

DRAFT REPORT

North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council

Working Group 4 The Irish Sea (ICES VIIa)

Friday, 3rd November 2006
9.30am-1.00pm

Chair: Lorcan O’Cinneide (Ireland)
Vice-Chair Rapporteur Alan McCulla (UK)

1. Agenda

The agenda was adopted by group members.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the 3rd meeting of the ISWG (Irish Sea Working Group), held in Glasgow, Scotland on Tuesday, 16th May 2006 were tabled and approved by group members.

3. Review of ICES Advice for VIIa (Irish Sea)

A presentation on the October 2006 ICES advice was given by Wim Demare. As many group members had already seen the advice in other forum there were no real surprises. However, the industry did express its surprise regarding the advice on Irish Sea Sole, which suggested a recovery programme should be initiated. Industry highlighted the significant change there had been between last year’s (2005) advice on sole and this year.

So far as Irish Sea cod was concerned, Mr. Demare confirmed that ICES saw no signs of a recovery in the stock. This was despite seven years of temporary spawning closures in the Irish Sea, fleet reductions, effort reductions and the application of additional technical conservation measures.

The uncertainties in the advice were highlighted. The Group felt that this underscored the need for a review of the Cod Recovery programme and the proposed initiative to further industry/science collaboration in the Irish Sea aimed at removing much of the uncertainty.

On the positive side it was noted that the plaice stock in the Irish Sea remained very buoyant and that nephrops in the Irish Sea and Area VII as a whole were now reported by ICES to being fished sustainably. The Group hoped that this better news would be interpreted into improved TACs.

Industry took issue with the assertion in the advice that misreporting of catches remained an issue and highlighted the application of the “Buyers and Sellers” regulation as evidence that this claim was outdated.

4. Review of Proposal of Cod Recovery/Discard Project

Alan McCulla provided an overview of the proposed project to date. In short the paper aimed to greatly enhance data gathering from within the Irish Sea, in the form of a new self-sampling programme, with greater scientific observer presence on board fishing vessels. This data would be used to reduce the uncertainties regarding the state of fish stocks within the area. The scheme would be voluntary. In return for this much enhanced co-operation it was proposed that participating fishing vessels would be granted additional days at sea, but with no overall increase in fishing effort. Importantly, the proposal had the support of the Fisheries Administrations in the UK and Rep. of Ireland.

Many group members contributed to the discussion that followed and while suggesting a few amendments to the proposal, everyone welcomed the initiative. The Chair expressed the hope that this project could dovetail with the wider review of the cod recovery programme. He volunteered to re-draft the proposal, with the aim of incorporating some of the points that had been highlighted during the morning's discussions. The goal was to submit a final version of the document to the forthcoming NWWRAC Executive Committee.

5. Report for suggested formulation of Commission Policy on Atlantic Wild Salmon. (Submitted by the Irish Sea Sanctuary.)

Patsy Peril from the Irish Seal Sanctuary presented the paper and in doing so highlighted the announcement made earlier in the week by the Irish Government that drift-netting for salmon would be prohibited from the 1st January 2007.

The group expressed a range of views on the paper. These included a belief from some quarters that the Working Group was not the forum to discuss the issues contained in the paper and also that the matter was an internal Irish one. The Irish Seal Sanctuary disagreed with this.

Given the announcement by the Irish Government it became obvious that the matter was extremely contentious. Most representatives maintained that it was not a matter for this Working Group and after a lengthy debate the Irish Sea Sanctuary agreed to withdraw their paper, while wishing it to be recorded that they considered the matter to be a European one.

6. Review of Member Papers

A. Information document on irregular commercial fishing practices in Irish coastal areas (Irish Sea Sanctuary).

Johnny Woodcock from the Irish Seal Sanctuary presented the paper, which alleged mis-recording of engine powers and a number of other regulatory abuses.

Group members urged the Irish Seal Sanctuary members that if they had evidence of abuses, then these should be provided to the appropriate coastal authorities for proper

investigation and action. They also suggested to the Irish Seal Sanctuary that there was a clear difference between allegations of law breaking and aspirations that some might have regarding new or improved conservation measures.

B. Fishy Tails: Alternative uses for the Resource (Irish Seal Sanctuary).

Johnny Woodcock from the Irish Seal Sanctuary presented the paper, which suggested alternative uses/management of certain fisheries. He suggested that the example provided by the hand line fishery for mackerel off the south-west of England proved a greater return could be gleaned from the resource. Recreational fisheries were also highlighted as a possible alternative.

The Chair expressed his interest in such ideas, especially in relation to inshore fishermen and communities where there was a need for diversification. Barrie Deas stated that there were areas where commercial and recreational fishermen could identify common ground. Finally, the Chair expressed his interest in discussing this matter further with the Irish Sea Sanctuary.

The meeting was closed with the Chair thanking Group members for attending, the Secretariat for their organisation and most importantly the interpreters for their patience.