



NWWRAC Data Deficiency Coordinator **Progress Report**

*** Name:**

Jim Portus

*** NWWRAC Working Group(s):**

WG3 Channel

*** Stock(s) for which I have responsibility:**

7e Sole

*** Contact within ICES:**

Sven Kupschus

*** Comments on contacts made:**

Sven and I have had working relationship for this stock since 2004. Sven has met the industry in the SW UK ports. I have attended Benchmark meetings at Copenhagen and in Bilbao, including SGMOS 10-06. I will be attending Bilbao on 1st March 2012 to assist the first 3 days of this year's WKFLAT benchmarking meetings that will study 7e Sole and also 7 Megrin & 7 Angler.

*** Comments on data deficiencies identified:**

The 2009 Benchmark assessment failed to provide clear advice to the Commission because of insufficient science. "...it was not possible to either carry out an analytical assessment or to identify biological reference points."

However, there was sufficient science in 2010 for the STECF advice in early 2011 to state: "the fishing mortality rate being at or very near the long-term target established by the plan (27%)."

Although the Commission cautioned that the recovery of this stock is "slower than predicted", it is nevertheless faster than the NWWRAC considered necessary for social and economic reasons or expedient for the long-term aim of MSY by 2015.

For 2013 and subsequent years, the Council shall decide annually by qualified majority on the basis of a proposal from the Commission on TACs for Western Channel sole at that level of catches which, according to a scientific evaluation carried out by STECF, will result in a fishing mortality rate of 0.27.

There is concern about data deficiencies and there is need to fill the gaps because, in the words of the Commission "Where there is no scientific advice, or where the data available are inadequate to calculate the situation of sole in the Western channel, there is a need to be more careful. This could be solved by foreseeing a fallback mechanism for calculating a precautionary reduction of effort and TACs when the methods mentioned in the plan (Article 3 and 5) cannot be used due to the absence of scientific assessment."



*** Comments on possible NWWRAC initiatives or initiatives by fishing industry organisations in the member states to resolve specific data deficiencies:**

As part of their determination to achieve stock recovery and long-term good management for 7e sole, the UK authorities introduced in 2008 a vessel license regime that prohibits beam trawling in more than one ICES area during the same voyage, thus bringing an end to the illegal practice of cross-booking Sole caught in one area as if it had been taken from an adjacent quota.

The 2007 7e sole LTMP introduced limits of fishing effort for beam trawlers and gill-netters. The UK industry has ensured compliance within the effort limits by diversifying to non-quota fishing, such as dredging for king & queen scallops and by migrating to other areas where they have available quota opportunities, such as in Area 7d. The knock-on impact is that Western Waters Effort for scallop dredging by UK >15m vessels has been exhausted 3 years in a row.

The UK industry has innovated with their beam trawl gear designs, firstly with Project 50% to reduce significantly the discards in the Area 7e fishery and more recently with other larger mesh side and top panels that have lightened the gear, improved fuel economy and further eliminated discards whilst also improving the selectivity for Sole.

Recent observation voyages have reported very low discards rates of Sole. Such observation voyages are conducted randomly and frequently as part of the UK authorities commitment to filling the data gap quantifying discards and by-catch levels in the different seasons.

In 2011, the UK industry welcomed an initiative to install cameras on 3 beam trawlers. These vessels qualified for 30% extra Sole catch-quotas, based on their landings in recent years.

The cameras are used to observe 24/7 that the crew are not discarding any Sole.

In 2012 this cameras trial has been extended to 6 vessels in the fleet.

The designers of beam trawls in Brixham have submitted this year bids to CEFAS and to Seafish for funding a full-scale trial of a "Roller Ball" foot-rope innovation that, it is hoped, will further improve selectivity and fuel economy while reducing benthic impact for the benefit of the marine environment.

The Commissioner announced in December 2011 that 20 stocks in EU waters are now managed at MSY. 7e Sole was amongst that number!

In December 2011, the Council of Ministers agreed 9% increase in the TAC. No changes were made to the terms of the LTMP in response to the earlier Commission non-paper on the subject. The effort limits remained unchanged.

Date: 19 February 2012

Signature: Jim Portus.