

DRAFT MINUTES
Meeting of NWWRAC Working group 2
Thon Hotel City Centre - Brussels
October 31, 2007
9:30 am - 1:15 pm

1. Welcome

The meeting started welcoming the participants. The Chairman reported on the absence of Jacques Pichon and André Gueguen at the meeting, as they had to attend a meeting, together with other French representatives and the French Minister of Fisheries, and he conveyed apologies in their name. Jim Portus intervened in the name of Paul Trebilcock to apologise for his absence.

- **Adoption of agenda**

The Chairman proposed that the following items should be included in the agenda under the "Any other business" section:

- Debate of proposals and the issue of a response to the Secretary on the request form for the creation of NWWRAC Focus Groups.
- Mention of the NEAFC annual meeting and initial programme of its contents.
- Update on the matters relating to gillnets (at the request of Stéphanie Tachaires of the CNPMEM)

Barrie Deas expressed surprise at the fact that the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) was not listed as a point in the agenda, and suggested that in future it should be included on a regular basis in order to report on the status of the projects related to it (specifying whether there has been any progress) Barrie justified his request by arguing that it is one of the priority strategic actions of the NWWRAC. The Chairman made a note of this comment and promised to include this point in the agenda of the next WG2 meeting.

The agenda was then adopted including the aforementioned amendments.

- **Adoption of minutes of the last meeting**

There were no comments. The minutes of the last meeting were deemed to be approved.

2. Review of ICES 2008 opinion on the VII bcfghjk areas (Martín Pastoors)

Martin Pastoors gave a general presentation prior to the detailed analysis of each species by area and fishery, explaining in detail:

- The method used in drafting this report, based on biological reference parameters (reproductive biomass levels and fishing mortality)
- The terminology adopted by the ICES to describe the status of the stocks ("traffic lights" system: red, green and yellow)
- The data interpretation and assessment protocol based on three alternative scenarios:
 - 1) When the stock is under the cautionary reproductive biomass (Bpa)
 - 2) When no adequate reliable and solid scientific data is available, and the calculations must be arrived at by means of estimates.
 - 3) When the stock is subject to a management plan governed by the precautionary principle (Martin clarifies that the precautionary principle or criterion is a political and not a scientific concept, and that the ICES limits itself to respect and follow this approach which ensues from the Member States and from the Commission)

The following general trends were highlighted:

- A significant effort in the fishing effort in area VII within the period 1999-2006, with a greater effort in subareas VII_{fg}. By types of gear, the main effort has been centred on trawler ships ("otter trawlers")
- The presence of a high degree of scientific uncertainty due a lack of sufficient and trustworthy data that has been obtained to assess the status of the different stocks in area VII (a great majority of these are catalogued as "unknown").
- A general recommendation on the reduction of catch limits and the quotas for all stocks with the exception of North Sea hake and of sole in the Celtic Sea and in Southeast Ireland.

On NWWRAC's webpage one can view the presentation of Martin Pastoors, which contains a detailed analysis of each species.

- **Comments of the members on the ICES opinion and the proposals of TACs and quotas for 2008:**

The members regretted the high degree of scientific uncertainty, which is characterised by the lack of trustworthiness of the data on the majority of the fish populations data for area VII, and it was agreed to ask the Commission to give more financial resources to the ICES and the relevant scientific bodies, so that these may be able to obtain more solid, trustworthy and verified data.

There was also a matter relating to the degree of participation of the stakeholders in the review procedure of the stocks by the ICES. A clear degree of discrepancy can be observed between the viewpoint of the fishermen (for example, with regards to the aggregations and quantities of cod in the Celtic Sea) and the scientific criterion with regards to the same stock in the same area, with obvious risks such as the increase in discards. For this reason, it was recommended that the ICES and the stakeholders must meet in a specific forum to discuss the manner of how to improve the collect, analysis and distribution of data (which includes the harmonisation of the data coming from different sources and different campaigns or observation studies) as well as to set up more direct participation mechanisms, as may be easily understood by all (for example, to establish clear series over time with regards to their duration and scope, relating the species and fisheries)

Finally, it was suggested to the ICES that it should ponder on the possibility of reviewing its dynamics / advisory policy for such stocks with regards to which it does not have sufficient available data in order to arrive at an opinion (above all with regards to its calculations based on the average levels of unloading, which have a huge impact on the decision-making process of the Council of Ministers of Fisheries)

Martin Pastoors recommended to all the stakeholders and fisheries managers that when measures arise or when specific objectives are defined, they should also clearly indicated how to measure the scope and how to assess whether the expected results have been achieved or may be sought by the said measures, as well as to specify the types of additional control that may be needed. Without this additional information, it would be most difficult to progress in the improvement of the quality of scientific advice. It is thus necessary to set the concrete objectives and to specify how to assess the degree to which these have been achieved. The information furnished by the fishermen and the industry must be presented in a systematic and non-anecdotal manner. The NWWRAC should act as a "bringing-together" forum for proposals and coordinate and gather all this information contributed by its members.

The members believed that the TAC zero policy adopted for certain species (including cod) would solely lead to a greater level of discards, and that new measures should be designed, which should encompass more flexible objectives and which should be adapted to each specific region, in order to contribute to the effective recovery of the stocks, in a more realistic manner.

Some examples in this sense would be the plans addressed to preventing cod catches (for individual ships or fleets of ships) or the project for reducing discards in the Irish Sea, as well as other initiatives for improving the knowledge on the fisheries (regular interviews, the preparation of standard templates and questionnaires to be covered by the fishermen, etc.)

Martin believed that this type of alternative measures based on specific objectives can be very useful, but that there is an obstacle or a challenge to be overcome, which is to clearly integrate the knowledge and qualified knowledge that comes from the fishermen into the process of scientific advice.

It was agreed that it is necessary for the NWWRAC to meet with the ICES in order to collect and analyse all these approaches and proposals for specific measures and to establish the common steps to be carried out for their implementation.

With regards to the Trevose closure, the Chairman gave a brief summary of the origin of this initiative on behalf of the industry and mentioned that as yet no results have been seen. The Commission was asked to obtain detailed information on the area and this has not been done up until now, which creates a feeling of powerlessness in view of the lack of recognition of this initiative which involved a significant reduction in the fishing effort in the area. Next, the Chairman gave the right to speak to Julien Lamothe so that, in the absence of Jacques Pichon, he may give a brief analysis of the Trevose closure.

Julien presented a summary of the data contained in the ICES report on this closure, and asserted that in spite of the low figures recorded with regards to the rate of recruiting, there are other clearly positive signs, such as a steep decline in the rate of fishing mortality, a certain abundance of young cod in the catches of the West Channel and Celtic Sea areas (according to French and Irish professional data). He mentioned that all the age categories have been underestimated by the ICES assessment. He was of the opinion that a low TAC may have a perverse effect leading to more intensive catches, which would oblige Member States to adopt drastic measures with regards to the "*downgrading*" or discards. Finally, Julien encouraged a joint cooperation between the industry and the scientists in order to consolidate this type of initiatives, and he placed at the disposal of the ICES and the Commission the idea of gathering useful data in commercial fishing vessels, through the coordination of the NWWRAC.

In its turn for the right to speak, the Spanish delegation reiterated its unconditional disagreement to real time closures, and it asserted that it would strive to cooperate insofar as possible and as far as it could in the cod recovery plans, with the sole requisite that its activity should not be affected as it is a fleet that does not fish cod or have any impact on this species. Thus, the Spanish delegation will adopt a stance of attentive observation in the view of any approach which may tend to involve other mixed fishing activities, as the effort should be placed on the industry that captures it and should not be attributed to the other fishing activities that may take place in mixed fisheries. Finally, it expressed surprise with regards to the doubts mentioned by the ICES on the validity of the Trevose closure, as it was believed that this organisation had sufficient information at its disposal to undertake an adequate assessment of it, for which reason it reserves its right to rectify its support to this measure, in the event that it does not yield results in the future.

ACTION: It was agreed to study the possibility of creating a joint RACs-ICES workshop in order to study how to cooperate and improve in the obtaining, analysis and processing of scientific data, and to identify useful flexible measures to reach the objective of arriving at the cautionary limits, not only for cod but for all the recovery plans in general.

3. Hake recovery plan

The Chairman made reference to the agreement arrived at in the recent meeting of the Executive Committee in Dublin, in which it was agreed that a draft letter should be prepared requesting a transition from the present recovery system provided for by the European Commission in Regulation 811/2004 to a system for managing North Sea hake, with a view to fulfilling the objective of reaching 140,000 tonnes of reproductive biomass for the third year.

Those present were also informed that there was a specific workshop for North Sea hake on October the 30th. This workshop was organised by the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, and held a meeting with Spanish representatives in the business sector, the government, the Commission, managers and executives and fishermen. In spite of the recognition of having reached the objective of 140,000 tonnes of biomass, the business sector was surprised by the reaction of the Commission in not adopting this management plan in 2008, and to initiate a financial impact study in order to assess the impact of this measure. The said report of the Commission will be of a financial and biological nature and the opinion of the NWWRAC will be requested.

In spite of this news, it was unanimously agreed to adhere to the initiative of sending a letter to the Commission according to the abovementioned terms, including the following text¹: *“The stock of North Sea hake has reached the established reproductive biomass of 140,000 tonnes established in the recovery plan for two years (2006 and 2007). Article 3 of the recovery plan made mention of a management plan, which should now be implemented”*. In any event it was accepted that the NWWRAC must show itself to be firm and request the Commission to implement the management plan as soon as possible, and that in the event of delay, transitional measures should be implemented to waive requirements such as the 8% tolerance margin requirement in the daily fishing estimates and the unloading declarations.

Acting in his capacity as an observer, Álvaro Fernández of the IEO made a summary of the indicators on the status of the stock of North Sea hake, using public data obtained from the ACFM and the ICES Working Group on Hake, Monkfish and Megrim (WGHMM)², and he invited the attendants to use this information in their notifications with the governments and the Commission. There are highly positive historical results and statistical data relating to the increase in the stock, the average size of the unloadings, the average age of the populations, the overall reduction of the fishing effort (in the fleet specifically addressed to hake and the distant water fishing fleet) and the fishing mortality rates.

Álvaro recalled that it is expected that the stock of reproducers will increase in a continuous manner over the oncoming financial years, and he believed that by sustaining the present level of fishing effort by all the countries, this will contribute to continue to decrease the fishing mortality if the stock continues to increase, thus achieving that in the medium-term we can approach the optimal fishing mortality rate for this species. By maintaining the present level of fishing effort in all the countries one can continue to reduce F if the stock continues to increase, in the medium term approaching the optimal F of MSY. Moreover, the maintaining of the fishing effort for hake would not have a negative effect on the stock of monkfish, megrim and Dublin Bay prawn.

Lisa Borges, representative of the European Commission, mentioned that the Commission has the intention of implementing a management plan for hake in 2009, but that this is not ready yet due to the fact that a non-paper document is being prepared on Long-Term Management Plans, which will have a solid scientific basis and shall seek the comments and contributions of the relevant RACs and in general the stakeholders.

¹ Back translation from an approximate translation of the English original – ICES report on North Sea hake (ICES Advice 2007, Book 9) – p. 28:

<http://www.ices.dk/committe/acfm/comwork/report/2007/oct/hke-nrtn.pdf>

² Only available in English: <http://www.ices.dk/iceswork/wgdetailacfm.asp?wg=WGHMM>

- **Presentation of the EFIMAS project (Lorenzo Motos)**

EFIMAS is a project encompassed within the VIth R&D Framework Programme and it is presently in its last implementation phase: the scenarios simulation programme has already been used in practice for the biological report by the STECF Working group. The objective of this latter phase is to make known between the stakeholders, the different models developed and applied for studying the management of the fisheries, and to place this tool at the disposal of these if this is in their interest.

With regards to the approach of the programme, as opposed to the traditional management approach based on a “single hypothesis”, this consists in the assessment of alternative management processes, undertaking simulations with regards to different given hypotheses. It therefore involves a model on which the simulation of different management processes is based.

With regards to the action timetable, it was proposed to the members that they must express their interest in participating in focus interest groups before the month of January, in order to be able to test the application and decide the parameters and indicators (of a biological nature, financial, social...) under which they wish that the model to study the management of fisheries shall be applied. Lorenzo pointed out that this project has financing available for a series of representatives of the NWWRAC (the number pending confirmation) for these meetings. A meeting would be held in March in Brussels to make common knowledge of the experiences prior to the completion of the project, to which a representative of the NWWRAC would be invited.

Finally, a demonstration of the tool was made by means of a simulation with entry of data on a real-time basis. The interface referred to as the “*viewer of management alternatives*” was presented, in which the stock of North Sea hake can be specifically selected and also a series of parameters (levels F, B and ages of the populations, among others), so that it displays the results of all the simulations made within a time span of 20 to 30 years.

ACTIONS: The Secretary will distribute Lorenzo’s presentation in the three languages and a period of presentations of candidatures shall be opened as may be of interest for participating in this project. Similarly, it shall be decided at the next Executive Committee, whether the NWWRAC shall participate in this project and a decision shall be arrived at between the candidacies of the final two representatives.

4. Proposals approved for presentation to the Executive Committee

It was decided that the following action proposals and requests addressed to the Commission should be remitted to the Executive Committee for its consideration:

- To formally request of the Commission a substantial improvement of the reports that are issued by the ICES with regards to the assessment of the status of the stocks for area VII in general, and similarly to specifically provide the results on the Trevoise closure.
- Approval of a document or letter in which the materialisation of a management plan for the North Sea hake is called for, as opposed to the present recovery plan, requiring that insofar as no alleviation of the special conditions imposed by the present recovery plan is implemented, in the form of the derogation of requirements such as the 8% tolerance margin between the records of the fishing daybook and the unloadings,
- The establishment of contacts with the ICES in order to improve communications channels, and for the gathering and interchange of relevant information and data: valuation of the possibility of a workshop or seminar, within which these matters could be evaluated.

Following a debate on the procedure to be followed with regards to formulation of specific proposals and recommendations by species in response to the ICES recommendations, and given the lack of available time for dialogue, it was agreed to transfer the conclusions mentioned in this point to the next Executive Committee for its discussion and adoption of agreements, if required.

5. Marine Protection and Natura 2000 areas: Presentation of the proposed SACs for the United Kingdom (Charlotte Johnston, JNCC)

Due to the lack of time, the Chairman suggested to the speaker that she should make a brief summary of his presentation and give a general overview of it, apologising to her and inviting her to repeat the said presentation at the next meeting of the NWWRAC Executive Committee. Similarly, he advised the members to read the contents of the presentation that are available on the NWWRAC website and requested them to remit all such remarks as they may deem to be appropriate.

The speaker clarified this is a preliminary consultation phase for the selection of closure areas, and will be based on exclusively scientific criteria. Four closure areas have been proposed within the scope of the NWWRAC.

6. Any Other Business

- Creation of Focus Groups: The discussion of this matter was postponed due to lack of time.

- Annual NEAFC meeting: The Chairman announced that this meeting will be held between the 12th and the 16th of November in London. At this meeting new proposals will be discussed for the closing of the areas of Rockall and Hatton Bank³.

- Gillnet nets: Stéphanie Tachaires (CNP MEM), in the representation of Michel Goujon, informed the attendants on the news that has occurred on this matter. Michel has recently contacted Norman Graham, one of the people responsible for the DEEPCLEAN project, and he has invited a number of representatives of the NWWRAC, so that they may confirm their attendance to the project meeting to be held in Galway from the 21st to the 23rd of November. Norman has expressed his disposition towards dedicating a certain amount of time to analysing and examining, together with his colleagues on the scientific panel of experts, the plans of the observation campaigns undertaken by the governments of Spain, France and the United Kingdom in 2006.

The attendants were thanked for their participation, as well as for the work carried out by the translators. The session was closed at 1:15 pm.

Chairman: Hugo González García
Rapporteur: Alexandre Rodríguez
(standing in for Paul Trebilcock)

November 2007

³ More information: <http://www.neafc.org/>