

**Report to the NWWRAC Executive Committee of the meeting of Working Group 3 Channel ICES Areas 7d and 7e, held in Paris on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2006:**

Under the chairmanship of Daniel Le Fevre, the Working Group 3 recommends to the Executive Committee the following positions:

**Regarding ICES advice for TACs and Quotas for 2007:**

**Plaice 7d:** ICES states “No short-term forecasts can be provided. Advice less than 4 000t (*for 2007*) is the average of landings from the last three years (2003-2005)”... “Last year’s advice was no increase in effort. Given the apparent stability of the stock, this year’s advice recommends no increase in landings.”

The response of WG3 to the Executive Committee is that advice in this form is not helpful. Where there has been no recent stock assessment a TAC recommendation based on an average of catches in recent years creates winners and losers in terms of opportunities for no good scientific reason. Mathematically it is a lottery. The TAC may be higher or lower than that set in the previous year. Uptake of Relative Stability shares (national quotas) amongst Member States may not be even and subsequent quotas set in this way may exaggerate differentials. WG3 urges that, unless ICES advice can be given unequivocally then the Commission should propose a TAC that is neither reduced nor based on average catches. There are implications of potential social and economic damage to fishing communities with no obvious benefit accruing to the stock involved.

**Plaice 7e:** ICES states: “As the TAC for plaice in the Channel is set for Divisions VIIId,e combined, the results from this assessment need to be considered along with those for the much larger Division VIIId stock. Given that the Division VIIId component dominates the TAC, a catch control does not guarantee that fishing mortality in Division VIIe is constrained. Management measures should be put in place to control fishing mortality even locally in the VIIe stock area.”

The response of WG3 to the Executive Committee is that interim measures imposed for the benefit of 7e sole in 2005 and 2006 and the Long-Term Management arrangements from 2007 for that stock have been providing and will continue to provide for 7e Plaice the necessary constraints on Fishing Mortality. The combined TAC 7d,e Plaice for 2007 should be no lower than for 2006.

**Sole 7d:** ICES states: “Based on the most recent estimate of SSB (12 000 t), ICES classifies the stock as having full reproductive capacity.”... “Based on the most recent estimates of fishing mortality (0.38), ICES classifies the stock of being harvested sustainably.”... “Recent recruitment has been strong, with the 2001 and 2004 year classes being the second-highest and highest, respectively, of the time-series (1982–2005).

The response of WG3 to the Executive Committee is to support the advised TAC for 2007.

**Sole 7e:** ICES states: “Rebuilding the stock above  $B_{pa}$  in just one year would require that fishing mortality be reduced by at least 68%. This would correspond to landings of around 350 tonnes in 2007. If this reduction is not possible

then ICES recommends that a recovery plan be implemented which ensures a safe and rapid rebuilding of SSB to levels above  $B_{pa}$ .”

WG3 noted with some satisfaction that revised estimates of the Biomass for this stock appear to show it to have been 25% above  $B_{lim}$  in 2005.

The response of WG3 to the Executive Committee is that a long-term management plan for this stock is supported. Its practical application in and beyond 2007 should be based on the interim effort limitation arrangements established in the Annex to the Quota regulation for 2005 and 2006, with the caveat that métiers maintaining a lower than 5% bycatch of 7e sole should continue to be excluded. Its long-term target should be a Fishing Mortality corresponding to Maximum Sustainable Yield,  $F_{max}=0.27$ .

**Cod 7d:** ICES states: “ICES classifies the stock as being harvested unsustainably and suffering reduced reproductive capacity. SSB is well below the  $B_{lim}$  of 70 000 t. Fishing mortality has shown a decline since 2000 and is currently estimated to be around  $F_{lim}$ . The 2001–2004 year classes are all estimated to have been well below average, the 2005 year class is estimated from surveys to be more abundant but still below average.”

**Cod 7e-k:** ICES states: “The current assessment indicates that the stock was well below  $B_{lim}$  since 2004 and is still declining. Fishing mortality has been very high since the mid-1980s, although it has declined slightly in recent years while remaining above  $F_{pa}$ . Recruitment since 2001 has been well below average.”

The response of WG3 to the Executive Committee is that the fishing fleets based in ICES Areas 7d and 7e (English Channel) take Cod only as a small untargeted bycatch of other operations in a mixed demersal fishery. The link between and the contribution of the Cod in Area 7d compared with that part of the Cod stock in the greater North Sea is minimal. Any vessels, whatever gear type they use, that operate in Area 7d and continue to take less than 5% Cod in their catches should be excluded (*for example the 70mm to 89mm group of trawlers. The French are to provide evidence of by-catch directly to the Executive Committee.*) (*Some métiers are already excluded*) from the provisions of the North Sea Cod Recovery Plans/ Zones. No good for the Cod stocks will come from any requirement of such vessels to discard, dead, the small amounts of Cod involved. Insofar as Area 7e is concerned the WG3 supports the response to the Executive Committee of WG2 (Celtic Sea) in that the present measures and TAC levels for Cod7e-k should be maintained as they are until such time as a full evaluation has been conducted of the efficacy and impacts of the Trevoise Box and its associated measures.

**Regarding the 7e Sole long-term Management Plan (MAMP):**

The WG3 provides the Executive Committee with this revised Opinion for consideration and submission to the Commission:

1. The NWWRAC, in considering the need to establish a MAMP for the sustainable exploitation of the stock of sole in the Western Channel, proposes a target Fishing Mortality of  $F_{0.27}$ . This target is consistent with the achievement of high long-term yield and provides low risk of depleting the Biomass. According to the WGSSDS meetings in 2005 and 2006, a Fishing Mortality target of less than  $F_{0.31}$  implies a risk of 5% or less that reproductive capacity in the future might fall below  $B_{lim}$ .

2. The NWWRAC remains concerned that excessive caution might be unnecessarily damaging to the fleets in the western Channel where there is a mixed fishery. At very low Fishing Mortality target levels the fleets might not be operating optimally or to maximum sustainable yield. The target Fishing Mortality adopted in the MAMP should therefore be the highest possible that will achieve the objectives of the plan and provide sustainable economic, environmental and social conditions as specified in the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy.
3. The practical application of the MAMP for 7e sole in and beyond 2007 should be based on the interim arrangements established in the Annexes to the Quota Regulation for 2005 and 2006, with the caveat that métiers maintaining a lower than 5% bycatch of 7e sole should be excluded.
4. Where the MAMP requires effort reports from Member States, those reports should only be required for the effort deployed by the fleets and gears specified in the relevant Annex to the TAC and Quota Regulation.
5. By way of derogation from Article 5(2) of Commission Regulation (EEC) 2807/83... the permitted margin of tolerance when estimating quantities retained on board of 7e sole should be 10% of the logbook figure. This lower percentage should apply only to the 7e sole and not to other species taken.
6. Where weighing of landings is required by the MAMP the term “scales authorised by the Member State” should be used.
7. Where the MAMP requires the skipper of a fishing vessel to provide assistance to inspectors there should be due regard paid to the safety of the vessel and its crew.
8. The NWWRAC asks the Commission to acknowledge the contribution to date of the fishing industry in all involved Member States to secure the future sustainability of this stock. The measures already taken in 2005 and 2006 to reduce fishing effort and to remove surplus capacity from the fleets have had a significant cumulative and beneficial effect on this Sole stock and on 7e Plaice.

**Regarding the Conference on Scalloping held in London on 10<sup>th</sup> October:**

WG3 provides to the Executive Committee the following advice:

9. Requests that the NWWRAC commissions a seasonal and spatial study to ascertain in various white-fish fleets of Belgium, France, Ireland and the UK, the levels of by-catch of scallops taken.
10. Requests the NWWRAC to co-ordinate trials on scallop ring sizes and to examine the pros and cons of harmonisation across the EU.
11. Requests the NWWRAC to initiate a study of the French proposal to close seasonally Area 7d and parts of area 7e to scalloping, to determine the likely impacts, costs and benefits of such a proposal on the fleets affected and the stocks of scallops involved.
12. Requests the NWWRAC to consider the questions arising from the practice of soaking scallops prior to sale and to determine whether this is a matter for the RAC or for some other forum.

Jim Portus,  
 Rapporteur,  
 NWWRAC Working Group 3, Channel Areas 7d and 7e.