REPORT

FOCUS GROUP ON SKATES, RAYS AND SHARKS

CNPMEM - Paris

Wednesday 29 February 2012

14:00 - 17:00

Chairwoman: Eibhlín O´Sullivan

Rapporteur: Alexandre Rodríguez

1. Welcome

The Chairwoman of the Focus Group, Eibhlín O´Sullivan, welcomed all attendees to the meeting. The list of participants, and the organisations they represent, is detailed in Annex I.

Apologies: Alexandre Rodríguez (Secretariat) recorded apologies from Guzmán Díez (AZTI-Tecnalia)[1]. He highlighted that the Spanish scientific institutes AZTI-Tecnalia and IEO had addressed a request from the Focus Group and submitted two presentations on the Spanish initiatives in relation to studies/surveys on biology and of rays in ICES areas VI-VII-VIII and IX.

Agenda: The Chairwoman proposed that the agenda was slightly revised and in light of the fact that unfortunately the Spanish Scientific Representatives had been unable to attend the meeting Item 3 ("Input from national initiatives on rays") would be swapped with Item 4 to allow more time for discussions from the floor. This proposal was accepted by the members, and the agenda was adopted without any further changes.

Adoption of the report of the last meeting (Madrid, 16 September 2011):

The meeting report was considered a true and accurate record, and adopted without any comments or changes.

[1] Note "a posteriori": A last minute apology was received by Kelle Moreau (ILVO) prior to the meeting.

Setting the scene by the Chair:

Ms. O'Sullivan reminded the attendees on the history and objectives of this Group, and made a brief summary of the work progress achieved to date, with specific emphasis on the outstanding actions arising from the previous Focus Group meeting held in Madrid[2].

The following objectives were identified as priorities for this meeting:

- To get a better understanding of the scientific knowledge on the state of the main stocks of skates, rays and sharks;
- To be informed of historic and ongoing surveys carried out by national scientific institutes in Member States to improve the knowledge on species that might help to better inform management decisions;
- To exchange views on the revised version of the Irish proposal on a LTMP for Rays and Skates in ICES areas VI and VII, which has incorporated comments made by members following the first Focus Group meeting, and to agree a way forward.

2. State of Skates and Rays stocks in ICES Areas VI and VII (Graham Johnston)

2.1. Presentation on ICES Advice

The Chairman of the ICES Working Group on Elasmobranchs (WGEF), Graham Johnston, provided a detailed presentation on the state of the various Skates and Rays stocks.

Mr. Johnston showed a list of the main Ray and Skate species found in the Celtic Seas eco-region. He advised the group that the ICES Advice on Demersal Elasmobranchs is provided on a biannual basis (i.e. 2 year cycle). The last advice was issued in 2010 and underpins the setting of TACs for 2011 and 2012. The main features of the 2010 advice was that overall landings should be less than 9,900 tones and there should be no target fishery on *Raja undulata* and *Dipturus batis* complex. The next ICES WGEF meeting will be held in June and the new advice is planned to be released in October for the 2013-2014 period.

In comparison with other fish, the general biology of elasmobranchs was described as:

- Long-lived
- Slow-growing
- Late maturity
- Low fecundity

[2] http://www.nwwrac.org/Meetings/Meetings_ENG/Navigation.php?id=512&language=English

The above characteristics render these species very vulnerable to over-fishing, given the long time the stocks need to recover/rebuild. Protecting spawning stock by protecting spawning females and/or nursery grounds was highlighted as a potentially powerful tool for the restoration of the stock.

The presentation from Mr. Johnston is available for consultation in the NWWRAC website[3]. The key information provided for the main species is summarised in the table below.

SPECIES (Latin name)	GROWTH RATE (K) / FECUNDITY (F)	AGE AT MATURITY (years)	LENGTH AT MATURITY (cm)	MAXIMUM LENGTH (L∞) (cm.) m=male f = female	CONSIDERED STATUS	ICES ADVICE 2011-2012
Common skate[4] ***(Dipturus cf. flossada)***	unknown	11 (m/f)	115 (m) 122 (f)	unknown	Extirpated in VIIa; Depleted in other areas	No targeted fisheries
Common skate ***(Dipturus cf. intermedia)***	unknown	19-20 (m/f)	185 (m) 197 (f)	254 (m-f)	Extirpated in VIIa; Depleted in other areas	No targeted fisheries
Thornback ray ***(Raja clavata)***	K Irish Sea: 0.135 (m) 0.093 (f) K Bristol Channel: 0.09 F= 62-74	6 (m)	82 (m/f)	106 (m) 139.5 (f)	VI- Stable / Increasing VIIa,f,g – Stable / Increasing VIIe - Uncertain	Status quo catches
Blonde ray ***(Raja brachyura)***	K Irish Sea: 0.145-0.19 (m) 0.13-0.19 (f) F= 40-90	4 (m) 5 (f)	82 (m) 84 (f)	145 (m) 154 (f)	Uncertain; Patchy distribution; Identification issues	No advice

[3] Direct link to the presentation: www.nwwrac.org/admin/publication/upload/Status_Skates_Rays_ICES_VI_VII_GJ_Feb2012.pdf

[4] As *Dipturus batis*, the common skate is now considered to consist of two species, *Dipturus cf. flossada* and *Dipturus cf. intermedia* are considered to form part of the *Dipturus* (common skate) complex.

SPECIES (Latin name)	GROWTH RATE (K) / FECUNDITY (F)	AGE AT MATURITY (years)	LENGTH AT MATURITY (cm)	MAXIMUM LENGTH (L∞) (cm.) m=male f = female	CONSIDERED STATUS	ICES ADVICE 2011-2012
Spotted ray *(Raja Montagui)*	Irish Sea: 0.304 (m) 0.296 (f)	3 (m) 4 (f)	56 (m/f)	72 (m) 78 (f)	Same as *raja clavata*	Status quo catches
Small-eyed ray (*Raja microocellata)*	K= 0.086 F= 54-61	unknown	58.0 (m) 57.5 (f)	137 (VIIf)	Stable at low levels in main stock area (VIIf)	Status quo catch for VIIf, no advice for other subdiv.
Undulate ray *(Raja undulata)*	K= 0.124-0.149 (m); 0.112-0.146 (f)	9 (m/f)	73 (m) 76 (f)	112 (m) 114 (f)	Overall status unknown; Local stocks should be managed individually	No targeted fisheries
Cuckoo ray *(Leucoraja naevus)*	K Irish Sea 0.294 (m) 0.197 (f) K Celtic Sea 0.108 F= 90	Irish Sea 4 (m/f)	57 (m) 56 (f)	Irish Sea 87.5 (m) 84 (f) Celtic Sea 92 (m/f)	Area VI – Uncertain; Area VII – Uncertain; Need to better understand stock structure	Reduce from recent catch levels
Sandy ray *(Leucoraja circularis)*	unknown	unknown	Unknown	100-120	Uncertain	No advice
Shagreen ray *(Leucoraja fullonica)*	unknown	unknown	Unknown	120	Uncertain	No advice

The Chairwoman thanked Mr. Johnston for his presentation and opened the floor for discussion.

2.2. Questions and exchange of views from the floor

**** The representatives of the fishing industry made the following remarks:***

Eibhlín O´Sullivan stressed the fact that it is likely that we have now two species of common skate. This raises questions regarding the identification of both species and the current state of knowledge. She asked if during 2012 ICES will give advice for each of the two species or under one single group (*Dipturus batis* complex).

Jacques Pichon asked about the reasons for the decrease in landings of cuckoo ray reported by the French fleet: he wondered if this is due to a decrease in the exploitation rates (CPUE) or is it more related to a nominal decrease in landings due to the reduction of effort induced by regulatory reasons?

Mr. Pichon commented on a presentation received from IFREMER on a trends-based survey on fishing exploitation of rays. In this presentation the cuckoo ray shows a relatively stable trend. It would be worth reflecting, therefore, if this species are sensitive only due to their slow growth rate regardless of the fact they are fished in multi specific fisheries (no targeted fisheries). He also suggested that variations between species might be explained by the degree of resilience of each particular species to the fishing activity.

Daniel Lefèvre stressed the importance that undulate ray has historically had as a commercial fishery for part of the French fleet in the Channel, particularly the Western area (VIIe). He reminded the group that the ICES advice that there be no directed fisheries had been interpreted by the Commission severely in the implementation of a landings ban for this species in EU waters. He asked how we could improve the knowledge and collect the necessary data for this and other stocks if a landings ban is in place. The perception of abundance from the fishermen is that this species have not decreased but this cannot be proved unless there is a data collection programme in place. If the stock status remains unknown, there is fear that this will lead to a proposal from the Commission of an automatic reduction of 25%. The possibility of developing a multi annual management plan would be an option

Sean O´Donoghue asked how robust are the scientific data in terms of basic biology of the different rays species (i.e. distribution, fertility, ageing…). There seems to be a problem with ageing calculation and species identification in relation to landings. He wondered how ICES can come to a reliable assessment if data received are uncertain. He also asked if there was any transnational collaboration to coordinate information coming from scientific surveys from national institutes on rays.

John Lynch stated that, according to his experience, fishermen in the Irish Sea do not have a problem with the identification of ray species. He also stated that a proportion of 60-75% individuals of blonde rays captured by the Irish south-east fleet have reached maturity age.

Paul Trebilcock asked if the current prohibition on landings is hampering the efforts to improve data quality and achieve a better understanding of ray stocks aiming a sustainable exploitation.

**** The representatives from the Environmental NGOs made the following remarks:***

Johnny Woodlock defended the Commissions imposition of a TAC reduction by pointing out in those cases where there were uncertainty on the status of rays, the Commission had the legitimate option to invoke the precautionary principle for the sake of the conservation of the stocks.

Ali Hood reinforced the point that we need to ensure that we have full reliable information available before moving from a management decision based on the precautionary principle. She warned the fishing industry representatives to be cautious with the current knowledge available and reminded the Group that they were talking about endangered species. Only in the case where new scientific data should come available which would justify a reopening of the fisheries, would the Shark Trust Alliance be in a position to support a sustainable management of fisheries. Ms. Hood highlighted that CEFAS and Marine Scotland have been working together to make sure they do not jettison existing information available. One viable option would be to pinpoint nursery areas as an important step to achieve a recovery of the stocks.

**** The Commission's representative made the following observations:***

Robert Griffin (DG MARE) encouraged the participants to continue with this strand of work and transmitted the Commission's willingness to consider a future proposal of a management plan for skates and rays coming from the North Western Waters RAC.

Regarding the reasons why the Commission proposed a prohibition on landings for raja undulata based on ICES advices that only said "no targeted fishery"; he will convey this question to his colleagues and come back with a detailed explanation.

The scientific representatives addressed the questions posed by the members as follows:

Graham Johnston (ICES Chair of WGEF)

Common skate: To date, ICES has not provided information on both species, just on Dipturus batis complex. However, ICES will hopefully be able to provide separate advice for the newly two species depending on the data available as this differentiation was discovered only two years ago.

Cuckoo ray: The decline in landings is the result of a decline in CPUE which showed a decreasing trend for the stock. There is a need to prevent the stock collapse although a management option of maintaining a stable fishery could be considered if compatible.

Undulate ray: ICES has not advocated for a landings ban, this is a managers' decision. There had been an issue with the use of generic landing categories. Better information on discards and historical series of catch data from different ports, measuring both fishing effort and volume of catches, would be of great help for the Channel.

General comments:

- Current assessments show that rays in general have not been reacting well to intense fishing activity. It is believed therefore that high fishing pressure has lead to severe depletion of some ray stocks.
- Rays are notoriously difficult to age. Ageing of rays is not routinely carried out as part of the DCF due to this difficulty. Most age information included in this presentation are obtained from PhD studies on the Irish Sea from 2006 onwards.
- There are issues with identification of species by landing statistics: however, there is no longer a problem to group species in skates and rays; and figures of landings individualised by species in the last couple of years are more reliable.
- Landings data provided from the industry is not decisive for ICES assessments, as they are mainly based on survey trends, which together with landings and CPUE helps to build the assessment.
- There are transnational surveys for ray stocks. The main source of information is the IBTS (International Bottom Trawl Survey) that covers vast areas of North Sea, West of Scotland, Celtic Sea and Bay of Biscay. This survey is carried out by most EU member states. Also the methodology used for catches is inter-collaborative. There is an ICES group entrusted with examining these data on a yearly basis, comparing the figures between national surveys.

Alain Biseau (IFREMER)

Cuckoo ray: Alain Biseau from IFREMER explained that it is likely that the recent LPUE data have not been updated to cover the last years of the research scientific campaigns that started in 1997. These data will be submitted to the working group that will prepare work for WGEF.

Undulate ray: We need to reconcile and find the historical sets of data for landings. However, IFREMER has also carried out a different approach: fisheries science partnerships and scientific campaigns (SFCS) started in the 90s and this information can be used.
IFREMER has also undertook a systematic analysis of the catches from French fishing vessels as well as information on discards in the last three years, but historical data needs to be built on to be able to have a reliable picture about trends.

3. Input to proposals on rays from national initiatives in Belgium and Spain

As a result of the action agreed in Madrid, the Secretariat contacted the Belgian and Spanish scientific coordinators with the NWWRAC and asked them to provide presentations or reports on surveys or projects carried out at Member State level on skates and rays. In response to this request, two presentations were received from the two main Spanish institutes (IEO and AZTI). Both are available for consultation in the NWWRAC meeting site.

3.1. Scientific surveys on Skates and Rays in ICES subareas VI and VII[5]
Instituto Español de Oceanografía (IEO) – Spain

Main projects involved:
* Fishery activity monitoring: information on landings (by year and type of gear) from Spanish trawl fleet in ICES VI and VII;
* Sampling discards programme: information on discards by species and weight through observers on board Spanish trawl fleet for ICES VI and VII
* Fishery independent information: Bottom-trawl surveys aimed to collect data on the (spatial and length) distribution, relative abundance and biological information of commercial fish in the Porcupine Bank Area (ICES Division VIIb-k)

3.2. DCF Pilot project on Fisheries landing for Skates and Rays in the Bay of Biscay (ICES Subarea VIII) and mainland Portugal (ICES Division IXa) [6]
Partners: AZTI Tecnalia / IPIMAR (Spain / Portugal)

The objective of this survey is to provide an evidence-based response to the Council Regulation EC No 43/2009, which prohibits the landings of *Raja undulata, Dipturus batis* and *Rostroraja alba* in Iberian waters (ICES subareas IXa and VIII).

The reason is that there is not enough information or evidence of declines in the populations of these species in the sub-areas mentioned. Also socio-economic impact of this regulation has not been evaluated.

An annual report from 2011 is in the process of being completed and will be ready in May 2012.

[5] www.nwwrac.org/admin/publication/upload/Rays_Surveys_IEO_Spain_RAC.pdf

[6] www.nwwrac.org/admin/publication/upload/Presentation_Rays_AZTI_NWWRAC_Feb%202012.pdf

4. Discussion on management measures for skates and rays

4.1. Background

As a result of the input received in the Madrid Focus Group meeting, Maurice Clarke (scientific advisor from the Marine Institute) was commissioned with preparing a revised version of the Irish proposal on a management plan for Skates and Rays for ICES VI and VII. Dr. Clarke completed this task and submitted a summary note explaining the changes inserted in line with the agreements reached in Madrid.

This proposal was verbally presented at the October meetings of the NWWRAC Working Groups 2 and 4 in Dublin Castle by the Chairwoman of the Focus Group. The Secretariat circulated the revised proposal to all NWWRAC members for information afterwards.

The Chairwoman stated that consultation time has been long enough and invited attendees to make final comments on the specific elements of the plan. She encouraged participants to make progress to agree a final proposal that can be put forward the Executive Committee for decision within the near future in light of the tight timeframes involved in getting such a plan assessed formally by ICES and STECF.

4.2. General remarks

*** The Focus Group members made the following general remarks to the plan:**

Barrie Deas advocated avoiding a blunt approach and instead the group should look at tailored and targeted measures given the specific biological characteristics of these species (i.e. slow growth rates; long sexual maturity; etc) and its sensitivity to fishing activity. The CFP reform process might have introduced some measures that can affect the rays' exploitation (e.g. effort control regimes, TACs decreasing for Cod, technical measures, etc.). Mr. Deas asked if there is any evidence to suggest that the measures currently in place have delivered any positive effects for the recovery of skates and rays.

Eibhlín O´Sullivan requested additional information on effort levels and landings, and also to identify those potential areas that could be defined as nursery areas.

Jacques Pichon asked if the draft management plan would include specific MSY values established from the outset.

*** Graham Johnston, in his capacity as national scientist from the Marine Institute here, replied to some of the general queries posed by the members:**

He regarded it as very difficult to discern the cause and effect of each of the factors which were going on simultaneously (e.g. environmental and ecological changes, impact of fishing activities; etc.).

He also acknowledged that some species are more resilient than others and can even show an increasing trend in some cases (a good example would be *Raja clavata*). It is uncertain as to whether gear modifications might have had an effect.

In relation to nursery areas, Mr. Johnston said that the Irish Sea as a whole could be an important breeding area for cuckoo ray. The Marine Institute in Ireland is working with fishermen to gather local knowledge on nursery and spawning areas that could be useful.

Regarding the fixation of MSY values, that would only happen at the last stage (third) of the management plan.

ICES elasmobranch assessments are mainly based on ground fish surveys, and data on endangered species and its locations are collected and coordinated in IBTS.

4.3. Specific remarks by species

* Common skate (*Dipturus batis*)

The audience was reminded that a new Memorandum of Understanding between ICES and the European Commission was concluded in January, and there is an option for the RACs to submit specific request to ICES via the European Commission.

Also, it is possible for the NWWRAC to ask for access to relevant data from Member States under the current Data Collection Framework Regulation

Action: The NWWRAC will submit a special request to ICES via the Commission seeking clarification on the identification of the two species of common skate and also that advice be provided on an individual species basis.

* Cuckoo ray (*leucoraja naevus*)

Graham Johnston gave a brief summary of the assessment for Areas VI-VII:

- Lack of trends in the survey
- Decline of CPUE provided by France
- Decrease of catches advised as precautionary approach;
- It is worth noting that all skates and rays in VI and VII are treated the same in the advice: cuckoo ray is not separated here at the moment.

Alain Biseau added that IFREMER is revising the trends curve graph and will review its own data to make it available for the ICES Working Group meeting in June;

No further comments were provided by the members in relation to the management plan.

* Undulate ray (*raja undulata*)

Graham Johnston said that a great level of protection is required for this stock and the larger population is located in the English Channel. Even if this species is targeted, a management plan should be put in place with safeguards for locally vulnerable populations, e.g. in Tralee Bay in VIIj.

Jacques Pichon reminded that there were identification difficulties for the French fleet in the past, but these problems had been overcome by working on guidelines on identification.
He reiterated Mr. Lefèvre's point that this was a traditional fishery that have existed for decades and only stopped two years ago. Mr. Pichon said that he is not certain that some zones are in immediate danger to require the adoption of such stringent measures. Fishermen and NWWRAC might prove that we can come up with management measures.

Daniel Lefèvre asked if undulate rays migrate to distant locations or they are rather concentrated in local distributions. From the fishermen's experience, it seems they concentrate in patchy and local populations but this is not certain as there is no comprehensive marking or tagging programmes in place.

Graham Johnston replied that there is a well-defined population for the South West of Ireland. A small level tagging study has been carried out in Ireland, which seems to indicate that these species do not have long migrations. However, we still do not have enough evidence or information to support this assumption.

4.4. Development of a NWWRAC Proposal: way forward

Phase I (2012) – Improving the knowledge of the stocks

The Chairwoman proposed the members to endorse the measures proposed in this section of the proposal: no further comments were made and this point was considered as accepted.

Phases II and III (2013-2014) – Procedure to set TAC for 2013 and 2014

The Chairwoman read to the members the 5 harvest control rules to set TACs in different scenarios, with the aim to reach MSY levels in 2015 but including a 15% TAC constraint as safeguard.

Emiel Brouckaert requested clarification on two points:

1) What is the starting point of the TAC for calculating 15% variations and/or setting a separate TAC for each of the species concerned?
2) How will we segregate those species that are in worse state and separate from those that are in better condition?

Emiel Brouckaert affirmed that we currently have a TAC established for VIIb-k. He wonders if it would be risky to develop a plan without knowing or defining correctly the TAC area. It would be also essential to include some MSY determination or variant for different species for clarity purposes.

Action: The Irish authors of the proposal will amend this part of the plan to provide more specific proposals based on Emiel's comments and to reflect the realities of the different ray stocks at stake. This revised part will be circulated for comments and endorsement by all Focus Group members.

Phase III (2015 and beyond) – Management measures in line with MSY values

Jacques Pichon believed that setting targets based on MSY seems not feasible at this stage.

Eibhlín O´Sullivan clarified that we need first to obtain the information as stated in the plan in Phase I to be able to venture to measure MSY and it will be likely an MSY variant which will be used.

Graham Johnston stated that this is a common problem to ICES on a broad scale, and they are now looking into alternative methods to calculate MSY proxies.

No further comments were made by the Focus Group members.

5. Management measures for sharks

5.1. Overview of state of stocks – Graham Johnston (ICES WGEF)

The Chairman of the ICES Working Group on Elasmobranchs (WGEF), Graham Johnston, provided a detailed presentation on the status and biology of some sharks in the ICES area.

Mr. Johnston reminded that ICES advice for elasmobranchs is provided on a two year cycle. The last advice was issued in September 2010 (with the exception of Spurdog, which was last issued in October 2011). Next release is scheduled for October 2012, and the corresponding recommended TACs should be established for two years (2013-2014).

The presentation from Mr. Johnston is available for consultation in the NWWRAC website[7].

The key information provided for the main shark species is summarised in the table below.

SPECIES (Latin name)	GROWTH RATE (K) / UTERINE FECUNDITY (F)	AGE AT MATURITY (years)	LENGTH AT MATURITY (cm)	MAXIMUM LENGTH (L∞) (cm.) m=male f = female	CONSIDERED STATUS	ICES ADVICE 2011-2012
Lesser spotted dogfish *(Scyliorhinus canicula)*	K=0.15 (Irish Sea) F= 29-62	Unknown Celtic Seas	52 (m) 55 (f)	82.7	Stable / Increasing	Status quo catch
Greater spotted dogfish / nursehound *(Scyliorhinus stellaris)*	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	150	Locally common. Survey indices increasing in VIIa, but low catches in other areas	No advice in 2010. EU have requested advice in 2012

[7] Direct link to the presentation:
www.nwwrac.org/admin/publication/upload/Status_Biology_Sharks_ICES_Area_GJ_Feb2012.pdf

SPECIES (Latin name)	GROWTH RATE (K) / UTERINE FECUNDITY (F)	AGE AT MATURITY (years)	LENGTH AT MATURITY (cm)	MAXIMUM LENGTH (L∞) (cm.) m=male f = female	CONSIDERED STATUS	ICES ADVICE 2011-2012
Smoothhound *(Mustellus spp)*[8]	K 0.195 (m) K 0.146 (f)	13 (m) 20 (f)	~80cm	104 (m) 123.5 (f)	Increasing in most surveys	Status quo catch
Spurdog / Spiny dogfish *(Squalus acanthias)*	K= 0.17 (m) K= 0.086 (f) F= 2-21	17 (f)	80 (m) 87 (f)	81 (m) 110 (f)	Stock at very low level	No targeted fishery
Porbeagle shark *(Lamna nasus)*	K=0.07 (NW Atlantic) F= 3-6	8 (m) 13 (f)	195 (m) 245 (f)	290 (m) 348 (f)	Depleted	TAC = 0
Tope *(Galeorhinus galeus)*	K unknown F=10-41	11 (m) 16 (f)	117 (m) 123 (f)	152 (m) 163 (f)	Insufficient information assessment	No ICES advice
Blue shark *(Prionace glauca)*	K 0.175 (m) K 0.13.-0.251 (f) F= 4-75	5.5 (f)	153 (m) 180-190 (f)	295 (m) 241 (f)	ICCAT Assessment 2008 – Stock believed to be above MSY, F below Fmsy New ICCAT assessment due 2012	No ICCAT or ICES advice
Thresher shark (*Alopias vulpinus)*	F=2-6		260-330 (f)	492 (m) 636 (f)	Not a targeted species / Considered vulnerable to exploitation	No ICES advice

[8] Includes common smoothound (*mustelus mustelus*) and starry smoothhound (*mustelus asterias)*, but they are not possible to separate visually.

The Chairwoman thanked Mr. Johnston for his presentation and opened the floor for discussion.

5.2. Questions and exchange of views from the floor

**** The representatives of the fishing industry made the following remarks:***

Daniel Lefèvre asked about the reason, when there is no ICES advice, that a landings ban has been implemented by the TAC and Quotas Regulation for 2011 and 2012 for tope fishery, as this has detrimental economic impact on the French long liners operating in the Channel.

Paul Trebilcock stated that there is a fair degree of uncertainty and lack of scientific understanding of the state of the shark stocks, and asked how this could be improved.

**** Mr. Johnston addressed the questions above as follows:***

ICES have not provided advice for tope, as there is not sufficient data. The banning imposed on some fishing gears is not an ICES decision, but a management decision adopted by the EU legislators.

ICCAT, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, provides assessment and advice for certain pelagic shark stocks.

Remedial measures can be set in place for improving stock assessments for certain shark species with the collaboration of the fishing industry and Member States. However, there is reliable data for the case of the spurdog and the porbeagle. Other species like blue shark or tope are more uncertain due to the wide geographical distribution of the species. The best source of information available refers to the longline fleets;

* ***The Commission representative at the meeting, Robert Griffin,*** said that he will seek clarification on the reasons to ban landings of tope and provide the Secretariat with a response after the meeting.

5.3. Proposals from the industry – Paul Trebilcock

Paul Trebilcock stated his intention of not making a fully-fledged proposal, but instead trying to propose some general principles and objectives that can be agreed by the Focus Group.

Key objectives or principles presented:

* The current regime of zero TACs for spurdog and porbeagle is ineffective for the conservation of the stock and has imposed an unjustified burden on the industry;

* A reduction of discards of dead spurdog and porbeagle should be a priority, and studies should be dedicated to that extent;

* It is necessary to develop effective by-catch provisions aimed to reduce discards and to enable sustainable exploitation of spurdog and porbeagle in non-targeted fisheries.

The representatives of the other interest groups made the following comments:

John Woodlock reminded that there is an EU Action Plan on Sharks in force, being the main priority to protect the shark stocks.

John Crudden said that he was not ready to come back with a response to the proposed objectives within such a short timeframe, but he committed to give a reply to the Secretariat within a period of two weeks.

Action: If agreed beforehand by the members of the Focus Group, Paul Trebilcock will work on a position paper aimed to develop the principles and objectives above stated. The paper will be circulated by the Secretariat among all Focus Group members with a period for comments of 3 weeks. If consensus is achieved, this paper will be put forward for adoption by the members of the Executive Committee.

6. Summary of actions by the rapporteur and concluding remarks by the Chair

Alexandre Rodríguez summarised the four main actions agreed at the meeting and the responsible persons identified to:

1. Biology and status of common skate: Chairwoman and Secretariat to draft a special request to ICES asking it to provide individual advice on the two components of the *Dipturus batis* complex if possible. In compliance with the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between ICES and the European Commission, this special request will be submitted to and channeled by the European Commission.

2. Request of available data for skates and rays: Secretariat will request to the Commission to access to the data provided by the Member States under the Data Collection Framework, and to compile all information on rays (catches, discards, etc)

3. Management Plan on Skates and Rays for ICES subareas VI and VII: Authors of the Irish proposal (with Eibhlín O´Sullivan as coordinator), to amend and revise the phase II of the management plan incorporating changes coming from Emiel Brouckaert and Jacques Pichon.

4. Management measures for Spurdog and Porbeagle: John Crudden to provide within two weeks his response to the objectives proposed. If agreed, Paul Trebilcock to prepare a position paper based on the elements proposed with the view of putting a formal proposal forward for adoption by the Executive Committee.

The Chairwoman thanked all participants for their attendance and interventions, the interpreters' team for their excellent work, and CNPMEM for hosting this meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 17 h.

ANNEX I
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

NWWRAC MEMBERS		
NAME	**SURNAME**	**ORGANISATION**
Eibhlin	O´Sullivan	**Focus Group Chair** - Irish South and West FPO (ISWFPO)
Bertie	Armstrong	North Western Waters RAC Chairman
Iwan	Ball	World Wildlife Fund (WWF)
Emiel	Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Richard	Brouzes	OPBN
Thomas	Bryan-Brown	Manx Fish Producers' Organisation (MFPO)
Luc	Corbisier	Stichting voor Duurzame Visserij Ontwikkeling (SDVO)
John	Crudden	European Anglers' Association (EAA)
Barrie	Deas	National Federation of Fishermen's Organisation (NFFO)
Cécile	Fouquet	European Bureau for Conservation and Development (EBCD)
André	Gueguen	Comité National de Pêche Maritime (CNPMEM)
Julien	Lamothe	FROM Bretagne
Daniel	Lefèvre	CRPMEM Basse Normandie (CRPBN)
John	Lynch	Irish Fishermen's Organisation (IFO)
Eduardo	Míguez	European Association of Ports and Auctions (EAFPA)
Francis	O´Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisation (IFPO)
Sean	O´Donoghue	Kyllibegs Fishermen's Organisation (KFO)
Jacques	Pichon	Association National des Organisations de Producteurs (ANOP)
Jim	Portus	South and West Fish Producers' Organisation (SWFPO)
Paul	Trebilcock	Cornish Fish Producers Organisation (CFPO)
John	Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary (ISS)
EXPERTS / OBSERVERS		
NAME	**SURNAME**	**ORGANISATION**
Alain	Biseau	IFREMER - France
John	Daly	Irish Seal Sanctuary - Ireland
Roy	Griffin	DG MARE - European Commission
Ali	Hood	Shark Trust Alliance
Graham	Johnston	ICES WGEF / Marine Institute - Ireland
Véronique	Legrand	CRPMEM Basse Normandie - France
Eamon	Mangan	DPMEM – Ministry of Fisheries - France
Laurent	Markovic	DG MARE – European Commission
Jamie	Rendell	DEFRA – United Kingdom
NWWRAC SECRETARIAT		
Conor	Nolan	Executive Secretary
Alexandre	Rodríguez	**Rapporteur** – North Western Waters RAC Secretariat
Joanna	McGrath	Executive Assistant – Administration and Finances