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Report by Jim Portus regarding his participation on behalf of the NWWRAC at the meeting of STECF subgroup SGMOS 0902 in Lisbon on 25th November 2009.

(Also invited the participation of SWWRAC and NSRAC)

The main TOR for this group is to provide a report to STECF regarding the past performance of the management plans on fisheries in the North Sea on plaice and sole, Western channel sole and Bay of Biscay sole.

This was the first of such evaluation meetings and was used to develop the process of evaluation, both technically and including ways in which RACs / observers can be involved. Required was some direct input from the RACs on their experiences of these plans over the last 2 / 3 years. Also required was direct input from the RACs on thoughts for the future of such plans. By the end of the day it was hoped to have some initial conclusions on how these specific plans have worked and how the process of evaluating plans in the future should develop.

There were two areas of participation for the RACs as initial contributions:

- 1) RAC views on the 3 plans so far, experience, changes observed, advantages and disadvantages
- 2) The future, any thoughts about the way these specific plans might develop.

Then later discussion on two aspects with RAC participation:

- 1) Summary of how these plans have performed.
- 2) Idea of how the evaluation process should be conducted.

John Simmonds chaired the meeting. We met under Chatham House Rules.

Veronique Angot represented DGMare E2.

- We considered whether the TACs had been set according to the plans and how the TAC accorded with effort limits and annual uptake. In the case on N S Plaice and Sole, the interaction with Cod Recovery was a factor to be considered.
- For 7e Sole, consideration was necessary of diversion to other areas and diversification to other methods in order to avoid the reduced quotas. Fuel costs were an important factor at times. Catching the quota then discarding can be more economic than steaming to avoid the quota! Fishers have innovated with selectivity trials, led by CEFAS, to avoid discards and save fuel. Regret expressed that profitability is not an indicator of success in the Plans. Regret also expressed that economic incentives are absent.
- Disappointment expressed that the Plan as approved in 2006 by the NWWRAC was not as adopted by Council in April 2007.
- In North Sea, fishers have innovated with anchor seines, twin-rigs and out-rigs and other technology to save fuel.
- In Biscay, IFREMER has led bio-economic study group investigating Sole and Nephrops fisheries.
- Each Plan must be considered in isolation and a good result in one area may not be replicated in another fishery/ area.
- For 7e Sole, scientists noted changes from 2005 to patterns of recorded landings. Also noted the ICES advice to reduce effort and, in proportion the TAC, in response to precautionary reference points that have now been removed from the stock assessment. The ICES Working Group met earlier this year, but could not find why there is distinct retrospective bias in F (downwards) and B (upwards). The Plan requires TAC to be set in response to F in recent years, yet F is most unreliable indicator.

B is also not a reliable indicator for setting TAC. In 2003 the threat of B falling below Bpa caused the Plan to be initiated, yet in retrospect we now know that Bactual was 30% greater than Bpa.

The Plan does not have a contingency for retrospective bias, but it cannot be enacted as adopted! A well-designed Plan must allow for retrospective bias.

However, recruitment R has always been shown retrospectively to have been directly proportional to survey indicators.

- For North Sea Sole and Plaice, the review of the Plan compared to using the traditional method of TAC advice, shows that there is so-far little difference. The stocks are rising and the TAC advice would be the same either way. Retrospective bias is less pronounced than in 7e.
- For Biscay Sole, the objective of Bpa was reached in 2008. Recruitment R is not as strong an indicator as in 7e. Assessment and survey indicators are sympathetic to the Plan.
- For North Sea and Biscay, there is still confidence in the management Plan, so the overall advice is to follow it.
- For 7e Sole, although the TAC to date has been set to the Plan, the terms of the Plan cannot now be implemented. However, F is tending towards the target and the survey indicates healthy recruitment. Where there is no assessment, it is acceptable to advise setting a TAC based on survey indicators.
- The report from this meeting will go the STECF for adoption and will go to the Commission by April 2010.
- I was advised that the UK might usefully request the Commission to seek from STECF an interim and immediate evaluation from this workshop of the Plan for 7e Sole, to consider the state of the stock from the 2009 survey indices and to determine the TAC implied by setting the 2010 TAC at Fsq level. Such a TAC would still be consistent with long term objectives of achieving target F0.27. (N.B.TAC Fsq 2010 would be increased from 2009 level!).

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