

**North Western Waters Regional Advisory Committee
Working Group 3
13th March 2008
Manchester (UK)**

Report by Rapporteur, Jim Portus:

1. The Chairman, Daniel Lefèvre, welcomed delegates to Manchester and moved the **adoption of Agenda**. Approved.

2. **Scallop Management:** Agenda topic introduced by Chairman, Daniel Le Fevre. He reminded delegates of the discussions extending over 2 years that centred on joint “trans-manche” management of scallop fisheries. The NWWRAC hosted a conference in London in October 2006 that presented the various national strategies for the control of exploitation of this valuable non-TAC species. France has 30 years experience of controls, both spatial and temporal, that they would like to see harmonised across the Channel. Following the London Conference letters were submitted to each Member State seeking experimentation with ring sizes and other technical innovations. Although there is no support from the Commission, scalloping is an issue in which the NWWRAC can be proactive. It would deal with a fishery that is by definition, exploited responsibly and sustainably.

Jim Portus: Referred to the Conference in London and the subsequent letter sent by the NWWRAC to Member States and requested clarification about responses. He introduced Peter Merrick, former Chairman of UK Scallop Association and a prominent merchant/ processor of scallops based in Fleetwood.

Peter Merrick: Has 35 years experience. Suggested that the UK France problems associated with marketing of scallops derive from imports from third countries (Peruvian, Japanese...). Fresh fish can be air-freight imported from afar at prices below competitive. Any closures within EU could lead to the void filled by imports. It would be difficult to regain the market subsequently.

The Chairman accepted that the problems of the market are not things for the NWWRAC to consider. The focus must remain on technical measures and harmonisation of seasonal and other restrictions.

Eric Foucher (IFREMER): Confirmed there had been few experiments on gear. Ring sizes can readily be compared in relation to selectivity. The 92mm agreed in France does help avoidance of juveniles. This may be crucial for the breeding stock.

Richard Brouzes: Confirmed that 80% of French consumption is of imported scallops. For the market in France the winter scallop sells better and is preferred. He felt that it would be advantageous to close 7d in the summer to all fishers, but 7e should not be closed. He also felt that certification of origin could be better regulated.

Tom Bryan-Brown: Felt that the London Conference established much common ground and those issues should be the focus of ongoing co-operation, rather than considering new things, such as closed seasons.

Barrie Deas: Suggested that dialogue should look at the three aspects of the scallop sector:

- Best way to manage the resource
- Market
- Environmental impact of scallop gear.

On that last point, he felt it important to consider fully the UN resolutions and environmental considerations. The ban on bottom trawling in some sensitive areas might spread to others that would, in time, impact on all towed fishing gear including dredges. Supermarkets are exerting pressure on behalf of consumers and the Women's Institute in the UK, a powerful lobby, is considering such a ban for discussion at its Annual Meeting. He cautioned that the sector should be proactive and seek ways to mitigate impact for survival.

The Chairman accepted the need for such caution, but urged proportionality in our reactions.

Eric Foucher: Expressed the view that there appear to be few alternatives to harvesting scallops with dredges.

Jim Portus: Suggested that the industry might prepare by engaging in seabed mapping exercises of scallop activity and benthic material. Special areas of Conservation (SACs) and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) can be fished, if Appropriate Assessments show historic levels of activity in areas of current fishing.

Helen McLachlan: Did not think that a ban on scallop dredging was contemplated, but pointed out that Member States have an obligation to designate MPAs to protect seabed environments, as for example, already done in some areas on the West coast of Scotland that are having impact on fishing.

The Chairman offered the opinion that dredging for Marine Aggregates has a far greater impact on the seabed than ever scallop dredging could have.

Joe Maddock: In Ireland where there have been moves towards banning dredging the fishers have shown their effect is minimal. He also opined that a summer closure throughout Area 7d would be economically damaging to Irish fishers and they would prefer to continue with existing regulations on gear size and fish size.

The Chairman repeated that the French fishers had worked with IFREMER to establish 92mm as the optimum ring size for legal-sized fish.

Barrie Deas: Informed the meeting that ICES considers it relevant to "Reverse the burden of proof in fisheries". It is one of their 8 priorities. In essence fishing would be allowed with any gear except if it is forbidden. These changes might come about through the reform of the CFP in 2012. He urged a start with planning.

Jim Portus: Preparations should include seabed and habitat mapping. Suggested the letter to Member States for scientific co-operation should be re-issued with the addition of request for seabed mapping projects.

Michael Walsh: Expressed concerns that it is not so much the targeted fish that is the problem, but the inadvertent bycatch of other seabed life.

Tom Bryan-Brown: Admitted that the French sector is very heavily regulated, evidently more than in other countries. Opined that others might consider such an approach.

The Chairman hoped that the outcome would be consensus on unifying ring-size if not the 7d seasonal closure. He thought that the NWWAC should make progress on drafting Appropriate Assessment for the Natura 2000 sites that overlap scallop beds.

Jim Portus: Requested that the focus should remain on preparation for Appropriate Assessments and that harmonisation of technical and seasonal restrictions is a low priority while the sector is the subject of close scrutiny by environmentalist pressure groups.

Michael Walsh: Considered that stocks of scallops seem in good shape and are managed sustainably by each Member State. Seabed mapping surveys would reveal the state of the bottom. Structural changes in Ireland have led to 70% reduction in effort and 50% reduction of fleet of dredgers since 2005. The greatest ongoing issue is introduction of MPAs and industry-gathered knowledge would be a useful protective measure.

Jacques Bigot: Offered a differing opinion. Considers that working with different regulations should be unacceptable. Proposes to manage under a common regulation with access under equal conditions and terms.

The Chairman proposed the following as Action Points:

- **Select a small study Area (7d) and work together to try formulating a common technical regulation through trials of ring sizes, etc.**
- **For the time-being, park the subject of a common seasonal closure, but come back to it once technical trials have completed.**
- **Issue letter to Member States seeking partnerships on seabed mapping in addition to earlier requests for co-operative study.**

3. Review of EC Response to NWWRAC Advice on TAC & Quotas for 2008

- Comments on Specific Stocks for Area VII d & e:

- * Cod
- * Plaice
- * Sole

The Chairman introduced this Agenda topic. He expressed concern that management of the Channel stock is confusing and there is no coherence between the 11% increase of N Sea Cod for 2008 and the 7% reduction in 7d. It is essential that the Commission provides clarification of the situation that puts Channel Cod in this “sandwich” between Celtic Sea and North Sea.

The Chairman asked Jim Portus, who had drafted the NWWRAC Advice paper, for his response to the EC Reply. In turn, Jim Portus asked Paul Trebilcock to provide the WG3 with a summary of the debate on cod from WG2.

Paul Trebilcock: WG2 had focussed on 2 key points.

1. In the short-term to write asking ICES to review urgently the scientific basis for the 2008 TAC, in the light of dense shoals of Cod.
2. In the longer-term to consider the effects of the Trevose Box and to seek other practical and effective measures that might help continue to avoid effort limitations, such as gear selectivity devices.

Jacques Bigot: Echoed the Chairman’s earlier concerns about lack of coherence. Scientists think it is the same stock as area IV (North Sea), but as TAC it is joined with Celtic Sea. He proposed change that might allow departure from the joint management of N Sea and Channel.

Richard Brouzes: Suggested that extra 7d Cod might be taken as “of which” element of N Sea Cod. Urgent that more quota is allocated to eliminate unusually high discard levels. Perhaps an observation campaign might demonstrate the situation?

Joe Maddock: Expressed disappointment with the outcome for Channel (7bk) Cod as the indications from the scientists had been quite optimistic.

Jacques Bigot: Industry professionals are aware fully of the need to participate in assessments and provided initiatives for cod and whiting to help scientists to understand these fisheries better.

Fishers must, however, participate in the decision-making process so that measures adopted can be worthy of respect.

Channel Plaice and Sole (Areas 7d and 7e):

Jim Portus: reported that Plaice 7d,e has been removed from the list of stocks eligible for banking from 2007 for use in 2008. This point had not been noticed during the pre-meetings for December Council, when the NWWRAC had been lobbying for status quo TAC. The significance of losing the 10% quota that would have been banked from last year to this is now recognised.

Jim Portus: reported the disappointing 15% cut to the Sole 7e TAC that resulted from the terms of the Recovery Plan adopted in April 2007. The NWWRAC had strived to achieve stability for fishers by having the same Fishing Mortality (F) for 3 years. By updating the assessment of F each year, the target Mortality would be reached more rapidly, but the industry would have to cope with fluctuations to the TAC, a situation not much better or different than inherent in the annual TAC method.

4. Cod recovery in East Channel (7d): EC Response to NWWRAC Advice on Cod Recovery for the Eastern Channel: Proposed way forward:

The Chairman referred again to the incoherence of the ICES assessment linking 7d to the N Sea, yet the Quota management unit links 7d to the rest of Area 7.

Jacques Bigot: Expressed deep concerns about this issue. The N Sea Cod Recovery regime supposes targeted fishing, yet catches in 7d are generally bycatch in nature. Selectivity is possible for targeted catches, but this is not so for bycatches. More perverse is the reduction of days at sea for gear that has larger mesh size. He accepted need for experiments with mesh and selectivity. He proposed a briefing note for consideration by the Exec Committee, but this was deemed, after further debate, unconstitutional without the prior approval of the WG3.

At this stage, the Rapporteur, Jim Portus, had to take leave for another meeting.

5. Presentation on international action plan for the conservation and restoration of the European sturgeon: risks of incidental catches (Nicolas Michelet – CNPMM)

Wild sturgeon of NW Atlantic: ongoing campaign to restore European stock, avoid accidental by-catches; every single capture would involve a risk for future recovery of the stock. Spawning area: Gironde. Life cycle very long, many habitats and migratory. Population at sea: few hundred specimens.

Helen: Secretariat to e-mail details for circulation amongst all members;

Nicolas: Spanish version; draft information package. Communicate these to all WG3 members. Have booklet published also in Spanish.

6. Presentation from IFREMER about French fisheries (Eric Foucher)

Definition of French fisheries:

- Theoretical explanation of concept from Stéphanie:

How to improve CFP, approach “by fishery” for improving management of fisheries.

Move to an “eco-system” evaluation from the current stock one.

Fishing unit = combination of métiers (gears x species x area).

Regulation focused to each fishery.

Define overall objectives about eco-systems on a global framework.

Objectives:

Simplification of regulation at the local level (with framework regulation defining overall objectives)

- Scientific presentation

Action: Upload PPT to NWWRAC Website

The Chairman requested IFREMER to extract information relevant for NWWRAC.

Barrie Deas queried: What is this exercise for? Where is it going? Is it part of the review of CFP in 2012?

- Alternative management systems to be studied.
- Anticipate what is going to happen.

The Chairman suggested this study might allow us to have a better understanding about the fishing activities in France.

Stephanie: Suggested the work might be useful in the context of reform of TCMs.

Barrie Deas: Two strands: improving governance and regulation.

Stéphanie: Draft plans with objectives over the 10-15 years to come.

Joe Maddock: The CFP has its own segmentation of fleets. The same needs to be applied to the French study.

7. Discussions on MPAs in the Channel.

Stéphanie Tachoures made a presentation of her report in the MPAs seminar on Edinburgh. The official report from this workshop will be available soon in the NWWRAC Website.

8. Open debate and agreed proposals to put forward to the Executive Committee.

To be agreed and presented at next Executive Committee (15th April, Amsterdam)

Chairman: Daniel Lefèvre
Rapporteur: Jim Portus,

29 March 2008