

North-Western Waters Regional Advisory Council

**Working Group 4
The Irish Sea (ICES Area VIIa)
The Hague, Netherlands
Wednesday the 1st March 2006
2.00pm – 4.30pm**

Chair: Lorcan Ó Cinnéide (Ireland)

Vice-Chair/Rapporteur: Alan McCulla (UK)

The Chair opened the meeting by expressing the NWWRAC's gratitude to the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs for providing such excellent meeting facilities in The Hague. He also expressed his thanks to the interpreters for their sterling work over the two days of the Working Group meetings.

The Chair reminded working group members that these meetings were intended to be the primary source of input into the deliberations of the Executive Committee and he felt that members of all working groups had not settled into a proper mode of operation in this respect.

- 1. The agenda was adopted by the Working Group.**
- 2. Report of Working Group meeting held in Paris on Monday, 7th November 2005.**

Manx representatives raised the issue of seeking a derogation for the Queenie fishery in the Irish Sea, which utilised nets in the 70-99mm band, but which recorded little or no whitefish by-catch. They reminded members that this issue had been raised at the November meeting, but had not been recorded in the minutes. The issue had been accepted by the Working Group last November and it was agreed that the report of November meeting would be amended accordingly and the issue would be considered at the Next Executive Committee meeting.

With this amendment, the report of the November meeting was adopted.

- 3. Irish Sea Cod Recovery**

The Chair opened debate on this issue by reminding members that the EC had launched a formal review of the Cod Recovery Programme. In doing this he was mindful of very useful correspondence originating from the North Sea RAC that had not been circulated to Working Group members. It was agreed to circulate these documents.

The Vice-Chair advised members that during a meeting with the European Parliament's Fisheries committee in January 2006, Commissioner Borg had given a commitment that in drafting their terms of reference with ICES for 2006; the EC would seek a working group to examine specific Irish Sea issues.

The Chair further advised the Working Group that the Commission is discussing the possibility of convening a group/meeting on Cod Recovery issues in June 2006 and would be seeking the RAC's view regarding the constitution of such a group.

The issue facing today's meeting was whether or not specific Irish Sea issues could be encompassed within a broader Cod Recovery review. Therefore, the question that arose was the degree to which there should be involvement in the June review process by members of the ISWG? After an exchange of views the consensus was that the ISWG should participate in the EC's wide-ranging review of Cod recovery and pending discussions at this level a decision should be taken as to whether or not to seek a specific Irish Sea group, which recognised the specifics of the area.

It was agreed that for 2006 the Working Group's work programme would include an analysis of specific issues facing the Irish Sea such as fleet profiles, fishing patterns, and geographical distinction of the stocks and/or interaction between stocks. It was proposed that a short report on these issues be collated for the next working group meeting by email. The Chair agreed to take responsibility for this project.

The Chair drew the attention of members to a paper published from the journal of Marine Science, which included in his opinion rather controversial conclusions concerning Cod Recovery in the Irish Sea. It was agreed this report be circulated to members. Another report drafted by Ireland's Marine Institute was also mentioned as being a useful tool in terms of reviewing developments within the Irish Sea since 2000

Given that the Irish Sea was now in the midst of its 7th annual temporary spring closure aimed at protecting cod, and that issues remained about data deficiencies from the Irish Sea, it was agreed that a number of questions had to be tabled about the effectiveness of the closure. Was the current approach correct? Was implementation of the recovery programme beneficial? Were existing derogations helpful? In addition to the closure an effort restrictions were now in place. What had this contributed? Were estimates of cod stocks correct? Had the stock behaved as had been projected at the outset of the Recovery Programme? Was there anything man could do to assist Cod recovery in the Irish Sea? These were questions that were also being examined in the context of cod recovery programmes in other sea areas. It was agreed that while the North Sea example provided a useful blueprint, the ISWG needed to draw up its own specific list of issues and set suitable deadlines to examine these issues prior to the next meeting of the RAC.

Dr. Mike Armstrong briefed the meeting upon the recently launched series of egg surveys being carried out in collaboration between the UK and Ireland in the Irish Sea. These surveys were being developed as an additional tool to monitor and verify the level and distribution of cod stocks in the Irish Sea, as well as examine issues as to the extent and timing of spawning. This was a long term programme and no results would be forthcoming until at least next year. Industry representatives confirmed their knowledge of the work and advised Dr. Armstrong that a series of questions had been tabled about the egg surveys, but to date these questions had not been answered.

It was agreed that industry support of this initiative was needed and that this was another tool that would add to the understanding of this stock. Yet at the same time

the survey had to be put into context. In isolation it could be regarded as contributing nothing new and therefore branded as part of the reason the cod recovery plan had apparently failed.

4. Proposal from ANIFPO

The Working Group discussed the proposal tabled by the Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers Organisation (copy attached). The Vice-Chair explained that he regarded this proposal as a way of addressing the deficiencies in fisheries data from the Irish Sea and hoped that if it were adopted that it would ultimately lead to a breakthrough in fisheries management for the Irish Sea. At this stage the proposal was in its infancy and if it were to be adopted a great deal more detailed work would have to be put in.

The ISWG agreed this was a radical approach and while there were a number of issues raised and questions tabled about the detail of the proposal, there was general agreement that this was the way to proceed. The meeting was told that a similar idea had been tabled for the Kattegat.

Dr. Armstrong stated that anything that will give us more accurate information should be applauded, but that the proposal needed development. There was agreement on this point. It was agreed that over the next few weeks that Working Group members should email their thoughts on the proposal to the Secretariat or directly to the ANIFPO and that appropriate amendments would be included in the proposal.

Barrie Deas suggested that the aim should be to produce a robust proposal by Easter 2006, which could be tabled at the next Executive Committee meeting. It was agreed that this work could proceed in parallel with involvement in the general review of the Cod Recovery Programme.

Luc Mallearts from the Belgian industry advised the ISWG that Belgian scientists were working on board Belgian beam- trawlers in the Irish Sea. A lot of data was being collated and he believed this data would be available to the ISWG. He agreed to pursue this for the next meeting

Sam Lambourn, Chairman of the NWWRAC confirmed his perception that the Commission were well aware that something had to be done with the Irish Sea; the fundamental problem was the weakness of fishery data. He felt that the Commission were desperate to find a way through this problem.

5. AOB

It was agreed that issues about the Queenie fishery had been covered at the outset of the meeting.

Michael Parry, representing Welsh fishing interests discussed the issue of SACs. He explained that 70% of the Welsh coast coastline had now been designated as of international importance and that regretfully these designations were stopping traditional fishing operations. He agreed to produce a paper on the subject for the next Working Group meeting.

The Chairman agreed this was an increasingly important issue. The ISWG would have to understand the processes leading to such designations, as well as developing views on the issue. This was an issue, which together with the impact of wind farms, tidal energy sources and aggregate dredging, which deserved significant consideration.

6. Conclusion

The Chairman stated that there was a developing programme of work that had to be undertaken over the next few months. This involved the refinement of the ANIFPO proposal discussed earlier, as well as dealing with a range of other issues raised at this meeting. He encouraged all ISWG members to participate fully in this programme. The output of the Group depended upon the input of its members