



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR  
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES  
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN  
WATERS  
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA  
LAS AGUAS  
NOROCCIDENTALES

## **DRAFT MINUTES**

### **FOCUS GROUP ON SEABASS (FGBass)**

**The Main Conference Centre – Dublin Castle**

**Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2016**

**13:30 – 16:30**

#### **1. Welcome and introductions**

The acting Chairman, Jim Portus (replacing Barrie Deas who had sent his apologies), welcomed the attendees to the meeting. The full list of participants is included as an annex to these minutes.

The agenda<sup>1</sup> was adopted as drafted. The action point from the last meeting in Paris (February 2016) had been completed, with the organisation of a meeting of the Advice Drafting Group on seabass in March 2016.

#### **2. NWWAC advice May 2016 – and the EC response**

On the basis of the Advice Drafting Group work, a Framework advice had been formulated that was sent to the Commission, and the NWWAC received a response on the Presentation of response on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July 2016 ([link](#)).

The Commission response mentioned the following points for consideration in the light of further developing advice.

- a. Consequences of including the northern stock<sup>2</sup> in the NWW MAP  
The Secretariat (Barbara Schoute) explained that although the stock is distributed from the southern North Sea up to the Celtic Sea according to scientific advice, the Commission indicated that they intend the stock to be included in the Multi-Annual Plan for NWW. The NSAC Focus Group on seabass had been informed about the Commission response, but had nothing to add to this point.
- b. Catch and discard information for STECF  
The Chair commented that from his experience in 2016, the UK landings had plummeted, and fleets had been displaced, targeting different stocks. The French industry had similar experiences, for example the 1<sup>st</sup> semester landings in 2016 in the north were around 75%

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<sup>1</sup> All relevant documents to the meeting can be found on the NWWAC website: [link](#)

<sup>2</sup> Northern stock = Divisions 4.b–c, 7.a, and 7.d–h (ICES advice: [link](#)),  
Western stock in Divisions 6.a, 7.b, and 7.j (ICES advice: [link](#))

lower compared to 2012. They noted that Ifremer had advised that if the fishing mortality were to be reduced by 30%, a revision of the advice could be considered.

The other interest groups commended the industry for having achieved this massive reduction in landings, but reminded the meeting that this was still considerably more catches than the ICES advice. The industry members of the meeting commented that any further reduction of landings would be meaningless because it would mean discarding of unavoidable bycatches. Fishing crews were very unhappy to have to discard valuable fish, and sought evidence of benefits arising from the efforts in the seabass management implemented over the past two years.

The Commission (Robert Griffin) also considered the 75% reduction in landings was a very important step, but unfortunately the ICES advice for zero catches meant there was no short-term benefit and it was important to look at the long-term management plan. He noted the difference between landings and actual catches, and information on the successful avoidance practices would be useful to take on board for future management decisions.

The industry members informed the meeting that the fishing strategy had changed completely, even in deep and mid-water trawlers. Some fleets however depended on a targeted seabass fisheries (for example 300 French vessels), for which no alternative catch options were available. The industry stressed the fact that implementing the ICES advice would cause serious socio-economic effects for many fishing communities.

The Commission indicated that the current measures for seabass took socio-economic effects into account, which is why the ICES advice was not strictly followed. Further development of EU management for seabass could be improved with help from the ACs by informing the EC and scientists about the methods used by fishermen to reduce mortality.

The industry argued that it was important to evaluate the biological and socio-economic results of the current measures, and balance the results between the northern and southern stocks. The other interest groups were asked if they had suggestions for alternative measures to improve the state of the stock.

The other interest groups shared their concern of the consequences of a possible collapse of the stock. They urged the industry members to work together in the AC to find and encourage additional measures to try to make both the stock and fishing communities sustainable. In the light of the ICES advice, the stock must have an opportunity to recover.

The Chair led the group back to the discussion on the need to have sufficient data for the evaluation of the stock status and management measures. The meeting agreed that the lack of data on catches was a cause for concern, but it was noted that other factors, such as water quality and climate change could also cause changes in the (distribution of) the stock. A request for a full overview of stock distribution would be needed.

The Commission emphasised the need for guidance from stakeholders on this stock. Taking into account the scientific advice, the Commission had been forced to implement short term measures, but would be much helped with advice on how for the longer-term.

c. Selectivity trial proposals for specific fisheries

The Chair asked the group if there were further reports on improvement of selectivity, especially considering the 1% bycatch rule was causing large problems for trawlers. The industry members noted that no further action was taken because avoidance of catches was considered much more immediate and efficient than release from the net and discarding than might not be reduced to zero.

d. Identifying nursery areas and associated fisheries (management)

Industry members indicated that seabass was a highly mobile species, and determining specific areas with concentrations of seabass beforehand would be virtually impossible. Avoidance was based on local knowledge and once a haul showed an unexpected bycatch of seabass, that area could be avoided temporarily, but due to the high mobility the stock could move away quickly.

A suggestion was made to propose a formalised process to inform the industry about local patches of seabass that should be avoided temporarily, as was done for cod (Real Time Closures, RTCs). The industry acknowledged the need to inform local fishermen about zones that should be avoided because of seabass catches, but stressed that the greater mobility of the stock than for example cod, made it impractical to fix an RTC process. The mobile, patchy distribution of the stock resulted in a certain level of unavoidable bycatches per haul, and the current reduction of catches was a result of fishermen moving out of areas with high seabass concentrations after such a haul. Industry members considered it was up to fishermen to optimise their avoidance behaviour, but this could never avoid 100% of catches.

e. Evaluation of alternative closed seasons for 110 mm driftnets

This point would be taken up under the next agenda item.

f. Recreational fisheries – concrete management proposals

The Chair asked the representative of the recreational fisheries if there were any aspects he could add to improve the framework advice. The recreational fisheries representative (John Crudden) informed the meeting that a number of Member State projects started in 2016 to collect catch data by recreational fisheries. A pilot project was underway in the Netherlands and Belgium, and two Irish pilots were gathering information, as well as a Danish project that used mobile phone data. There were no datasets available yet from these projects.

The fishing industry commented that there should be a clear distinction between commercial and non-commercial fisheries. Anglers that sell their catch to restaurants for example are poachers, and enforcement of the rules is needed. In France, rangers had been appointed to improve enforcement on anglers landing and selling their catch.

### **3. Progress with industry – science partnerships**

Lisa Readdy (CEFAS, UK) presented an overview of the latest science on seabass. The main assessment uncertainties were the lack of estimates of recreational catches and discards by the fishing industry. A benchmark is planned for 2017, and members of the NWWAC are invited to sign up at the ICES Secretariat.

A number of Fisheries-Science Partnership (FSP) projects were underway. Selectivity trials were done for gillnets, which showed that 120 mm mesh sizes showed optimal avoidance of seabass under the MCRS of 42 cm. A trawl survey had also been carried out, and a square mesh panel attached around the full circumference of the net was shown to considerably reduce undersized catches. Additionally, tagging programs were underway in cooperation with Ifremer (Bargip) to better understand patterns of movement of the stock(s), as well as finding the nursery areas. Information on nursery areas around the French coast were not well known. Results of the programs were due to be published at the end of 2016.

The main problems for seabass were related to the biology of the stock, which makes it vulnerable due to slow growth and relatively late maturity, along with the expansion of the seabass fisheries over time, especially after the high recruitment in 1989. It is a shared resource between commercial and recreational fisheries, and catch data are considered uncertain for both. Ms Readdy stressed the need for more information on the impact of the landing obligation as well as post-release survival.

Representatives from the industry considered that the studies presented were very relevant, and that fishermen would be happy to contribute data to the scientific process, but they were uncertain as to which data scientists would need from fishermen. They also questioned the changes in the assessment between years, especially changes in the confidence intervals (uncertainty) around biomass estimates.

Ms Readdy asked fishermen and recreational anglers to provide information on all catches, and stressed the need for inshore fleet information. She explained that the improvement of the assessments through the benchmark process now means that scientists know more about the level of uncertainty than in the past, where this was not calculated.

The Secretariat asked Ms Readdy if it would be possible to send out a 'data-call' to fishermen in preparation for the benchmark. Ms Readdy considered that data-calls are normally set up for the provision of data based on national data-bases, which meant that scientists knew exactly what type of data would be delivered. In the case of fishermen, it was unclear what data fishermen might have available, so a data-call might be difficult to develop. The Secretariat noted the fact that this meant fishermen were unsure about the data needed, and scientists did not know what data were available, so a translation would be useful. Ms Readdy invited all relevant stakeholders to take part in the Data Evaluation Workshop (DEWK) set up to analyse all available data in preparation for the benchmark meeting.

From the side of the French institute, Ifremer (Mickael Drogou) had informed the Secretariat that there was an extensive tagging program in progress, which meant they could not yet provide conclusions on stock structure. Additionally, they had developed a scientific survey on seabass nurseries, for which funding had yet to be found.

No further information on scientific studies considering recreational fisheries were presented.

#### **4. Planning and Terms of Reference for an Advice Drafting Group (ADG)**

The Chair sketched the time frame in which the NWWAC could provide advice on management decisions by the Commission and Member States for 2017.

- Input for the November STECF meeting – before the end of October

- Input for the December Council – before the end of November

The Commission indicated that the proposal for the December Council will be available by the end of October. Mr Griffin stressed that more information on socio-economic effects and effective avoidance would help to reach better conclusions in the Council. In general, the Commission was not considering a moratorium, but would concentrate on management of a low fishing mortality for seabass.

The meeting was asked if there were specific points to bring forward by an Advice Drafting Group based on the discussion. One example would be to ask STECF to evaluate the effects of RTCs for seabass, based on the information from the industry (indicating it might not work due to the mobility of the stock) and the experience from cod recovery plan.

The French industry was worried about the idea to transpose management measures between stocks, and was dubious as to if/how this would work, and the implications of closed areas on mixed fisheries, and small-scale inshore fishermen. They stressed that RTCs can only work on the basis of self-sampling by fishermen, making full use of fishermen's knowledge. The other interest groups agreed that it was vital to use the knowledge of fishermen to develop efficient management plans.

The Commission noted that RTCs would inevitably cause displacement of fishing effort, which could have specific side effects. If the NWWAC would want to ask STECF for an evaluation of the effects of RTCs for seabass, a specific request with a full description of the measure would be needed.

The Chair suggested that if there was no agreement on an evaluation of RTCs, it would at least be important to ask for an evaluation of the current management measures.

The French industry noted that an increase in recruitment was shown in the stock assessment for seabass, which suggested the measures taken in the past two years had been successful. There were divergent views on the development of proposals on RTCs, which some argued would need more time to develop based on fishermen's knowledge and experience, while others reasoned RTCs might have negative effects, and might not contribute much to the measures already in place.

Chair concluded that considering the differences in opinion it was not possible to draft a request for evaluation of new measures. He suggested that the ADG could be asked to draft a letter underlining the conclusions from the previous meetings without proposing new measures but stressing the need to evaluate old measures first. This was met with general agreement.

## **5. Summary of actions agreed and decisions adopted by the Chair**

The Focus Group asked the Advice Drafting Group to put together an NWWAC letter based on the conclusions of the meeting to be sent to the Commission and Member States in preparation for the December Council.

NWWAC Document  
Chair: Jim Portus  
Rapporteur: Barbara Schoute

## Annex 1 – List of Participants

NWWAC members		
Jim Portus		South Western Fish Producer Organisation
Marina Le Gurun		Blue Fish
John Crudden		European Anglers Alliance
Debbie Crockard		Seas at Risk Organisation
Vera Coelho		The Pew Charitable Trusts
Julien Lamothe		Association Nationale des Organisations de Producteurs
Paul Françoise		Comité Départemental des Pêches et des Élevages Marine: CDPMEM 14
Romain Le Bleis		Comité Départemental des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins du Finistère
Manu Kelbérine		Comité Départemental des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins des Côtes d'Armor
Caroline Gamblin		Comité National des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins
Daniel Lefèvre		Comité Régional des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins de Basse Normandie
Olivier Le Nezet		Comité Régional des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins de Bretagne
Pascal Coquet		Comité Régional des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins de Haute-Normandie
Olivier Leprêtre		Comité Régional des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins du Nord / Pas de Calais / Picardie
Richard Brouzes		Copeport Maree OPBN
Francois Hennuyer		FROM Nord
Franck Le Barzic		OP COBRENORD
Marc Ghiglia		Union des armateurs de la pêche en France
John Woodlock		Irish Seal Sanctuary
Geert Meun		Stichting van de Nederlandse Visserij / Dutch Fisheries Organisation (2)
Stephan Beaucher		Fundació ENT
Liane Veitch		ClientEarth
Paul Fletcher		Scottish Fishermen's Federation (1)
Mike Park		The Scottish White Fish Producers Association (1)
Observers		
Dimitri Rogoff		Comité Départemental des Pêches et des Élevages Marine: CDPMEM 14
Lisa Readdy		CEFAS
Dana Miller		Oceana
Gonzague de Moncuit		Ministère d'environnement, énergie et mer
Maeve White		Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Jonathan Shrives		European Commission
Robert Griffin		European Commission
Mathieu Vimard		OPN
Edward Fahy		Eatenfishsoonforgotten.com
Vincent Lamidel		Comité Régional des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins de Haute-Normandie
NWWAC Secretariat		
Conor	Nolan	Executive Secretary
Barbara	Schoute	Deputy Executive Secretary
Sara	Vandamme	Project Development and Communications Manager
Aoibhín	O Malley	Financial Administrator and Event Manager