

Report on the Joint RAC Meeting on Deep Sea Species NSRAC - NWWRAC - SWWRAC Lisbon, 16-17 June 2008

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SESSION 1: BLACK SCABBARD (NWWRAC - SWWRAC)

Tom Blasdale (ICES WGDEEP Chairman) presented the 2008 advice for Black Scabbard. There are still uncertainties about the stock structure, which is distributed over a wide area and may be composed of several populations. The stock is divided in three management units: the Northern (Vb, VI, VII and XIIb), Southern (VIII, IX) and other areas (I, II, III, IV, X, Va, and XIV). The southern fisheries has been stable, the northern fisheries expanded significantly at the end of the 90s, probably due to a shift from by-catch to directed fisheries for black scabbard, but since the introduction of TACs the fisheries is more stable. CPUE data from the French reference fleet show a strong reduction over time in the northern area. The ICES advice for the Northern area is that catches should be constrained to 2000 t (50% of the level before the expansion of the fishery, 1993–1997; current TAC is 3042 t) and that the fishery should not be allowed to expand unless it can be shown that it is sustainable. The CPUE data derived from the Portuguese longlining fleet in the southern area are relatively stable, and recent levels of catches do not appear to have had a negative impact. ICES recommends that catches in these areas should be constrained to 2800 t (the average over 2003–2007).

In the following discussion several French industry representatives highlighted that the French reference fleet of Boulogne-Sur-Mer is only a very small subset of the entire French fleet (for this advice actually only two vessels), and they questioned the reliability of the CPUE data on which the ICES advice is based. They presented an additional graph, showing CPUE data of the entire fleet. Both graphs show a decrease over time in CPUE, but the decrease for the entire fleet is less steep than in the reference group, showing since 2004 a more stable and higher average CPUE of the entire fleet than of the reference fleet.

Tom Blasdale explained that the reference fleet, which is indeed only a subset of the entire fleet, is chosen for the analyses because of the longer trend of data and because the same vessels have been used over the whole period. Graphs including the entire fleet are influenced by too many variables that scientists cannot control for: changes in gear, target species, areas, etc. The general comparison of the catches between fleets shows that the fleet from Boulogne-Sur-Mer has become strategically less important than the fleet in Bretagne in relation to this fishery. Bearing this in mind, the graph of the entire fleet does not accurately reflect the stock abundance due to changes in fishing patterns. By sticking to the reference fleet, scientists seek to exclude all external influences and have a more reliable indicator for stock abundance.

The meeting agreed that the additional graph with CPUE data of the entire fleet could not be discussed at the meeting without any preparation or additional information, but should have been discussed at the ICES working group meeting.

A presentation on the Portuguese (Madeiran) black scabbard fishery showed that hand lining for black scabbard is a traditional fishery of extreme importance for Madeira in cultural terms, though less so in socio-economic terms. The fishery is very selective, targeting adult individuals of around 90 cm (just over 2 kg). The fishery is subject to monitoring and quota have been stable over recent years; the fishery is sustainable and the products of high quality. Over 50% of black scabbard landings in 2007 were not destined for consumption but for industry. Genetic studies show that there are two species of black scabbard: *A. carbo* (probably widely distributed in the North East Atlantic) and *A. intermedius* (south Madeira, Canary Islands) but little is known about the distribution and biology of the newly found species, which makes it difficult from a management point of view to incorporate this new information.

In the following discussion was noted that by-catch of deepwater sharks around Madeira and the Azores is 5%, whereas in continental Portugal it is 18%. Especially east of the British islands where mainly French and Spanish are trawling for black scabbard, the by-catch level of juveniles is high due to the high concentration of juvenile black scabbard in the area. During a discussion about the relation between the northern and southern stock component it was highlighted that it was very odd for one stock to show different trends in the different areas and to have two different management approaches (Northern and Southern) for one stock. This is the result of lack of knowledge about migration patterns, whether it is one stock or perhaps two.

SESSION 2: DEEPWATER SHARKS (NSRAC – NWWRAC - SWWRAC)

In his presentation about the ICES advice for deepwater sharks, Tom Blasdale showed that deepwater shark species are still not separated in landings data by some countries, but combined as “siki” sharks. Landings are mainly Portuguese dogfish and leafscale gulper sharks but there are also small quantities of other species. For management purposes, “siki” sharks are treated as a single stock in Northeast Atlantic. The rates of exploitation and stock sizes of deepwater sharks cannot be quantified. However, based on the CPUE information, Portuguese dogfish and leafscale gulper shark are considered to be depleted. Given their very poor state, ICES recommends a zero catch of Portuguese dogfish and leafscale gulper shark. Comparison of recent advice, agreed TACs and landings show that despite the advice of a zero catch, TACs have been set which were subsequently not fully used, which suggests that the TACs did not restrain the fishery in recent years. The zero catch is a precautionary measure to allow the stock to recover. Once that is achieved slow expansion should be possible if it can be done sustainably.

In the following discussion it was questioned whether the ban on Spanish and English gillnetting was included in the analysis. This was not the case because the advice was based on French CPUE data, but the ban might have played a role in the fact that not the whole TAC was fished.

A possible result from that ban will only show in the future since these are slow growing species. It was noted that the advice of zero catch was very restricting resulting in massive discarding, and that a by-catch TAC was needed, as well as measures to reduce by-catch. ICES is currently not aware of data that could help identifying technical measures to avoid by-catch.

A presentation by Marine Girard about the concerted program for the improvement of technical and scientific advice showed that information about species specific catches and depth can significantly improve the management of "sikis", given that there is sex segregation and maturity segregation over depth.

In the following discussion it was noted that there is a regulation requiring vessels to note the maximum and minimum depth for each sub-trip, so the data do exist. However, these data are not made available to the ICES working groups, where only aggregated data are presented. With such data about species composition and depth, the ICES deepsea working group would be able to do their work much better; currently they hardly have any data. One of the reasons why the data are not available to scientists is the lack of confidence of the fishers. This triggered more discussion which resulted in the following decision:

Marc Ghiglia will draft a letter to be sent to the Commission on behalf of the NWWRAC, SWWRAC and NSRAC, requesting to organize a meeting including all three RACs, the ICES working group, STECF and CECAF. Purpose of the meeting is to get clarity about the data available on deepwater fisheries, which information was used for assessments and management advice, and which information is needed to improve the assessments and management. The meeting should take place in time for the next round of advice (in two years).

SESSION 3: BLUE LING (NWWRAC - NSRAC)

Tom Blasdale showed that also for blue ling there is insufficient data to establish stocks. On the basis of geographical separation, three management units are considered: Northern (Subareas Va and XIV); Southern (Subareas Vb, VI, and VII); Other areas (Subareas I, II, IIIa, IVa, VIII, IX, and XII). CPUE of blue ling in the northern area has steadily declined from 1991 to 2000 and has remained at a low level since then; CPUE data for the southern area suggest that the abundance of blue ling remains at a low level and landing trends suggest serious depletion for the other areas, at least in IIa and IIb.

For all areas the advice is no directed fisheries, minimisation of by-catch and closed areas to protect spawning aggregations (maintaining current closures and expansion where appropriate).

In the following discussion several industry representatives expressed doubts about the reliability of the CPUE data as there were obtained from the reference fleet rather than the entire fleet (see also discussion black scabbard). Also some noted that the CPUE data both in the northern and southern area seemed to show a slight increase in recent years. However, Tom Blasdale stressed that this should be considered fluctuation around a low level. He noted that blue ling is different from other deep sea species since it has shorter reproductive rates more similar to gadoids, which should result in a relatively fast recovery.

The problem with blue ling is less so the vulnerability in terms of slow reproduction but rather in terms of spawning aggregations. In the ICES advice a graph shows a decline in mean length in the 1990's which might be an indication of over fishing. However, industry representatives noted that an alternative explanation is that the sex ratio in current catches are different from the sex ratio in the past, but again, the ICES working group did not have any data on sex composition of the catch.

It was also noted that CPUE data can not reflect consecutive depletion of spawning aggregations and that additional data are needed, which reconfirms the need for a meeting between scientists, fishers and managers. It was noted that the industry needed a figure for by-catch volume for blue ling, but ICES was not capable of giving that.

The Commission (represented by Rikke Nielsen, fisheries conservation and environmental questions, DGMare) gave a short presentation outlining that Commission proposals are based on three elements: scientific advice from ICES and STEFC, principles set out in the EC Policy Statement for 2009 (especially the 11 categories of fish stocks, see annex II) and on the political understanding reached at the Council meeting in November 2006 when the current deep sea TAC and Quota Regulation No 2015/2006 was adopted. The Commission confirms that deep sea stocks are included in the rules detailed in the policy statement.

Some dates:

- 4th July: STEFC advice published
- 8th July: RACs should give advice
- July or September: the Commission will organise a meeting between scientists and industry to develop measures for spawning aggregations of blue ling (invitations will be sent).
- September: Commission proposal for fishing opportunities will be issued.
- 17-18th November: Council to adopt deep sea management measures

Presentations were made of the Spanish, Scottish and French industry proposals for measures for spawning aggregations of blue ling, in reaction to last year Commission proposal for closure of a substantial area of the West of Scotland (sub area VIa)

The different proposals were discussed and a draft joint proposal was drafted. This proposal for measures to reduce blue ling by-catch includes:

- a protection zone (“bathymetric exclusion corridor”) in areas with blue ling aggregations in Vb and VIa in the period April-June, in which no fishing should occur at variable depths between 700 and 1100 metres depending on the zone;
- limits on by-catch (XX tonnes);
- at least XX% observers coverage on the vessels involved in the fishery (about 20 vessels in total)
- enhance data collection
- VMS on board all vessels and changing on timing of frequency of signal transmission

It was decided that Mike Park will submit to the RAC Secretariats a first draft joint proposal for circulation and comments amongst the members of the RACs. He will insert accordingly the agreed changes and then develop a final version to be sent to the European Commission.

The fishing industry will discuss and shape the final content of this draft joint proposal. The French fishing industry made clear that a ban of fishing between 600 and 1100 m is not compatible with their activities on other deep sea species (black scabbard fish, roundnose grenadier, saithe).

SESSION 4: GENERAL CONCLUSIONS (NSRAC - NWWRAC - SWWRAC)

Tom Blasdale gave a quick presentation on the ICES advice for roundnose grenadier, orange roughy, tusk, greater forkbeard and red seabream. There was little discussion on these species due to the current uncertainty of the available scientific data and the relatively little commercial interest as a result of the minimal TAC allocated to most part of these species.

Indeed, it was expressly agreed among all participants that no specific advice on biannual TAC and Quotas for 2009/2010 would be given from this Focus Group considering the poor knowledge on the situation of these stocks.

However, a specific commitment was reached to overcome this situation for future deepwater stocks assessments: the RAC members will send the Commission and the relevant scientific organizations a formal request to start working on the improvement of the quality of data for setting up the TAC and Quota for deep-sea species for 2011/2012 (see recommendation agreed in Session 2) This can only be achieved through an enhanced collaboration between the fishing industry and the scientific community on issues such as data collection and exchange of valuable information capable of being integrated into scientific assessment.



Finally, a representative of ArtisanalPesca presented some additional points as views from their own organization:

- The need for the Commission to finance a study on the socio-economic impacts of the measures on fishing communities, especially for deep sea longlining;
- deep sea quotas might be allocated to each fishing vessel, including for deepwater sharks, either as individual quota or through producers organizations;
- the Commission and scientific committees should promote and intensify genetic studies to differentiate between stocks;
- improve species identification at landings;
- ban gillnet fisheries from all ICES areas, including area IXb, where the fishery is currently developing.

Overview of conclusions and outcomes of the meeting:

- For various deep sea fisheries there seems to be information available that ICES had not at its disposal when drawing up the advice on TACs and quota in 2009/2010. To improve data quality for the advice for 2011/2012, the joint RACs will request the Commission to organize a meeting including all three RACs and the relevant scientific organizations.

- The RACs will try to develop a joint proposal on management measures to protect blue ling spawning aggregations. The final joint RAC proposal will be sent to the Commission after discussion and agreement.

The meeting was adjourned at 17 h.