



REPORT

NWWRAC Focus Group on Cod Recovery Bord Iascaigh Mhara - Dun Laoghaire (Dublin) Tuesday 31st July 2012

**Chair: Sean O'Donoghue
Co-rapporteurs: Barrie Deas
and Alexandre Rodríguez**

1. Welcome and Opening from the Chair

The chairman of the focus group, Sean O'Donoghue, welcomed all the participants to the meeting and gave some useful information about logistics and practical aspects. A round of presentations took place. The list of attendees and the organisations they represent are included in annex 1.

1.1. Agenda and terms of reference for the meeting:

The Chairman displayed on the screen a proposal of terms of reference hoping that it reflected accurately what was agreed in the last Executive Committee meeting held in Dublin Castle the 5th of July. He also proposed that agenda items 4 and 5 would be dealt with together as they are interlinked and form the core part of the meeting. This will be the moment where substantial discussions will take place and work priorities will be identified.

Both the agenda and the terms of reference for the meeting were approved by the present members without comments.

1.2. Minutes of the last meeting:

The minutes of the last meeting of the focus group on the 22nd of March 2012, drafted by Caroline Gamblin, were approved without amendments.

1.3. Purpose / Setting the scene

The Chairman briefly described the progress made at the Focus Group meeting held in Dun Laoghaire on 22nd March 2012 and subsequently at the NWWRAC sub-regional working group meetings and the NWWRAC Executive Committee meeting on 4th and 5th July 2012.



The paper "[Rebooting fisheries management in the West of Scotland and Irish Sea Demersal Fisheries: Breaking the Cycle of Decline](#)" prepared by the Focus Group had, with very few amendments, been adopted by the Executive Committee in June. Also a paper on how to achieve fully documented fisheries was presented for discussion.

Dr Norman Graham of the Marine Institute had subsequently provided an extremely helpful critical review of the paper, focusing especially on where further development was required.

The task confronting the Focus Group and the NWWRAC now was to build on these foundations to arrive at more concrete advice for the Commission, Member States and the European Parliament.

2. Report on outcomes of the meeting between the NWWRAC and the Commission on review of fishing effort (Brussels, 13th of July 2012)

A [report](#) on a private meeting held in Brussels with a DG MARE delegation led by Ernesto Penas on the future of the effort regime was received by the Focus Group.

The NWWRAC had referred to its position paper *Breaking the Cycle of Decline* which, whilst sharing the Commission's target fishing mortality for cod in the West of Scotland and the Irish Sea, outlined an alternative to the current failed instruments of TAC reductions and effort control.

The Commission appeared to be receptive in general terms to the NWWRAC proposal which ran in the same direction as the Commission's thinking on CFP reform and the implementation of a discard ban. They acknowledged that fishing effort regime has not worked so far in the West of Scotland and the Irish Sea. The linchpin issue of TAC increases to align quotas with catches, thereby reducing regulatory discards was accepted as a feasible management option. The Commission indicated that it is prepared to go down the route of higher TACs, matching TACs to *catch* levels as part of the drive to reduce discards. The qualifying condition is that TAC increases should not lead to an overall increase in fishing mortality with reference to MSY.

The Commission was particularly interested in the NWWRAC ideas on fully documented fisheries (henceforth, FDF) and accepted that CCTV was not an appropriate form of fully documented fisheries for all fleets and métiers. The European Control Agency has been asked by the Commission to develop proposals on FDF based on reference fleets, where observers or cameras would be placed upon a small number of vessels and the catch composition used for comparative purposes. The Commission said that it was anxious to identify good alternative forms of FDF to CCTV.



Action: *The NWWRAC Secretariat will contact the European Fisheries Control Agency requesting access to the studies or proposals available on a system of fully documented fisheries based on reference fleets with observers on board as alternative to CCTV.*

In the short term, the Commission is preparing a timetable of changes to the Cod Management Plan. The Commissioner will decide which of the approaches it will support by the end of August. An important part of the decision on how to proceed will be related to whether a Council decision will be proposed or whether some fast track co-decision route will be chosen. With goodwill and support from the RACs concerned, the Commission, the Council and the EP could agree an interim regime “very quickly”, pending the development of a broader multiannual plan for mixed fisheries linked to CFP reform and emerging ICES advice on mixed fishery and multi-species management.

In reaction to the conclusions reached at the EC Seminar on review of fishing effort (Brussels, 5th of July 2012), Iwan Ball clarified the position from WWF and stated that they were not in favour of retaining the fishing effort regime as a means to reduce fishing capacity unless there was clear evidence that it was being effective for the conservation of the stocks. Iwan will ask his colleagues to find out if WWF views were accurately relayed at the above referred Seminar.

3. Report on outcomes of STECF EWG meeting (Edinburgh, 18-22 June)

A brief report was received on the [STECF scoping meeting](#) where the future of the EU Cod Management Plan was discussed. Three fishing industry representatives attended this meeting as observers on behalf of the NWWRAC.

The STECF Group went through the various articles in the Council Reg. 1342/2008 and assessed how effective they were and what they might need to change. They discussed different scenarios such as amending existing Regulation or moving to mixed fisheries plans. Also discussions on data gaps and implementation problems were held, as well as enforcement problems affecting the implementation of the plan. It was agreed as way forward to look at fully documented fisheries and reference fleets.

Concern was expressed that contrary to the views of the industry, member states and the ICES working group scientists, the report seemed to suggest that discards were a central part of the problem for cod recovery in the Irish Sea. It was agreed that it would be prudent after consulting closer with the scientists concerned, to write to the Director General of Fisheries from the Commission to ensure that this misleading and inaccurate comment does not lead to unhelpful policy developments. There is a specific section in the Irish Sea Cod, which is object of review by STECF and therefore evaluates new ICES approach to data limited stocks.



Action: The NWWRAC will write to DG Evans explaining the work done in the Irish Sea to address and tackle the lack of information in relation to recent discards data. Pieter-Jan Schon and Colm Lordan will help the NWWRAC to reflect the reality of the discards situation and state the differences between the Irish Sea and the WoS.

4. Evaluation of the NWWRAC position paper (“where are we now?”)

After reviewing the most recent ICES advice and STECF’s deliberations and report, and after further discussion, the Focus Group concluded that different approaches would be required for the Irish Sea and the West of Scotland given the different pattern of stock development and the different nature of the fisheries. Discards were the central problem in the West of Scotland, whilst the absence of a clear idea of the source of the “*unaccounted mortality*” identified by ICES was the central issue in the Irish Sea.

5. Developing an Operational Plan for mixed fisheries in West of Scotland and Irish Sea (“where do we want to go?”)

5.1. West of Scotland (ICES VIa)

5.1.1. Fully documented fisheries:

The paper *Breaking the Cycle of Decline* had outlined a general approach for the West of Scotland but greater detail was required on the concrete form which an acceptable and relevant form of fully documented fishery could take. Annex 2 provides a summary note on the Focus Group’s further thought in this area.

5.1.2. Data deficiencies:

It was highlighted the need to rebuild or reconstruct available data from tuning of commercial fleet. This is an area of shared responsibility of the fishing industry and the Member States. The reconstruction of the data must be presented to the industry by the policy managers as an incentive linked to an increase in TACs aligned to real catches (landings + discards). However, it is also important to manage expectations and make it clear that the availability of more information will not necessarily always lead to an increase in fishing quotas. It is therefore crucial to set a clear framework and set of rules agreed by all relevant parties (scientists, managers, industry and other stakeholders) before adopting any further step.



The ICES Working Group on Mixed Fisheries will be looking exclusively at the West of Scotland on a meeting to be carried out from the 27-30 August in Copenhagen. The Focus Group will follow closely the outcomes of this meeting.

5.1.3. Stock identity:

A lengthy discussion took place about a distinction between cod populations at the north and south of 59 degrees north latitude. This is a difficult issue to solve as information presented at last ICES benchmark workshop was not conclusive. There is a research study by Peter Wright about genetics of cod populations in VIa. This might have implications in identifying those areas where there is more abundance of cod and a more refined assessment might contribute to rebuild at least part of the cod stocks in VIa.

Action: *The NWWRAC will ask ICES about the feasibility of a separate assessment for north and south populations of cod in VIa, taking as reference or border line 59 degrees north.*

5.1.4. Fishing mortality:

The Group agreed that the main challenge is to control fishing mortality and bring it down to precautionary levels by establishing clear transition schemes and targets on F reduction through a combination of management measures (such as seasonal or real time closures) and increase of TACs in line with total catches (landings + discards).

Action: *The NWWRAC will apply a transitional scheme to reduce fishing mortality from the current estimated value of $F=0.8$ to achieve F_{mp} (0.4) in a period of three years. It is noted that the Regulation (EC) 1342/2008 establishes an obligation to achieve $F=0.53$ in 2013.*

Action: *The NWWRAC will request ICES to look to establish specific reference points (including F_{pa} and values of F_{msy}) for VIa. It is likely that if we ask the reference points will be changed – probably to lower levels.*

5.1.5. Fishing effort:

The Group agreed that there is no need of applying an effort control regime if some form of fully documented fisheries is achieved. The critical issue here would be transparency and accountability, so managers feel confident that system works and actual catches reported are accurate. Also the alignment of incentives to the fulfilment of management objectives might help the industry to abide by a fully documented fisheries approach. A desktop study might be useful to look at ideas in other parts of the world.



5.2. Irish Sea (ICES VIIa)

5.2.1. Data deficiencies:

It was agreed to formulate a draft request to the Commission for an audit of Irish Sea Cod to address current uncertainties. Without a clear idea of the causal factors behind the truncated age structure, it would always be difficult to frame effective remedial measures.

Fisheries science partnerships (FSP) seem the way to go to fill existing data gaps. If FSP are validated by STECF, a small sentinel fishery would be used to improve the quality of data.

The present uncertainties regarding the state of the stock makes it unrealistic to develop an operational plan before an audit is made.

5.2.2. Fishing mortality

It is necessary to adopt a holistic approach and identify all sources of fishing mortality. Questions were raised about the level of discards of cod in Nephrops fishery for TR2, which seems to be quite significant (in the region of 15-20%).

5.2.3. Effort

The Western waters regime could bring a potential risk of displacement from other areas to the Irish Sea. Other regulations such as the management of deepsea species might create unexpected effects. All these potential disruptive factors must be considered when looking at the Irish Sea fisheries.

5.2.4. Definition of metiers / fishing areas

Some work has been done at national level (e.g. Ireland) to identify fleets and metiers in the area. There is also a European descriptor of different metiers but not analytical investigation has gone through yet. Once there is a list of metiers and fishing areas we will need to identify the fisheries.



6. Summary of action points and conclusions

- Action point 1: The NWWRAC Secretariat will contact the European Fisheries Control Agency requesting access to the studies or proposals available on a system of fully documented fisheries based on reference fleets with observers on board as alternative to CCTV.
- Action point 2: The NWWRAC will write to DG Evans explaining the work done in the Irish Sea to address and tackle the lack of information in relation to recent discards data. Pieter-Jan Schon and Colm Lordan will help the NWWRAC to reflect the reality of the discards situation and state the differences between the Irish Sea and the West of Scotland.
- Action point 3: The NWWRAC will ask ICES about the feasibility of a separate assessment for north and south populations of cod in VIa, taking as reference or border line 59 degrees north.
- Action point 4: The NWWRAC will apply a transitional scheme to reduce fishing mortality from the current estimated value of $F=0.8$ to achieve F_{mp} (0.4) in a period of three years. It is noted that the Regulation (EC) 1342/2008 establishes an obligation to achieve $F=0.53$ in 2013.
- Action point 5: The NWWRAC will request ICES to look to establish specific reference points (including F_{pa} and values of F_{msy}) for VIa. It is likely that if we ask the reference points will be changed – probably to lower levels.
- Action point 6: The Chair and the rapporteurs will draft a discussion paper containing the elements of a fully documented fishery for WoS/IS demersal fisheries.
- Action point 7: The Chair will draft a position paper on developing a mixed fisheries plan for West of Scotland and Irish Sea demersal fisheries, with the view of having it discussed and adopted in time for the presentation of the NWWRAC views before the European Parliament Fisheries Committee hearing on the 19th of September.
- Action point 8: Daniel McDonald (BIM) and Alan McCulla will provide a list of existing gear selectivity options in Ireland and Northern Ireland to avoid cod catches.

A more detailed list of the agreed actions is available under Annex 3.



7. AOB

There were no information points raised by the participants.

8. Closing

The chairman closed the meeting and thanked the attendees for their input and the NWWRAC Secretariat and BIM for hosting the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 4pm on schedule



Annex 1.

List of participants NWWRAC Focus Group on West of Scotland and Irish Sea fisheries BIM Dublin, 31st of July 2012

Chairman

Sean O'Donoghue

Rapporteurs

Barrie Deas

Alexandre Rodríguez

Focus Group Members present

Sean O'Donoghue

Iwan Ball	Alan McCulla
Luc Corbisier	Eibhlin O'Sullivan
John Crudden	Mike Park
Barrie Deas	Jane Sandell
Frank Evrat	John Woodlock

Observers

Michael Keatinge (BIM-STEFC)
Colm Lordan (Marine Institute)
Daniel McDonald (BIM)
Alexandre Rodríguez (RAC Secretariat)
Pieter-Jan Schon (AFBINI)

Apologies

Emiel Brouckaert
Hugo González



Annex 2

Elements of a Fully Documented Fishery for the West of Scotland Demersal Fisheries

1. Background

Whilst trials of a CCTV camera based system have demonstrated its utility for the North Sea cod fishery, it is recognised that this approach is not appropriate for all fleets and all fisheries on the basis of cost and practicality. It remains the case however, that a form of *fully documented fishery* which records both landings *and discards* is likely to be a prerequisite for a TAC based on catches rather than landings.

Against this background, the NWWRAC considers that urgent development work is required in defining the elements of a form of fully documented fishery appropriate for the West of Scotland demersal fisheries, taking into account the specific *metiers* in the fishery. We understand that the Commission has requested the European Fisheries Control Agency to investigate the enforcement and monitoring aspects of a system of *reference fleets*, through which:

- Observers or CCTV cameras would be placed aboard a small percentage of the vessels in a given *metier*. This would be the reference fleet.
- The *catch composition* recorded by all vessels in that metier would be compared to the *catch composition* of the designated reference fleet.
- Vessels whose recorded catch composition displayed anomalies beyond a defined range would become candidates for enhanced monitoring using CCTV cameras or observers or other monitoring technology

The NWWRAC considers this development work of the first importance.

2. Use of new Technologies

If the TAC for cod is to be raised closer to the level of current *catches* whilst securing a target reduction in fishing mortality, it is clearly vital that all parties, (fisheries managers, fisheries scientist, participants in the fishery and the wider stakeholder community) have full confidence that the catches recorded under a reference fleet system are demonstrably full and complete; and that minimum observer coverage is guaranteed for each fleet.



The NWWWRAC considers that important recent developments in technology and their incorporation into the catch monitoring system will provide the *monitoring platform* that would underpin a system of fully documented fisheries based on reference fleets.

Specifically these developments are:

- VMS satellite vessel position recording, which under article 9 of the Council Regulation (EC) 1224/2009 is mandatory for Community vessels down to 12m length overall as from 1st January 2012.
- Electronic logbooks, mandatory for Community fishing vessels exceeding 15m length, as from 1 July 2011, under the provisions of Commission Regulation (EC) 1077/2008.
- CCTV Cameras or observers' programmes trialled in the Catch Quota pilots in Denmark, Scotland, England and the Netherlands.

Combined, these new technologies open the possibility of something close to a system of *real time catch monitoring*. This would provide a reasonable confidence, within a *risk-based and proportionate enforcement system*, that discards as well as landings are recorded.

3. Metiers

The new technologies offer the prospect of monitoring catches of a coherent group of vessels on the basis of a spatially and gear category, and flagging up catch composition anomalies that could signal unrecorded discards.

- Whitefish
- Nephrops
- Saithe
- Hake
- Anglerfish **North and South of 59°N**

4. Cease Fishing when Cod Quota is Exhausted

An obligation to cease fishing for all species when a vessel's (or group's) (enhanced) allocation of cod is exhausted would provide an incentive and impetus for effective, bottom up cod avoidance and is the key to reducing fishing mortality in this fishery. This will only be feasible if the TAC for cod is set at a level that allows for cod avoidance strategies to work, bearing in mind that the purpose of cod avoidance is not to avoid catching all cod but to ensure that all cod caught by individual vessels is recorded and within the allocated quota.



5. Quid Pro Quo

In accepting the additional burden implied by the approach outlined here the participants would take into account that the quid pro quo would be TAC increase close to the current level of catches and exemption from the effort control regime.

6. Discard Ban

Given the scale of discards of cod in the West of Scotland fisheries (accepting that some fleets discards much more than others) the approach outlined above if adopted would contribute towards meeting the anticipated obligation to land all quantities of defined species within a defined timeframe.

-END-



Annex 3. **List of agreed actions**

1. Discards data

STECF Plenary Meeting report adopted in July – page 30

“STECF EWG 12- 06 notes that the lack of discard data for cod from the fisheries in VIIa prevents reliable conclusions to be made regarding fleet specific partial fishing mortalities and this should be taken into consideration when taking decisions on management”

In reaction to the above wording, the NWWRAC will write to Director General Evans to reflect the reality of the discards data situation in the Irish Sea outlining the substantial work done to overcome the lack of information in relation to discards.

Pieter-Jan Schon and Colm Lordan will help out to write this letter and clarify this point. It will also make it clear the significant differences between the Irish Sea and the West of Scotland. The letter will be available for circulation before the end of the week.

2. Data deficiencies

2.1. Colm Lordan to formulate questions to be submitted to ICES (via the Commission) requesting a differentiated analysis of the north and south populations of cod (above and below 59 degrees latitude), given that they are considered to be genetically different sub-species.

2.2. Norman Graham and Colm Lordan liaise with Scottish colleagues and make a proposal on the tuning of commercial fleet in Area VIa as part of the required data to rebuild the assessment of the stock.

2.3. Colm Lordan and P-J Schon to provide the wording for a NWWRAC request addressed to ICES to set specific reference points for VIa Cod so it can be disaggregated from the North Sea current values (FMp = 0.4).

3. Fully documented fisheries (FDF)

3.1. NWWRAC Secretariat to contact EFCA and ask for information about studies to develop proposals to achieve FDF based on reference fleets as alternative to CCTV.

3.2. P-J Schon to provide references for ICES Groups working on useful data on fishing areas and métiers for the West of Scotland.



3.3. Secretariat to follow up work from the ICES Mixed Fisheries Group as they will be looking at the WoS on its next meeting (27-30 August 2012) and they should have all necessary data together – Action: Ask to– References for NWWR

3.4. Norman Graham and P-J Schon to submit available information from ICES advice in relation to closures in the West of Scotland; and the statistical rectangles where there are juvenile closures similar to the Greencastle one.

3.5. NWWRAC to request a review on the effectiveness of the closure at Windssock.

3.6. Daniel McDonald to act as coordinator and compile all available information on gear selectivity trials / surveys from Ireland and Scotland for the West Scotland; and to identify those existing cod avoidance initiatives in Irish Sea both for Irish and Northern Irish fleets;

3.7. Barrie Deas and Alan McCulla (with the support of Pieter-Jan Schon) will work on producing a structured request asking to ICES/STECF to investigate the reasons of cod mortality for the Irish Sea in future meetings.

3.8. Alan McCulla to find a wording to ask ICES about the utility of the closure in the Irish Sea.

4. Way forward: NWWRAC Advice on How to Make Operational a New Approach to Cod management

4.1. Barrie Deas will identify all documentation available and put together a proposal based on the discussions held at the meeting, including an operational TAC for the WoS (1900t?).

4.2. A draft will be circulated to all WG members for comments within the first week of September, with the view of being adopted by the Ex.Com. in time for the EP Fisheries Committee meeting, scheduled for the 19th of September.

4.3. Sean will act as NWWRAC representative at this meeting and will present the NWWRAC position regarding short term arrangements to review the Reg. 1342/2008 as well as a long term strategy for cod in the WoS and IS.

-END-