



## **REPORT OF MEETING**

### **North West Waters Regional Member States Group**

**Brussels, 10 September 2014**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The NWWAC was invited to attend part of the meeting in Brussels on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> September of the “High Level Group” of Member States in the North Western Waters.

The group was to address in a preliminary way a discard plan for demersal fisheries in north western waters and the AC was invited for an hour to discuss the work programme and preliminary ideas. Preparation time was short but conveniently several AC members were attending another part of the meeting as EAPO representatives, so the attending NWWAC team was: Emiel Brouckaert (Executive Committee Member – Belgium); Eibhlin O’Sullivan (Executive Committee Member – Ireland); Paul Trebilcock (Deputy Chair Celtic Sea WG – UK); Jacques Pichon (Vice Chairman); Bertie Armstrong (Chairman). A brief pre-meeting was held on the day, with proposed input being extracted from AC work done in the March meeting of our Horizontal Working Group.

## **REPORT OF MEETING**

The meeting comprised Member States’ Fisheries Directors (a Technical Group exists also, which met in July, details of which we will seek) and was divided into three parts. Firstly a meeting of the Directors themselves to look at a work programme for a regional demersal discard plan, secondly a meeting between the Directors and the Commission and finally an hour with the NWWAC delegates.

We had expected a preliminary briefing from the Group, but we were given the floor first. We restated our commitment to making a real contribution to regional management and regarding the demersal discard ban NWWAC members made the following input:

- On the matter of general approach to discarding, we noted that the legislation process leading to the CFP Basic Regulation had built into the Landing Obligation and associated articles a number of flexibilities, reflecting an understanding by Member States that an excessively rigid application of the obligation without use of flexibility where required would create unnecessary damage to the Member State fleets. This was accepted.
- Noting that the North Sea High Level Group (Scheveningen Group) was working also on a regional discard plan for demersal fisheries, we asked how these might be coordinated to avoid obvious difficulties for fisheries working cross-boundary, or for the use of different rules for the same stock. The Group indicated that they understood the problem.
- We asked who would define the fisheries to be addressed, noting the requirement for everyone to work on the same things, and also how these would be coordinated. The Group told us that they would lead in making this decision.
- We noted the fundamentally important question of phasing of Landing Obligation introduction. The importance of this was recognised by the Group given the uncertainty that will be inevitable in the earlier parts of the implementation.

The Group then gave us the preliminary headlines to be addressed by the NWWAC in preparing plans, with a timescale of receipt as soon as sensibly possible (the NS group has asked the NS AC for input by November this year). These were:

- Definition of the fisheries: A description of the demersal fisheries including target species, area, métier and secondary catch species. For mixed fisheries, a pragmatic approach will be necessary.
- Phasing of Landing Obligation: Given the scope for interpretation (Article 15.1(c)) including the choice of target species for introduction in 2016 and suggestions for follow-on timings and species for by-catches.
- De minimis: Specific-case recommendations (as set out in Article 15.5(c))
- High Survivability recommendations: Specific cases (Article 15.4(b))
- Documentation of catches: Recommendations on how this might be achieved.
- Minimum Conservation Reference Size: Specific recommendations for adjustment or introduction of Minimum Conservation Reference Sizes (MCRS).
- Scientific Basis: Reflections on the quality and quantity of scientific evidence to support flexibility recommendations including *de minimis*.
- Choke species: Their identification and suggestions for potential mitigation.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The meeting was useful in that the NWWAC is considered to be a partner in the matter of preparing discard plans.

I recommend that:

- We seek information from the Group (next chair and administration is the Netherlands) on the composition and output to date of the Technical Group. An invitation to join it is expected.
- The listing of output required from is in preparing demersal discard plans (the eight points above) form the basis of discussions at the upcoming Horizontal Working Group on Discards to be held in Dublin on 17 September.

BA

12 September 2014