

Barrie Deas, 4th March 2011

To: NSRAC and NWWRAC

Subject: Review of EU Cod Management Plan: Brief Report on the ICES/STECF Joint Scoping Meeting, Copenhagen, 28th February to 4th March 2011

This was an important meeting that will set the terms for the review of the management plans in the North Sea, Irish Sea, West of Scotland and the Kattegat.

Process

1. The evaluation is backward looking in the sense that it is an examination of how the plan has performed to date. It will however set the scene for revisions to the current plan, or the establishment of a new plan.
2. A report will be prepared at a meeting in Hamburg on 20-24th June by the same group, who will have prepared data and text in the meantime.
3. The July Plenary of STECF will review the report and may make changes.
4. The report will be presented to the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament in the autumn.
5. In October decisions on whether a new plan is required; if so an impact assessment will be prepared
6. A new plan could be adopted in February or March 2011

Questions

By its nature the meeting was inconclusive, as the focus was on developing the right type of questions that would shed light on:

- Whether the management plan is achieving its objectives?
- Whether the targets in the plan are appropriate or not?

- Whether there is a correlation between effort and mortality that would justify effort limitation as a central instrument in the plan?
- Whether the science is precise enough inform the exact changes in stock status required under the plan to set year-on-year TAC or effort reductions?
- What has the fisheries response to the provisions of the management plan been?
- Are any behavioural changes in the direction of sustainable exploitation or in the opposite direction?
- What data sets are available to inform these questions?
- Are the effort categories (e.g. TR1) too wide to be the basis for management measures, covering as it does mixed demersal, targeted saithe and flat fish fisheries?
- Is there evidence of a conflict or contradiction between the provisions of the cod management plan and other conservation regulations, eg the technical conservation rules? STECF has already commented that the average mesh size in the North Sea has declined under the perverse consequences of the effort regime.
- Is F0.4 an appropriate target?
- Are we achieving the objectives?
- What is working?
- What is not working?
- Is the way that the exemptions are framed help or hinder innovation in cod avoidance as was intended?
- Are there problems in implementing the exemptions?

- Is the effort regime working? Can it ever work? Does the starting point for member states' effort base-line, based as it was on a lottery of when each member states had major decommissioning schemes, mean that there is no possibility of an even application of effort reductions? What does this mean for fishing mortality on cod?
- What is the risk involved in relying on effort to bring down fishing mortality?
- Is the cod plan designed in a way that hinders it from achieving its objectives?
- Is the way that the plan is being implemented problematic? In what ways?
- Is it possible to achieve an F of 0.4 for cod at the same time we have a high TAC for haddock?
- How has effort affected the fisheries fleet by fleet and member state by member state?
- Do the biological and fisheries dynamics in the Irish Sea and West of Scotland vary to the extent that significantly different approaches are required to rebuild depleted cod stocks?
- Are there any alternative exploitation indicators that could be used for the Irish Sea and West of Scotland?
- Are different objectives desirable for the West of Scotland and Irish Sea fisheries?
- Are there reasons to believe that the estimates of natural mortality are correct?
- Did member states implement the plan properly?
- Has the plan incentivised perverse fishing behaviours that prevent the delivery of the plan?

- Has the TAC setting been in line with the plan?
- What accounts for the high level of unaccounted removals, including discards of mature fish?
- Does the plan provide obstacles to the type of derogations that would deliver a reduction in discards?
- Did member states calculate base lines in the same way?
- Is under-declaration of engine power a factor?
- What has been the effect of the default 25% reduction for stocks where there are data poor situations
- F0.4 implies a level of biomass that no one has ever seen before, including the gadoid outburst. This is unknown territory. What are the implications?
- Does the scale at which the plan is applied have an effect?
- In mixed fisheries, what are the impacts of the non-cod fisheries?
- Has the impact of the effort regime fallen on a negligible number of vessels, which are mainly involved already in some kind of cod avoidance?
- Can we prepare a catalogue of “cod saving” gears?
- What are the factors influencing the uptake of cod avoidance options?
- Are there examples of successful recovery plans (successful or unsuccessful) in other countries that could inform the report

Work Plan

Individuals from ICES and STECF were identified to collate the necessary data and write the necessary draft text that would contribute to answering the agreed questions. It was recognised that in some cases the data would be incomplete and the answers would therefore be incomplete; nevertheless, the process began with a high degree of ambition.

RACs/Stakeholders

The meeting was open to stakeholders from the RACs who participated throughout. A significant number of the questions raised were informed by stakeholder comments.

Although the report will be written by ICES/STECF this meeting opened a new chapter in openness and participation:

- RAC members participated fully in the discussions on what should be included in the report
- All documentation is shared with the RAC participants
- The RACs have been invited to provide a paper on their experiences and ideas on the cod management plan. As a minimum this could be provided as an annex to the main text of the report, with references to it in the main body.
- If stakeholders can identify some scientist (taken in its broadest sense) to undertake work on some aspect of the management plan, STECF have a budget in the region of 5000 euros (15 days at 300 euros per day + overheads) to cover this. Therefore the RACs should give thought to how to take up this offer. It would be wise to submit this application to STECF before the STECF Plenary on 11th April. The subsequent report would be incorporated into the STECF/ICES deliberations on the performance of the cod plan to date.