

North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council

REPORT

Working Group 4 – Irish Sea - ICES Area VIIa Paris, 28th February 2012

Chairman: Alan McCulla
Rapporteur: John Crudden

1. Welcome

The Chairman, Alan McCulla, opened the meeting at 16:30 h and welcomed everyone. He made the comment that the meeting of Working Group 4 was once again squeezed for time because the previous Working Group overran its allotted time. After a short debate the meeting decided on the following.

Action: To ask the Executive Committee to rotate the meetings of the working groups so that Working Group 4 does not always come last in the meetings schedule.

- Apologies: No apologies were received for non-attendance at the meeting.
- Introduction: The chairman welcomed Francis O'Donnell from the Irish Fish Producers Organisation to the meeting. Francis is replacing Lorcan O'Cinnéide at the NWWRAC.

The list of participants to the meeting is shown in Annex I.

- Adoption of the agenda: The agenda as circulated was adopted with one change. Item 7 Update on the Irish Sea Marine Conservation Zone was deleted having been dealt with at an earlier WG meeting.
- Adoption of the report from the last meeting: The report from the last meeting held in Dublin Castle on 28th October 2011 was adopted without comment.

2. Towards an ecosystem based management for the Irish Sea

2.1 Analysis of Fishing Opportunities for 2012

The Chairman, Alan McCulla, summarised the outcome of the December 2011 Council meeting for Fishing Opportunities for 2012.

- A roll-over of the Nephrops TAC was achieved;
- An increased in the Herring TAC in the Irish Sea was achieved;
- The UK's interpretation of Article 13 effort buy-back of the Cod MP was accepted.

2.2 Development of a mixed fisheries strategic plan

Sean O'Donoghue opened the discussion by saying that we need to get a definitive view from the Commission on what sort of plan it wanted for the Irish Sea before we do any work in this regard. A mixed fisheries plan could work but not for a multi-species approach, for example cod and herring.

Barrie Deas expressed the view that we don't have any option but to work on a plan in this area. We have two inter related issues to address, fixing the assessment and fixing the management issues.

It was suggested that a Focus Group be established to discuss management options. The Secretariat informed the meeting that a window of opportunity existed to hold a meeting of the focus group in Dublin Castle on July.

2.3 Collaboration between science and industry

The Chairman highlighted the importance of collaboration between science and the industry in formulating management plans. He informed the meeting that the organisation he represents, ANIFPO, is currently participating in two fisheries science partnerships in Northern Ireland with AFBI and it also has commissioned to a marine consultant two studies, namely:

- Development of a LTMP for Irish Sea Nephrops on an Ecosystem Based Approach; and
- Economic Impact Assessment for Northern Irish fleets on potential designation of MPA sites in the Irish Sea as proposed by JNCC.

These papers could be used in the development of a management plan.

Comments from the floor

It was agreed that a focus group was the best option to discuss management options. The following Terms of Reference were agreed:

- Concentrate on three key species of commercial value at first;
- Utilise the template developed for the Celtic Sea;
- Set out biological, economic and social objectives;
- Compile all available documents (STECF, WKROUND, ANIFPO, Celtic Sea FG);
- Draft a discussion paper for the Focus Group meeting.

Action: Ask the Executive Committee to convene a Focus Group to make proposals on the management of Irish Sea stocks.

3. Review of the Cod Recovery Plan for the Irish Sea

3.1 Outcomes of STECF Scoping Meeting (Edinburgh, November 2011)

Sean O'Donoghue briefed the working group on the meeting. His report can be summarised as follows.

- There is no mixed fisheries model for the Irish Sea;
- Fishing mortality issues – STECF are optimistic about reaching a solution;
- Discard proposals are unenforceable from a control point of view;
- The benchmark process could draw different conclusions;
- Social issues - don't know how to proceed except for meetings with stakeholders;
- Economic issues - looking at it from a disproportionate cost point of view;
- Number of scenarios that they want to utilise for the cod plan from basic to complex.

Comments from the floor

The Commission's representative advised that any proposal coming forward from the NWWRAC in relation to the Irish Sea impacted upon by the advice expected from STECF by November on the approach to mixed fishery management in the Irish Sea.

Sean O'Donoghue expressed confidence that ICES will address some issues that STECF raised in the Benchmarking process.

The Chairman made the point that Cod recovery rules the agenda against all other species which is depressing but he was encouraged to hear that the science seems to be catching up with the anecdotal evidence of better incoming year-classes now appearing in the fishery.

Johnny Woodlock referred to a series of informal meetings held with ICES at the Marine Institute last year at which it was said that they would recommend “in-year” increases in the TAC in Area VIIa if the science supported the anecdotal evidence.

The Commission cautioned against any widespread use of “in-year” revision as a management option and that for an in year revision to be progressed there must be a definite need identified.

The Chairman said that the good recent recruitments emphasize the need to protect the stock. The industry is doing everything it can to avoid catching cod (e.g. spatial measures, selectivity measures...) but how can it prove the positive. The Irish and Northern Irish FSP have been set to close the gap between scientific assessments and fishermen’s perceptions on the ground.

Barrie Deas stated that science and industry have to get a grip on the assessments. One view could be to assess the spatial distribution of cod on a vertical basis in the water column.

Joel Vigneau, Chair of ICES WGCSE, stated that total mortality of Irish Sea cod is estimated to be three times the fishing mortality, but the causes for that are hard to explain (predation by seals could be one of them worthy to look at). Mr. Vigneau added that ICES is not considering to link the effectiveness of the management measures with the recovery of the stocks, as this is only part of the picture. In summary, there is still a situation of high total mortality and low biomass.

Johnny Woodlock said that ICES has been consistent in recommending a zero TAC for cod in the Irish Sea for many years.

4. Management measures for Nephrops in sub-area VIIa

Eibhlin O’Sullivan gave an update as the Nephrops Data Coordinator for the Irish Sea. She has had one meeting with the Marine Institute and went through the areas where there are gaps in the data. She is hopeful that these gaps will be sorted within the next 6 weeks.

The Chairman said that the Commission is considering the possibility of managing Nephrops (i.e. setting TACs) by Functional Units (FU) in line with the biological assessments. From the industry perspective there is no problem with scientific advice being given on this basis but they have a difficulty with management by FU.

The Commission stated that the two are inter-linked but that management by functional unit had been discussed before and concerns such as effective enforcement have been raised. He also said that the Commission was well aware of NWWRAC views on that and that they would have in mind the stakeholders’ views when drafting any future proposal.

Sean O'Donoghue raised an important point. Nephrops is being dealt with in two NWWRAC sub-regional Working Groups as it covers all ICES Area VII. In order to avoid duplicating and fragmenting the discussions he proposed that the RAC should focus on it as a horizontal issue in just one Working Group. The meeting agreed.

Action: Ask the Executive Committee to decide the sub-regional (i.e. geographic) Working Group where all aspects of Nephrops management in Area VII will be discussed in the NWWRAC.

5. Data deficiency issues for stocks assessments

Barrie Deas gave a brief report on work progress on behalf of the remaining data coordinators appointed for the Irish Sea.

Good progress has been made but reports are still awaited for some stocks such as whiting. Further work needs to be done on haddock but cod is well progressed. Another coordinator is needed for plaice VIIa.

The Chairman praised the amount of work done by the Northern Ireland fleet under the Data Enhancement Programme. Good data on the level of discarding is now available.

Comments from the floor

John Daly questioned the level of involvement of Belgian, Dutch and French fleets in the Irish Sea. The Chairman and Emiel Brouckaert made the point that these fleets have historical fishing rights for sole and plaice. Substantial work has been made in terms of data for the beam trawl fishery and discarding levels have proven to be very low particularly by the Belgian fleet.

A discussion took place on the reasons why Plaice in Area VIIa was considered a data poor stock by the December 2011 meeting even though it is supposed to be at MSY levels. The CPUE for the past 8 years is very stable but the TAC comes down year-on-year.

Joel Vigneau reminded that ICES advice is that no analytical assessment has been undertaken due to poor performance. No assessment of discarding has been done but data is building up. Fishing mortality is below what could be the candidate Fmsy and the SSB is above Bmsy.

Action: Ask the Commission to provide a definition of what it is the definition of a "Data-poor Stock".

6. Technical Measures in Western Waters: Irish Sea

6.1 Outcomes of November meeting between NWWRAC – DG MARE – STECF

The Chairman Alan McCulla attended the meeting. It was the perception of everyone involved that the Swedish Grid would be implemented fleet wide from 1st January 2012. This measure taken in conjunction with Article 15 of the Cod Recovery Plan led the UK administration to take unilateral action and introduce additional technical measures for the TR2 fleet. By deciding to do further gear trials in the TR2 fishery this would examine the available technical options to exempt this fleet from the days at sea regime.

6.2 Discussions from the floor on Commission’s emergency measures – Swedish Grid

Johnny Woodlock asked about the survival rates of escapees from the grid and whether this was the answer to all problems in the Irish Sea. The Chairman replied that it certainly was a useful tool to have in the box to allow exemptions to the effort regime but there were doubts that it was the answer to all problems.

Tom Bryan-Brown asked about some reports in the media on the use of the grid by Irish fleets which caused a mix up with some of the fleets. He also highlighted some issues in relation to the grid and its impact in nephrops catches.

John Daly said that the grid does allow big fish to escape from the top of the net but not small fish. Johnny Woodlock stated that there were mortality issues resulting from juveniles impacting with the 35mm bars in the grid. He suggested instead the closure of the fishery or the introduction of a discard ban.

Sean O’Donoghue said that gear technologists from BIM had carried out extensive sea trials on the grid and found that it works very well particularly for cod and haddock. There may be some post escapee mortality and other operational issues that need to be sorted out.

Alan Coghill stated that the experience from Scotland was that the Swedish Grid did not work for their fleet and instead they use a variation called “Scottish Grid”.

Action: The Secretariat to collect reports from BIM on gear trials using the Swedish Grid and circulate to the RAC members.

Action: Ask the Commission to give a definition on what is the definition of “discard”.

Close of the meeting

With no other business to discuss the Chairman thanked everyone for their participation and closed the meeting at 18:00h.



ANNEX I. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

MEMBERS		
<u>Name</u>	<u>Surname/s</u>	<u>Organization</u>
Alan	McCulla	ANIFPO – WG4 Chairman
Thomas	Bryan-Brown	Manx Fish Producers’ Organisation – WG4 Vice Chairman
John	Crudden	EAA – WG4 Rapporteur
Bertie	Armstrong	Scottish Fishermen’s Federation
Iwan	Ball	World Wildlife Fund
Luc	Corbisier	Stichting voor Duurzame Visserij
Barrie	Deas	NFFO UK
John	Lynch	Irish Fishermen’s Organisation
Francis	O’Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisation
Sean	O’Donoghue	Killybegs Fishermen’s Organisation
John	Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary



OBSERVERS		
<u>Name</u>	<u>Surname/s</u>	<u>Organization</u>
Emiel	Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Alan	Coghill	Scottish Fishermen's Federation
John	Daly	Irish Seal Sanctuary
Roy	Griffin	European Commission
Laurent	Markovic	European Commission
Luke	Jessop	DEFRA – UK Government
Eibhlín	O'Sullivan	Irish South & West FPO
Joel	Vigneau	ICES / IFREMER

NWWRAC SECRETARIAT		
Conor	Nolan	Executive Secretary
Joanna	McGrath	Executive Assistant, Administration and Finances
Alexandre	Rodríguez	Executive Assistant, Policy Coordinator