

**North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council**  
**Meeting with DG Fisheries and Maritime Affairs**  
**November 23<sup>rd</sup> 2005**

Attendees

John Farnell (Commission)  
Ernesto Penas Lado (Commission)  
Miriam Garcia Ferrer (Commission)  
Sam Lambourn (NWWRAC)  
Jacques Pichon (NWWRAC)  
Patricia Comiskey (NWWRAC)

**General Comments**

- i. Poor quality of some fisheries based data: Lack of reliable data for some important stocks resulting in no advice from ICES is unacceptable. Declared landings must be brought into line with actual catches. The NWWRAC believes that there are certain fisheries where the Commission could increase TACs for 2006 to assist in achieving more reliable landings data. It was emphasised this would not mean an increase fish mortality. The NWWRAC wants to encourage longer term management of certain stocks to 'breakout' of the cycle of downward ratcheting quotas based on unreliable fishing data.
- ii. Frontloading: The NWWRAC expressed general disappointment that 'Frontloading' as proposed by the Commission has not been as successful as hoped this year.
- iii. Fuel Price Crisis: The NWWRAC believes that the current price of fuel will reduce fishing effort across the board in European waters and that this should be taken in to account where appropriate in the 2006 TAC allocations.
- iv. Johannesburg Declaration and MSY: The NWWRAC believes that the 15% cuts being imposed for certain fisheries, due to their association with Cod are an extremely blunt measure that needs more serious consideration. The RAC feels that this is being put in place to accommodate the Johannesburg declaration on MSY and is not appropriate to impose until full consultation has taken place with the industry.
- v. Annex III: Comment was limited because of lack of time for consideration .The NWWRAC welcomes the new presentation of different fleet segments effort in one document, but is concerned how the effort will be allocated on a vessel by vessel basis for periods of less than 1 year, and for vessels using different gear types during the year.
- vi. Deepwater Fixed Net Fisheries: The NWWRAC would like an update on the progress of the proposed emergency measure to ban deepwater fixed net fisheries.
- vii. Incorporating Scientific Advice into the RACs: The NWWRAC want to ensure that scientific advice is not provided to it on an ad hoc basis, although that provided to the WGs and the Executive already has been most welcome and useful. The NWWRAC propose the following:
  1. A formal relationship with ICES and a seat at ACFM as observer.
  2. Request from the Commission a member of STECF to present scientific advice to the NWWRAC from a neutral position [not necessarily the same member on all occasions].
  3. Develop an inter-RAC position on obtaining independent scientific advice.

*Response from the Commission:*

- i. Quality of data for assessments: The Commission expressed their thanks to the NWWRAC for the interventions and stated that they were pleased to hear the RAC's policy on the unreliable fisheries based data issue. They would welcome all input from the RAC on this matter.
- ii. Frontloading: The Commission too expressed disappointment with the fact that it had not been completely successful this year, but will be working harder to ensure happens next year.
- iii. The fuel crisis: The Commission acknowledged its impact on fisheries and stated that they will be releasing a paper early next year on ways to mitigate the impacts, but with regards to TAC allocations for 2006- the Commission stated that the fuel crisis was no reason to stop the development of a management strategy.
- iv. Johannesburg Declaration: The Commission stated that the proposed 15% decreases in TAC for several different stocks were not related to this- but to the Cod Recovery Programme, whereby it was agreed if the SSB had not reached certain levels the TAC would be reduced by 15%. The Commission informed the RAC that they have every intention of consulting the RAC's on the Johannesburg Declaration and MSY issues in 2006.
- v. Annex III: The Commission acknowledged that Annex III had taken time to produce and this was due largely to the review of the tables. They informed the RAC that the annual allocation of days would be managed by the Member States. They were aware of the multiply gear use issue and had circulated papers to the Member States for discussion on 2<sup>nd</sup> December.
- vi. Deepwater Fixed Net ban: The Commission stated that it was their intention to bring this forward to the Council of Ministers in December and that they would be proposing a 6 month ban on deep water fixed net fisheries. During this 6 month ban they would seek advice from the NWWRAC as well as Member States on control and technical issues to regulate this fishery. As NEAFC had already imposed the same ban it was likely to be introduced in European waters at the December Council.
- vii. Incorporation of Scientific Advice: The Commission welcomed the NWWRAC thinking on this and stated that it would support a formal arrangement being made between STECF and the RAC's, but that funding for this arrangement would have to be resolved [to be progressed at the next RAC Coordination meeting in February] ,also expressed caution on whether manpower resources were available [certainly not for all meetings for all RACS]. The Commission also supported links between the RAC's and ICES- independent of the Commission.
- viii. The Commission requested that the RAC inform them in advance of all meetings, as they were interested in providing as much input as possible into the process.

**Working Group Comments:**

***Working Group 1 West of Scotland Area VI and Vb***

- o Nephrops: The NWWRAC advises that the Nephrops TAC for this area needs to be increased by 30% to improve the quality of fisheries data and bring it more in line with positive indications for this stock from non fisheries data [burrow counts]. This should be done in accordance with effort capping. This will not increase 'the take' in this fishery.
- o Monkfish: The NWWRAC recommends that a 15% increase in the TAC is needed to improve the quality of fisheries data. Again this will not increase the take. The NWWRAC also proposes a comprehensive scientific assessment of the stock in 2006.
- o Cod Recovery: The NWWRAC believes that the Cod Recovery Programme for this area is not working and has relatively little impact on the state of the stock. The NWWRAC seeks a fundamental review of the Cod Recovery Programme for this area.

*Response from the Commission:*

- Nephrops: The Commission recognises that there is a problem; the official landings do not reflect actual catches. The Commission has received scientific advice from STECF on this and are looking to perhaps implement a harvest rule and set a TAC higher than that suggested by ICES. They are interested in the proposition to cap effort and would look to the RAC and member states for advice on how to achieve this, particularly with respect to migration from other fleet segments.
- Monkfish: The Commission understands the problem, however feels that without accurate data they cannot justify an increase in the TAC at the start of 2006. Propose to progress a fisheries/science partnership stock assessment in early 2006 with an undertaking to review the TAC in mid-year depending on results. The Commission suggested that the NWWRAC and Member States take a positive lead on this so the assessment can get underway in early 2006.
- Cod Recovery Programme: It was recognised that the plan is not necessarily suitable for area VI. The Commission acknowledged that the Cod Recovery Programme was very much designed for the North Sea and that the 'one size fits all' approach was not suitable here. The Commission agreed to consider a review of the Cod Recovery Programme in this area.

***Working Group 2 Celtic Sea and Western Approaches ICES area VII (Except VII a,d&e)***

- Cod Closure: The NWWRAC supports the Industry led initiative to close three ICES statistical rectangles (30E4, 31E4 and 32E3), outside of the six-mile limit of UK and Ireland, to all demersal fishing during the months of February and March. The NWWRAC recommends that there should be a full scientific assessment of the impacts of the closure on other species such as sole, plaice, nephrops and other gadoids and that displacement must be monitored and assessed as was the case for the 2005 closure. The NWWRAC considers that because of the cut in mortality associated with the closure the proposed cut in TAC of 15% is unjustified.
- TAC cuts based on Member State uptake levels: The NWWRAC are concerned with the initiative whereby TACs are cut based on Member State levels of uptake rather than on biological status. For example this is true of Pollack where Member States are taking up less than 60% of the TAC. It was pointed out that even if a Member State is taking up less than 60% in total of a quota individual POs may be taking up 100% of their share of that quota, and to cut it will cause real difficulties. This needs to be urgently reviewed by the Commission before such cuts are put in place.
- Megrim and Plaice: The NWWRAC recommends the proposed cuts of 15% be reviewed and increased. These broad-brush decreases are unjustified and in light of fuel costs for the beamer fleets targeting these species with the inevitable cut in effort, these decreases are unnecessary.
- Hake: The NWWRAC propose an increase of more than 3%. The current increase in TAC of 3% will yield an increase in SSB of 5%; an increase of 11% will yield an increase in SSB of 2%.

*Response from the Commission:*

- Cod Closure: The Commission welcomed the proposed cod closure and congratulated the NWWRAC on achieving consensus on this issue.
- TAC cuts based on uptake levels: The Commission admitted that they had not considered this aspect of uptake at a Member State level and would seek to rectify this.
- Megrim and Plaice: the Commission may consider the situation, but can only consider TACs based on biological advice.
- Hake: The Commission stated that they could not adopt long-term plans such as the Hake Recovery Programme to subsequently ignore them and would not agree an increase of more than 3%.

### ***Working Group 3 English Channel ICES Area VII d&e***

- Sole VIIe Recovery Plan: The NWWRAC accepts the proposed 9% increase in TAC and associated 10% cut in effort and proposes that a sole recovery plan for the channel be implemented with a stepped reduction towards  $F=0.31$  where each step has a 3-year holding pattern and that 2005 should be considered the first year of these steps. It was noted that this fishery is likely to have a cut in effort in excess of 10% because of the fuel price crisis and in addition the UK is considering a vessel decommissioning scheme for 2006 that would affect this fishery.
- The NWWRAC also recommend that any effort limitation scheme should not apply to netters whose catch of Western Channel sole is from very low to zero.
- Removal of VII d from the Cod Recovery Programme for the North Sea: The NWWRAC considers that VII d should not be subject to the North Sea Cod Recovery Programme. Cod for this area is assessed as part of area VIII b-k for TAC and quota management. Furthermore the vessels that target Sole in VII d, have a very low by-catch of Cod and should not be subject to effort control.
- Plaice in VII d&e: The NWWRAC believes that the Commission proposal to apply a 15% cut for 2006, will lead to serious discarding. This stock is primarily taken as a bycatch by the beam trawlers targeting sole and anglerfish and therefore TACs for Plaice should be brought more in line with those for Sole in this area. The comments regarding effort reduction for Sole VII e also apply to this stock.

#### *Response from the Commission:*

- Sole VIIe Recovery Plan: The Commission welcomed the NWWRAC proposal for the Sole recovery Programme but suggested that it was too gradual and would prefer to achieve a target in 5-6 years rather than the suggested 10.
- Removal of VII d from the Cod Recovery Programme of the North Sea: The Commission is considering an exemption from Annex IV for a number of gears that have proven to take low bycatches of Cod. Member States should submit data on landings and discards of cod from such fisheries to be considered by the Commission.
- Plaice VII d&e: The Commission stated they welcomed the suggested initiative of taking a multi-species approach to the management and would consider the NWWRACs proposal.

### ***Working Group 4 Irish Sea ICES area VII a***

- The Cod Recovery Programme: The Irish Sea Cod Recovery Programme measures have been in place since 2000, yet no real assessment has been made of the impact of the recovery programme to date. The lack of data is resulting in fishing opportunities for other species, such as Nephrops (the most important commercial stock in the Irish Sea) being held artificially low. ICES assessments for 2005 for the Nephrops, Haddock and Plaice stocks in the Irish Sea were favourable, yet the Commission proposed cuts of 11-15% due to the state of cod. This is not acceptable; the whole area cannot be managed by the lowest common denominator. The NWWRAC recommends that the Commission undertake a comprehensive review of the Cod Recovery Programme in the Irish Sea and maintain a status quo in the area to allow for some breathing space in 2006 while the review is being conducted.

#### *Response from the Commission:*

- The Cod Recovery Programme: The Commission acknowledged that there are serious concerns that neither the Irish Sea Cod Recovery Programme nor the Area VI Cod Recovery Programme are working and agreed that both are too generic and needed to be fundamentally changed to fit the area and the associated problems. However the Commission were not willing to give up on recovering Cod stocks altogether and stated that it was their responsibility to ensure that fisheries in these areas should not damage the cod stocks any further. The Commission agreed that a

fundamental review of the recovery programmes in the Irish Sea and Area VI should be carried out during 2006.

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The NWWRAC agreed to submit a summary of its advice and opinions to the Commission before 9<sup>th</sup> December.