



North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council

REPORT

Working Group 4 – Irish Sea - ICES Area VIIa Paris, 30th January 2013

Chairman: Alan McCulla
Rapporteur: John Crudden

1. Welcome

The Chairman, Alan McCulla, opened the meeting at 11:35h and welcomed everyone. He made the comment that the meeting of Working Group 4 was starting late because the previous Working Group meeting overran its allotted time.

- Apologies: Apologies were received for non-attendance at the meeting from the Executive Secretary, Conor Nolan and Pieter-Jan Schon (AFBI). The Chairman reminded the Secretariat to get invitations to RAC meetings out to the scientists as early as possible.
- Introduction: The chairman welcomed the representatives of the European Commission at the meeting, Robert Griffin, Edgar Goldmanis and Rodrigo Ataide, the representative of Northern Ireland Administration (DARDNI), Ian Humes, and the presenter invited from ILVO, Hilde Vanhaecke.

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

- Adoption of the agenda: The agenda as circulated was adopted with one additional information item by the Chairman in AOB.
- Adoption of the report from the last meeting: The report from the last meeting held in Dublin Castle on 4th July 2012 was adopted without comment.

2. Towards a mixed fishery management plan for the Irish Sea

2.1 Fishing Opportunities for 2013

The Chairman, Alan McCulla, summarised the outcome of the December 2012 Council meeting on Fishing Opportunities for 2013 in the Irish Sea.

- Member States agreed to a freeze in effort reductions which is effectively an increase in fishing opportunities for the Irish Sea.
- Member States agreed to a freeze in cuts in quotas especially for cod and sole.

He said that there had been significant improvement in the collection of data in the Irish Sea in the past year which was done at the behest of this RAC. Progress is being made on gear selectivity but this is not being reflected in an increase in TACs. The process of designating MPAs in Nephrops fisheries is progressing. A common sense approach to consultation and data gathering is proving worthwhile.

- *Exchange of views from the floor*

Barrie Deas questioned the retention of the 25% automatic reductions for cod in the Irish Sea and West of Scotland. The Commission representative, Robert Griffin, said that the ICES advice was that the stock had not responded sufficiently to allow a reduction and this was accepted by the Council in the December negotiations. He noted that the position adopted by the Council in December provided a 25% reduction in the Cod TAC in the Irish Sea; this was in line with its treatment as a data poor stock, rather than following the Article 9 approach which would have provided a 20% reduction. Sean O'Donoghue said that this contradicts the impression given by the Commission at the meeting of 13th July last.

2.2 Irish Sea Sole Stock – Presentation

Hilde Vanhaecke from the Belgian Agriculture and Fisheries Institute (ILVO) delivered a presentation on Sole in the Irish Sea and whether it was just a problem for the Belgian fleet alone. She acts as the coordinator between the scientists in ILVO and the policy makers in the Government in the Flemish region. The presentation set out in detail the current state of the stock and the ICES advice for 2013 and 2014. The scientific advice (biomass below Blim and BMSY trigger since 2005) is in conflict with the perception of fishermen, as there seems to be an increased catchability and LPUE. The survey abundance index is lower than all three commercial indices since 2005.



The presentation went on to detail the importance of Irish Sea Sole to the Belgian fleet. It consists of ca. 80 vessels, 80% beam trawlers, of which, in 2012, 19 beam trawlers were fishing in VIIa, targeting mainly sole. In 2011, 7.5% of the total landings which represented 7% of the total value of the fleet was realised in the Irish Sea. It is not economical for them to fish in the Irish Sea without catching sole. The Belgian quota for 2013 has been reduced by 73% to 36 tonnes. Only 12 vessels are allowed to fish the quota between February and the end of August with the obligation to carry observers on board.

The presentation posed a number of questions.

- Were survey results from the Eastern Irish Sea used solely to calculate the abundance index while the Belgian commercial index used data mainly from the western area.
- Would separate indices for both the east and west areas (or even by ICES Grid) give a better indication of the state of the stock.
- Has fishing opportunities been influenced by new designated areas for wind farm installations.

ILVO in partnership with Rederscentrale made the following proposal.

Action: Ask the Executive Committee to include an audit of the sole stock in the development of a mixed fisheries management plan for the Irish Sea. Integrate the three principal areas of concern, Cod, Nephrops and Sole using science/industry partnerships in the development of the management plan through an integrated ecosystem approach between the three main economic stocks: IS sole (Belgian data), Nephrops (Irish data) and Cod (UK data).

The initiative was generally welcomed as very timely and the action proposed was accepted. The initiative was highlighted as a good example of how industry and science could collaborate to improve data and knowledge of stocks.

2.3. Technical measures for Nephrops fleet

Following a request made by Tom Bryan-Brown, Alan McCulla provided an update on the collaborative approach between science and industry in Northern Ireland in relation to the effectiveness and implementation of selectivity devices to reduce whitefish by-catch in the Nephrops fishery. Seven devices (including Swedish Grid and Irish inclined separator panel) have been approved at national level in order to benefit from the exemption from the application Cod Plan.

Ian Humes, Northern Ireland Administration, stated that the focus was about managing effort. The amount of days-at-sea depended on the use of particular types of gears. It was a process of continuous improvement; if new ideas come forward for other selective gears they would be tested.

2.4 Outcomes from the last Irish Sea Fisheries Focus Group (September 2012) and
2.5. Revised discussion document from ANIFPO

The Chairman advised the meeting that little progress had been made to revise the ANIFPO discussion document on a mixed fishery multi annual management plan for the Irish Sea. Discussions had taken place with scientists but more thought needs to be put into the ultimate objectives and how to achieve them. The Irish Sea is a relatively small area with a restricted number of métiers used and only a few Member States involved so it should be relatively easy to discuss a common approach with the view of reaching an agreement. However, there is a fear that the Irish Sea could be left behind in the EU list of priorities.

Action: Ask the Executive Committee of the NWWRAC to write to the Commission and the Member States involved to initiative a Mixed Fisheries Management Plan for the Irish Sea using the Ecosystem Based Approach.

- *Comments from the floor*

Barrie Deas expressed the view that the proposal was consistent with the regionalization agenda. We can only make progress by moving in a stepwise fashion from a single species to a mixed fisheries / multi species assessment. The Cod and Sole audit is a necessary place to start.

Alan McCulla said that the Commission's view of a cod audit may not be the same as the view of this RAC. We need to have clarification on that.

Sean O'Donoghue said that we need to be careful in what we are looking for, as there is not still a clear definition of "*Ecosystem Based Approach*".

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

3.1 Amendments to the Cod Plan - EC Reg. 1342/2008

This subject was opened by a series of questions to the Commission representatives. Sean O'Donoghue asked if the new Commission's proposal on Cod will be in line with the decision of the December Council meeting and when can we expect it. The Commission response was that the proposal of Regulation had been tabled in September and was currently under discussion by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. For the Commission to amend the proposal following the decision during the December Council would require the retraction of the current proposal and re-initiation of the process.



Sean O'Donoghue replicated that what happened at the December Council meeting will have a big bearing on what the European Parliament decides. We should not anticipate any changes.

The Commission stated that EC Reg. 1342/2008 remains in force and applicable, and until challenged by the Commission or Parliament remains as amended by EC Reg. 1243/2012, so therefore there is no legal vacuum.

Alan McCulla said that in three week's time the PECH Committee will have the first reading of the opinion of the European Parliament which should propose some improvement to the functioning of the cod management plan. The big stumbling block could be the opinion of the Council when it arrives.

3.2. EC Reply to request for an audit of Irish Sea Cod and
3.3. Development of a NWWRAC position

The Commission has requested to ICES under the MoU to carry out an audit of Irish Sea Cod fisheries. Barrie Deas said that the NSRAC and the NWWRAC have been working on the Cod Plan for the past five years. Regular opinions and advice have been worked through and are reflected in the Commission proposal. Some good news have arrived in the December Council meeting with the changes adopted in relation to articles 9 (removal of automatic 25% reduction in TACs) and 12 (freeze of effort).

It was highlighted that the audit needs to be differentiated from the benchmarking and that additional work is required, which will improve the current state of knowledge of the stock, for example identifying the apparent productivity change in the early 1990's.

Action: Ask the Executive Committee of the NWWRAC to write to the Commission to re-emphasize the progress that has been made in relation to work done by the NWWRAC on cod recovery. Submit a joint letter in relation to NSRAC and NWWRAC proposals highlighting the special needs of the Irish Sea and requesting that a full audit of the cod stocks take place. Highlight the opinion of the NWWRAC on the difference between an audit and the benchmarking process.

4. Data deficiencies for stocks assessments

Barrie Deas gave a brief report on the latest MIRAC meeting. ICES is currently looking at a number of substantial reviews such as frequency of stock assessments or an stepwise approach from the current system of single-species assessment to a multispecies/mixed fisheries advice. A very informative report of the scientific needs and expectations in relation to collaborative work with the fishing industry and stakeholders to improve knowledge on data limited stocks has been produced by Joel Vigneau (WKDDRAC Co-Chair). A new Data Framework Regulation in preparation which we will need to be involved with. A data compilation workshop will be organized in October 2013.

Action: The NWWRAC should prepare a list of priority stocks that we need to add to with the assistance of scientific input.

Communication between ICES, Commission, and the RACs needs to be further strengthened. In relation to this, Michael Keatinge suggested that the NWWRAC might assist to develop a project to improve the knowledge of Irish Sea Cod stocks by way of an industry/science partnership. The project could attract funding under the upcoming EMFF.

5. Public consultation on 6 Marine SACs in Irish waters

The Secretariat (Alex Rodríguez) brought it to the notice of the meeting that the Irish Government has launched in January 2013 a public consultation on a proposal to designate six SAC's in Irish waters, not only the Irish Sea but different areas of the Irish EEZ (i.e. Porcupine Canyon, Hatton Bank...). The consultation documents have been put on the NWWRAC website. The closing date for contributions is 15th March 2013.

6. AOB

Alan McCulla informed the meeting that ANIFPO has made a proposal to the Northern Ireland Administration calling for reflection and an assessment of the use of more than three (multi) rig at the one time.

7. Close of the meeting

With no other business to discuss the Chairman thanked everyone for their participation.

The meeting was adjourned at 13:15h.



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 FPO – WG4 Vice Chairman
John	Crudden	EAA – WG4 Rapporteur
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
Caitlín	Uí Aodha	Irish South & East FPO
John	Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary

OBSERVERS		
<u>Name</u>	<u>Surname/s</u>	<u>Organization</u>
Rodrigo	Ataide Días	DG MARE - European Commission
Alain	Biseau	IFREMER
Emiel	Brouckaert	Rederscentrale

OBSERVERS		
<u>Name</u>	<u>Surname/s</u>	<u>Organization</u>
Stephen	Cederrand	European Fisheries Control Agency
Debbie	Crockard	Seas at Risk
John	Daly	Irish Seal Sanctuary
Marc	Ghiglia	NWWRAC President
Edgars	Goldmanis	DG MARE – European Commission
Roy	Griffin	DG MARE - European Commission
Ian	Humes	DARD Northern Ireland
Michael	Keatinge	Bord Iascaigh Mhara – RAC Director
Daniel	Lefèvre	CRMEM – Basse Normandie
Jesús	Lourido	Puerto de Celeiro S.A.
Rémi	Méjécaze	DPMEM - France
Eibhlín	O’Sullivan	Irish South & West FPO
Mercedes	Rodriguez Moreda	OPP-07-LUGO
Jane	Sandell	Scottish Fishermen’s Organisation
Declan	Tobin	Joint Nature Conservation Committee
Paul	Trebilcock	Cornish FPO
Hilde	Vanhaecke	ILVO Belgium - Presenter



NWWWRAC SECRETARIAT		
Joanna	McGrath	Executive Assistant, Administration and Finances
Alexandre	Rodríguez	Executive Assistant, Fisheries Policy and Communication