

**To Executive Committee NWWRAC**  
**From Barrie Deas**  
**Subject: Summary Report on North West Waters Data Task Force**  
**Meeting 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011, ICES Headquarters, Copenhagen**

**Present**

See separate list.

**Background and Preparation**

A combined North Sea / North West Waters preparatory meeting, held on 31<sup>st</sup> March discussed the broad principles behind a collaborative approach to addressing weak assessments caused by data deficiencies; such an initiative should involve fisheries scientists, stakeholders and managers. A report on these discussions and broad terms of reference for collaborative regional data task forces is in preparation.

**North West Waters Data Group Meeting 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011**

**Purpose**

It was agreed that the purpose of the meeting would be:

1. To identify stock assessment in North West waters which suffer from data deficiencies and consequently do not achieve “analytical” status
2. To prioritise stocks of immediate concern, most particularly those
  - scheduled for benchmarking by ICES in 2012
  - of high priority for stakeholders
3. To identify the nature of the data deficiencies
4. To which groups (scientists, member state fisheries authorities or fisheries stakeholders) hold the principal responsibility for resolving specific problems
5. To suggest, and where possible instigate, remedial actions

**Priority Stocks**

From 60 potential stocks in NW waters, the meeting identified 22 which suffer from serious data deficiencies. It was agreed that these should be the focus of our initial attention. The meeting accepted that this list of priorities was not exhaustive and might change over time as additional information from scientists or stakeholders emerged.

The stocks identified were concentrated on the following species: anglerfish, megrim, cod, sole, nephrops, haddock and hake; in the event the meeting ran out of time to deal with nephrops and a number of other stocks.

Stock	EG	Benchmark	Priority
Anglerfish ( <i>Lophius piscatorius</i> and <i>L. budegassa</i> ) in Divisions IIa, IIIa, Subarea IV and VI	WGCSE	2012	High
Anglerfish ( <i>Lophius piscatorius</i> and <i>L. budegassa</i> ) in Divisions VIIb-k and VIIIa,b,d	WGHMM	2012	High
Cod in Division VIa (West of Scotland)	WGCSE	2012	High
Cod in Division VIIa (Irish Sea)	WGCSE	2012	High
Cod in Divisions VIIe-k (Celtic Sea cod)	WGCSE	2012	High
Haddock in Division VIa (West of Scotland)	WGCSE		High
Haddock in Division VIb (Rockall)	WGCSE		High
Haddock in Division VIIa (Irish Sea)	WGCSE		High
Haddock in Divisions VIIb-k	WGCSE		High
Hake in Division IIIa, Subareas IV, VI and VII and Divisions VIIIa,b,d (Northern stock)	WGHMM	2010	High
Megrim ( <i>Lepidorhombus</i> spp) in Subarea VI (West of Scotland and Rockall) and Subarea IV (North sea)	WGCSE	2011 No Progress	High
Megrim ( <i>Lepidorhombus whiffiagonis</i> ) in Divisions VIIb-k and VIIIa,b,d	WGHMM	2012	High
Nephrops in Porcupine Bank (FU 16)	WGCSE		High
Nephrops in Division VIIf,g,h (Celtic Sea, FU 20-22)	WGCSE		High
Skates and Rays in VII	WGEF		High
Sole in Division VIIe (Western Channel)	WGCSE	2012	High
Sole in Divisions VIIf, g (Celtic Sea)	WGCSE	2012	High
Spurdog	WGEF		High
Porbeagle	WGEF		High
Whiting in Division VIa (West of Scotland)	WGCSE		High
Whiting in Division VIIa (Irish Sea)	WGCSE		High
Whiting in Division VIIe-k	WGCSE		High

**Area VII Anglers:** The principal problem facing the angler assessments is that scientists are sceptical about the age readings and therefore work is under way on moving to a different assessment model that does not require age data. A production model could provide an indication of abundance on the basis of length data.

The question of the most appropriate assessment model is principally a scientific responsibility.

Data Issues:

1. Accurate landings data is the most important data point
2. Sampling data from the gill netters could strengthen the assessment
3. Landings data from France was required but this may be a problem that is on its way to being solved
4. Tuning: Information from the industry on whether vessels are targeting monkfish or not; this could be helped by industry information, possibly annual fisheries reports from industry organisations

In summary:

<u>Data Issue</u>	<u>Responsibility/Solution</u>
Assessment model	Scientists
Landings info.	Member State
Discard Estimates	Industry and Member State
Effort / CPUE	Industry and Scientists
Proximity of benchmark	Scientists

## **Megrim**

The assessment model for megrim is considered satisfactory and age data relevant but there is a data deficiency issue relating to discards (only partial discards data available)

<u>Data Issue</u>	<u>Responsibility/Solution</u>
Landings data	MS
Discards	MS + I + S self-sampling project
Tuning	MS + I
Biological data	MS

## **West of Scotland Cod**

The main problem facing the assessment for west of Scotland cod is that landings data from 1984 has been unreliable as a result of historic underreporting. A current area misreporting issue may exist. There is a large question over unallocated removals (estimated to be X5 reported landings). Estimated of natural mortality are uncertain (assumed constant against the background of an increasing seal population). Changing sea temperatures may be an issue, as are stock identity/migration issues.

Similarly, the fishery's response to management measures may have given rise to a significant level of discards in recent years (estimated to be X7 landings). The spatial distribution of discards is also an issue. Incentivised discard sampling could considerably strengthen the assessment.

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Responsibility/Solution</u>
Total mortality estimates	S
Stock identity	S
Discards sampling more relevant	MS +I
Fisheries response to management	I (describe)
Landings data	I+MS

## **Irish Sea Cod**

Discards do not seem to be a problem in this fishery but area misreporting to the Celtic Sea may be an issue. The breakdown of relations between the industry, scientists and management authorities means that there are many historical factors that impact on the assessment. Stock identity/migration issues at the north and south of the area may be an issue. The model suggests that removals are higher than landings + discards. (Removals are estimated to be X3 catches).

The model suggests that the stock has the capacity to rebuild, although there may be uncertainty over whether the correct reference points have been chosen. There is a problem of accurate sampling because of the impact of the seasonal closure.

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Responsibility/Solution</u>
Misreported catches	MS + I
Stock identity	S
Historical Issues	MS+S+I (sentinel fishery?)
Sampling issues	S+I (self-sampling?)
Natural mortality	S+I (tagging)

### **Celtic Sea Cod**

This stock was benchmarked in 2009 and as a result the assessment “fell over”. The fishery has suffered from a sequential degradation in landings data. Restrictive TACs have led to significant levels of discards, high-grading since 2003. Different fleets in the fishery have different selectivity patterns. France has instigated a self-sampling programme to address some of these issues from 2008. The stock is highly dependent on recruitment but displays a truncated age structure. A large year-class has currently been observed but the restrictive TAC has led to widespread discarding.

<u>Issues</u>	<u>Responsibility/Solution</u>
Fisheries response to management	I+MS+S + Commission
Surveys not adequate to cover stock size	S +MS+I (FSP*)
UK survey data not provided	MS
Estimates of natural mortality	S
Intermixing with VII d/stock identity	S
Area misreporting (already taken into account?)	S+I
Trevose closure impact	S

\*Fisheries Science Partnership

## **Western Channel Sole**

The stock structure is sound and discard data is reasonable.

UK: Single are licensing has resolved misreporting by area. Estimating LPUE is a problem and there is a misalignment between commercial and survey data. The low TAC has led to diversion of effort to other fisheries with the result that CPUE is no longer representative, undermining the assessment assumptions. The future of an important commercial survey is uncertain and annual changes in the spatial pattern of fisheries pose a challenge to the assessment.

France: Low priority is accorded to this fishery and as a result there is a sampling issue. However a partnership project is already underway that should provide data on all year classes.

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Responsibility/Solution</u>
CPUE	S+I (under way)
Sampling	S+I (under way)

## **Celtic Sea Sole**

Very high recruitment in 1999; fishing is largely reliant on this year class and that is a problem. The fishing effort directed on this fishery by the Belgian fleet is significant and this is also governed by opportunities/constraints in other fisheries. Lack of knowledge of the resulting patterns causes problems for the assessment.

<u>Issues</u>	<u>Responsibility/Solution</u>
Tuning index	S+I
Discard data	MS +S+I
Sampling	MS
Effort	MS

### **West of Scotland Anglers**

This is a continuous slope fishery but subject to artificial management cut offs into areas VI, VII, IV and III. As a result of under-reporting the assessment “fell over” in 2003 but subsequently skippers’ diary information has rebuilt something approximating an accurate picture of catches. However cooperation of this sort has tailed off and it is a legal grey area. Funding for surveys has been an issue. The impact of cod management measures of the distribution of fishing effort is an issue.

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Responsibility/Solution</u>
Appropriate assessment model?	S
Stock identity/misreporting	S+I
Survey problem with time series	S+MS+I
Risk in future of becoming data poor	S+MS+I
CUPE/ response to cod recovery plan	S+I

### **West of Scotland Haddock**

The assessment problems in the WOS haddock fishery parallel those in the WOS cod fishery. (See above)

### **West of Scotland Whiting**

The assessment problems facing WOS whiting parallel those facing the WOS cod and haddock fisheries (see above).

### **Rockall Haddock**

Sampling is inadequate at Rockall and a number of issues arise from trans-boundary issues (Russian fishing/mesh size). Closed areas have implications for the spatial distribution of fishing effort and therefore for the assumptions underpinning assessments. Otherwise the situation at Rockall parallels that for West of Scotland Cod. (See above)

## **Hake**

Benchmarked in 2010, the hake fishery covers a large area (3a, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) and is fished by vessels from different jurisdictions, using many different types of gear. This poses challenges for the assessment. The benchmark accepted a new methodology. Aging of the fish is problematic and at present can't be trusted. Survey indices are patchy (nothing in VI or IV). The scientists are confident of trends but not enough to provide TAC advice. The signal of a strongly decreasing trend in fishing mortality is doubted.

<u>Issues</u>	<u>Responsibility/Solution</u>
Assessment model	S
Survey coverage (spatial and age structure)	S+MS
Decrease in F	S+I (industry narrative?)
Discards (uneven coverage)	MS +I+S
Very dependent on accurate catch data	MS+I+S
Standardised CPUE	S

## **Skates and Rays**

The data issues in relation to skates and rays are due to be addresses at a forthcoming ICES working group. It therefore makes sense to await the outcome of that group before making recommendations from the data task force.



## **Remedial measures**

Although a stock by stock approach to data deficiencies make much sense, the meeting recognised that the following generic points could be made on how assessments could be strengthened:

- Accurate recording of landings provides the backbone for most stock assessments
- Improved understanding of fishing effort is required, especially time on the fishing grounds, targeting and other fishing behaviours and strategies
- Reintegration of CPUE into assessments
- Well designed and applied self-sampling
- Cooperation with the requirements of the Data Collection Framework Regulation
- An increasing number of incentivised fully documented fisheries
- The establishment of reference fleets
- Where appropriate sentinel fisheries
- Dialogue between scientists and industry on changing fishing patterns
- RACs and member states promotion of fisheries science partnerships
- Cooperation on tagging studies
- Closing the gap in perceptions
- Strong communications between scientists, fisheries managers and fisheries stakeholders at every level
- Identifying and working on problem areas

## **Next Steps**

It was agreed that the parties identified as responsible for dealing with specific data deficiencies should take the steps that they deem necessary; a future meeting of the NW waters task force would assess progress. In the meantime it would be possible to track initiatives generated by the Task Force by coordinating with ICES.

NWWRAC: For the responsibilities falling to the industry, the issues should be taken forward in the respective NWWRAC working group:

- West of Scotland
- Channel
- Celtic Sea
- Irish Sea

## **Conclusion**

This was a very productive meeting which saw a high degree of collaboration between scientists, member states and the RACs. A very important start was made in resolving the data deficiencies which plague many fisheries in Area VII and VIII. It is important that the three parties now build on these foundations to address the issues identified and report back to ICES on the progress made. ICES will keep the RACs informed.

## Annex I. List of participants provided by ICES

### Second Data Deficiency Coordination Workshop with the RACs [WKDDRAC2]

31 March–1 April 2011

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