



Fokion Fotiadis
Director General
DG Fisheries and Maritime Affairs
DG MARE
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Brussels

1st of April 2010

Subject: Fish Stock Assessments: Regional Task Force

Dear Director General Fotiadis

It is a matter of the utmost concern to the NWWRAC that ICES is unable to provide analytical assessments for 57% of the stocks under its purview and that this percentage has gradually increased over the last decade. This failure arises principally from deficiencies in fisheries data available to scientists in the national laboratories.

I am sure that you appreciate that accurate catch, discard, and size-at-age data, along with survey data for tuning purposes, provides the backbone of the assessments system and ultimately, its absence inevitably represents a major weakness in our ability to manage our fisheries adequately.

This is a situation that cannot be allowed to stand.

The purpose of this letter is to kick-start an international initiative to address the issue. We propose the establishment of a Regional Task Force for North West Waters involving the member states, the members of the NWWRAC and ICES scientists.

The role of the Regional Task Force would be jointly to:

- Identify where there are data deficiencies in specific fisheries
- Identify the particular reasons why data deficiencies exist in specific fisheries
- Outline options for addressing the specific data deficiencies
- Develop pilot projects with the aim of delivering improvements in both the quality and amount of data

Our hope and aspiration is that a partnership approach of this type would develop the momentum to overcome the inertia that currently hold back scientists, fisheries managers and ultimately the fishing industry from rectifying this fundamentally unacceptable situation.



A good start for this exercise will be ICES information spreadsheet on the data used in its assessments, which identifies data deficiencies and also provides the reasons why some data cannot be employed. We understand that an STECF meeting in June will address some of these issues.

The STECF meeting is an important first step but if we are to stop moving backwards on this issue, it is important that we jointly take the initiative. To this end we hope that you will convene a meeting of interested parties to discuss how we, together, could begin to put this proposal into practice. The regional focus will help to ensure that the initiative is well supported and may be helpful in testing the benefits of regional bodies in the context of CFP reform.

Without this type of initiative the risk is that the ICES stock assessments will continue to be undermined by serious data deficiencies with all that this implies for weak science, precautionary TACS for the fishing industry and the achievement of good environmental status under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

We are copying this letter to the relevant member states and the national laboratories in order to stimulate a debate on how to address an endemic problem that undermines our efforts to manage our fisheries sustainably.

I hope that you will be able to respond positively to this initiative.

Sincerely,

Sam Lambourn
NWWRAC Chairman

In copy:

- Isabelle Viallon (RAC Liaison Officer - DG MARE)
- María Fuensanta Candela (Head of Unit C2 - DG MARE)
- Kenneth Patterson (Head Scientist, Unit C2, DG MARE)
- Representatives from national administrations and scientific institutes from:
Spain, France, United Kingdom, Ireland, Belgium and The Netherlands.