Vissersbond
Erik Tichelaar	Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality Netherlands
Johnny Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary

#### 1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair John Lynch welcomed all participants especially the guests from the Commission and the Member States. A quick round of introductions was made. Apologies were received from Paddy Walker, Dutch Elasmobranch Society. The agenda was adopted.

Minutes and action points from the last meeting (21 February 2022)

1	Mathies to distribute working documents once available. After review by members, Mathies will ask for interest in developing common position and organise a quick meeting if needed. <a href="#">No documents were made available prior to the STECF EWG meeting.</a>
2	Members approved the letter. The NWWAC and NSAC Secretariats will now progress with their respective approval procedures.. <a href="#">Letter submitted to COM 15 September 2022</a>
3	A FG meeting should be planned at the end of October to discuss finalisation of workshop ToR after EGW information is available. <a href="#">In progress</a>
4	Mathies will liaise with Prévalet and Villagra to discuss and organise the translation of these documents.
5	The FG will examine the information available on the subsea cables impact on elasmobranchs and consider inviting representatives from ICES and the Mons project to present on their results. <a href="#">Schedule presentation for next FG meeting</a>

## 2. STECF EWG 26-30 September – update – Erik Lindebo, MARE C.5

Erik Lindebo stated that the draft report from the meeting had not been received and therefore he would only be able to provide a limited amount of information. The EWG was looking specifically at the use of group TACs and how the scientific advice is allocated to the catch advice, whereas the UK has taken a different approach. The EWG was asked to clarify how both approaches worked and how they compare regarding TAC setting and conservation performance. Discussions with the UK on this topic are ongoing prior to the start of consultations on 07 November. The EWG also looked at alternatives to group TACs and analysed if some stocks could be removed and individual TACs could be set, for example for Cat 1 and Cat 2 stocks. The prohibited species list was also reviewed.

Similar to 2017 several recommendations will be made which need follow-up discussions within the COM, with the UK, the Member States and with all stakeholders. What came out of the STECF discussions is that the matter is quite complicated and there might be a better way of using group TACs, bespoke management plans and individual TACs to ensure sustainable exploitation. This may lead to the establishment of a more formal strand of work in the Specialised Committee Fisheries to take this forward.

The Commission also received all scientific advice for elasmobranchs apart from cuckoo ray and undulate ray. There is still a bit of uncertainty around how the discussions will continue with the UK.

Dominic Rihan asked for clarification on cuckoo ray and undulate ray advice.

Lindebo stated that both species have apparently undergone quite a revision of the stocks by ICES which was a considerable (positive) change in the perception of the stock. The advice still needs to undergo additional review and ICES have confirmed that the advice will be delivered by end of October.

Sander Meyns asked if the blonde ray had been discussed.

Lindebo stated that the blonde ray advice had been received and that an increase was observed in the stock. This will feed into the discussions with the UK.

The Chair wondered if the STECF EWG discussed the separation of some species from the group TAC, and if those species will be different in the different areas.

Lindebo commented that the specific TAC areas were looked at in relation to the stock advice. If there were a lot of Cat 5 or 6 stocks it was felt that it would be better to treat these cautiously. However, if better data are available for specific management areas, a distinction between species could be made based on the size of the stock and the quality of the assessment.

The Chair thanked Lindebo for his contributions.

### 3. Discussion: Terms of Reference for Skates & Rays Workshop 2023

Mathies took the participants through the draft Terms of Reference.

The Chair stated that the same issues were outlined by the STECF EWG in 2017 but added that a lot more data is available now to advance the issues. He felt to have presentations from current research would help establish more defined management approaches for certain species. He felt positive that this workshop would reach more advanced conclusions than the 2017 workshop.

Lindebo commented that he had sent a revised STECF EWG ToR to the NWWAC Secretariat as it had changed from what was published online. Regarding the purpose of the workshop on bringing various organisations and representatives together, he felt it would send a positive signal to set up a workshop with the UK as an integral part both in terms of their administration, but also in terms of the scientists. If changes are to be contemplated to management of skates and rays, including by looking at the group TACs, this would have to be agreed with the UK at some stage so including them in the workshop would be positive.

The Chair agreed that UK representatives should be included to allow full discussion.

Johnny Woodlock commented that it seemed that some stocks are increasing and felt that positive stories should be published on national media to show that the industry is not destroying the environment but assisting in the recovery of stocks. He felt that there were a lot of negative views in the public at the moment. A press release could be made following the workshop for example showing that the ACs are working towards the health of the planet. He felt that there is still a lot of ignorance as to the work of the ACs and the Commission.

The Chair agreed that this could be done.

Mathies stated that the NWWAC does circulate press releases, and this can certainly be looked at closer to the time.

### 4. Draft Workshop Agenda & participants list

Mathies explained that the draft agenda is based on the 2017 workshop. She explained that she hoped the Commission would assist the ACs by giving access to their facilities similar to the two workshops run by the NWWAC jointly with other ACs in 2019.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to contact MARE D3 regarding use of facilities for the workshop.

Lynch commented that that it is likely that the same topics would be discussed as in 2017 but with better data available hopefully more progress could be made.

Lindebo stated that it would be useful to have a presentation of the STECF EWG report to inform workshop participants at the start of the meeting.

Mathies identified the various research projects that are currently included for presentation at the workshop and asked if any additional ones needed to be considered.

Meyns commented that the Raywatch project can present on their progress regarding work on survival rates, catch identification of rays and catch monitoring specifically in the Western Waters. He added that ILVO could provide a more interactive aspect to the workshop as well and present on the project Rayscan which will be finalised at the beginning of 2023 with the release of a smartphone application for the identification of rays.

The Chair stated that Rayscan was tested at the DES meeting in Amsterdam and members felt it was very useful.

Solene Prévalet stated that as part of the Thornback Ray FIP survivability research was being carried out which could also be presented at the workshop.

Woodlock commented it might be interesting to bring in information on the protected species and the tagging regime. IFI could be asked to prepare a poster that could be made available at the workshop.

Amerik Schuitemaker mentioned the INNORAYS project for inclusion on the agenda and asked if FG members could assist the Secretariat with the names of experts.

**ACTION:** Members to contact the NWWAC Secretariat with names of experts that need to be invited to the workshop.

Lindebo stated that the more inclusive the workshop is the better. UK PO involvement could be very useful and help bridging the gap between the two administrations. We need both the scientific community and the industry especially when it comes to finding innovative ways forward that work.

Regarding the roundtable discussions Mathies identified that the specific topics for discussion here would only become clear following the publication of the STECF EWG 22-08 report. However, a "Save the date" could be circulated to interested parties with the draft Terms of Reference attached.

Workshop date: **Thursday 09 February**

**ACTION:** Secretariat to circulate Save the Date email to interested parties once facilities have been agreed.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to update draft Terms of Reference and draft agenda and circulate to members.

## 5. Next steps

Secretariat to follow up on action points.

## 6. Summary of actions agreed and decisions adopted by the Chair

<b>1</b>	Secretariat to contact MARE D3 regarding use of facilities for the workshop.
<b>2</b>	Members to contact the NWWAC Secretariat with names of experts that need to be invited to the workshop.
<b>3</b>	Secretariat to circulate Save the Date email to interested parties once facilities have been agreed
<b>4</b>	Secretariat to update draft Terms of Reference and draft agenda and circulate to members.

**Date of next meeting: 08 December 09:00 – 10:30 IE**