



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

MINUTES

WORKING GROUP 4 (IRISH SEA)

Conference Room 01, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh
Wednesday 6th of July 2016
14:30 – 16:00

1. Welcome

The acting WG4 Chairman, Hugo Boyle, welcomed the members and the attendees to the meeting. The full list of participants is included as an annex to these minutes.

An apology for absence was received from Francis O'Donnell (who was replaced by John Ward) from Alan McCulla and Patrick Murphy. John Ward kindly agreed to be rapporteur for this meeting in cooperation with the Secretariat.

The agenda¹ was adopted as drafted. The Chair called all stakeholders in the meeting to cooperate in order to make progress on the sea basin under discussion. The action points from the last meeting in Edinburgh (8th July 2015) had been completed, except for the drafting of the Terms of Reference for the Focus Group on the Irish Sea. The Chair asked the meeting if it still considered that a specific Focus Group on the Irish Sea would be needed. The meeting argued that the function of this group was largely addressed by the Horizontal Working Group for the Landing Obligation, as well as the ICES benchmark for the Irish Sea, WKIrish. It was considered more relevant to concentrate on these working groups, while dealing with relevant sub-regional points at the Working Group 4 meetings.

The meeting concluded that a Focus Group on the Irish Sea was not required.

Emiel Brouckaert asked the meeting to support the request for ICES to include Irish Sea sole in the benchmark process. The stock had previously been on the list but had been omitted from the latest Terms of Reference. The group agreed that the Secretariat would contact ICES with the request.

ACTION: Secretariat is asked to request that ICES expand the Terms of Reference for WKIrish to include Irish Sea sole.

¹ All relevant documents to the meeting can be found at the NWWAC website: [link](#)

2. Drafting advice to inform the development of the EU TAC proposal

The meeting was asked to provide input for a response from the NWWAC to the EC Consultation on fishing opportunities for 2017, using the information provided in the ICES advice, to help inform this process.

Based on the advice presented by ICES the previous day, the Chair concluded, that there did not seem to be much hope for fisheries in the Irish Sea, with zero TACs advised for cod, whiting and sole, as well as a serious reduction in the TAC advice for haddock and only a small increase for plaice. A balance between the lack of fishing opportunities for these species and the advice for *Nephrops*, which was expected in autumn, would have to be considered to enable all fisheries to take place in a sustainable manner.

The Irish industry commented that since the majority of the Irish catches of cod and whiting were bycatches in the most commercially important, *Nephrops* fisheries, a balance might be difficult to achieve. The lack of flexibility of Irish, small-scale fisheries was also highlighted as a problem in avoiding the choking of fisheries.

Liane Veitch commented that a balance in the fisheries could be looked for by means of a Multi-Annual Plan (MAP), but with the current state of the stocks, fishing opportunities may still be too low to enable commercial fisheries for these species to take place. She suggested asking WKIrish what could be done to improve the situation, while retaining a fishing industry in the area. The ICES representative (Ghislain Chouinard) informed the group that WKIrish would try to find the cause of the problems experienced by so many fish stocks in this area.

An important point mentioned was that the haddock advice was much lower than the information from the fishing grounds. This had been communicated by the industry to national scientists and a comment had been included under the 'information from stakeholders' in the advice. The industry information, however, had not been taken into account in the assessment and, as a result, the advice was considered to be unrealistic. The meeting participants feared that the setting of a low TAC for a species under the landing obligation would not enhance its implementation. The meeting participants suggested that information on closed areas and technical measures should also be taken into account.

The Belgian fishing industry indicated that it was working together with ILVO on a fisheries science partnership to improve the stock assessment for Irish Sea sole, but data had not yet been deemed sufficient to be used for the advice. The meeting participants asked ICES to evaluate the opportunity to shorten the time series needed for new data to be introduced in the stock assessment (from 5 years to 3 years perhaps). ICES indicated that it would take this suggestion into account. The Belgian fisheries science partnership had planned an extended survey and it was noted that authorisation to conduct the research in the Irish Sea was still being discussed. The group decided to support a request from the partnership for authorisation.

Additionally, the Irish industry suggested that the effects of technical measures (for instance the use of the 300 mm panel) and closed areas that were implemented for the protection of cod should be evaluated.

The industry members asked if the use of the 300 mm panel would be contained the new Technical Measures regulation. The Commission representative (Robert Griffin) commented that this would not be the case, if this was a national measure but would check if this was a measure agreed between Ireland and the UK.

The Chair commented that the industry had made considerable sacrifices in the recovery process for cod, where not all measures had been successful, notably by allowing less fishing effort for fishermen using increased mesh sizes, which was considered a negative incentive. Members considered that investing in the recovery of stocks was important, but that in the context of the financial crisis, it was not possible to ask society to take part in this. The group did support the questions raised by WG2 on the relation between cod stocks in neighbouring areas, asking for evaluation of the accuracy of the stock definition to be able to understand the influence of the recovery of different stocks in different areas.

The working group welcomed the opportunity for stakeholders to provide quantitative data and pertinent information to the assessment in advance of the WG. The meeting was informed that this process would be further developed in cooperation with ICES, in the MIACO meeting in January. Experience from the Pelagic AC demonstrated the use of this process.

The chair concluded that the main important points for the drafting of the NWWAC response to the EC TAC consultation had been discussed, and that the following action points had resulted:

ACTION: That the NWWAC support the Belgian Marine Scientific Research application request for an extended survey on sole in the Irish Sea;

ACTION: That ICES be requested to consider whether the length of the data series used for stock assessments could be reduced (from 5 to 3 years perhaps);

ACTION: That the request to evaluate the effects of the cod recovery plan, as well as to review the genetic stock composition of cod to ascertain if the management units supported the recovery of the stock be taken up in the NWWAC TAC consultation response;

ACTION: The Secretariat to inform the Irish north and south east RIFFs about the possibility to join WKIrish.

3. Technical measures

The meeting was asked to provide input to the NWWAC response on the EC proposal for Technical Measures. A major point for Irish Sea fisheries was discussed at the ICES advice presentation the previous day: the difference in perception of the state of the stock for Irish Sea haddock, between fishermen and the ICES assessment. The industry highlighted that the catches of smaller haddock were already much larger than the catch opportunities for 2016 allowed, which was problematic for a stock under the landing obligation. John Lynch argued that more fish should be able to grow to larger sizes through the application of technical measures.

Sean O'Donoghue noted that haddock is a boom and bust fishery due to its irregular recruitment and that a TAC system based on ICES rules, did not work. It was feared that with the landing obligation in place, the current advice might result in a quota uplift that would not be sufficient and the stock would become a major choke for Irish Sea fisheries. The ICES benchmark (WKIrish) was urged to look at this issue.

The group discussed possible technical solutions and considered that the fishing closures that had been implemented over 10 years for cod recovery had not been effective. It was argued that both the setting of the TAC and technical conservation measures (TCMs) should be adjusted to avoid causing choke species. The NWW MS group would be working on a choke

plan in the 2nd half of 2017, and the group suggested that it was important to forecast choke stocks and propose measures to be applied to avoid them.

Additional measures were discussed such as quota swapping. The possibility of compensation under the EMFF was mentioned as a possible mitigation measure to reduce fishing pressure. Mr Griffin indicated that the use of EMFF funds to compensate for tie-up schemes would only be possible if Member States have co-funding available.

The Irish industry members informed the group that since the *Nephrops* fisheries is part of the landing obligation, a national measure was proposed that would increase mesh size for single-rig vessels fishing for *Nephrops*, to 80 mm in order to reduce the bycatch of small individuals from this stock.

As a general point, the group supported the issues raised by WG2 concerning the proposed increase from 80mm to 120mm minimum mesh size, specifically for fisheries on megrim and queen scallops.

John Crudden asked about the NWWAC progress on advice for rays. The group was informed that the Focus Group met in Paris in February, where it was concluded that members should develop a list of scenarios for evaluation. The Secretariat informed members that no submissions had been received, to date and that the Chair (John Lynch) was working with the Secretariat to organise a meeting in autumn, before or after the ICES advice is released.

ACTION: The NWWAC to draft advice on the Commission's Technical Conservation Measures (TCM) proposals that reflects the concerns raised by WG4.

4. Summary of actions agreed and decisions adopted by the Chair

- 1** The Secretariat is asked to request that ICES expand the Terms of Reference for WKIrish to include Irish Sea sole.
- 2** That the NWWAC support the Belgian Marine Scientific Research application request for an extended survey on sole in the Irish Sea
- 3** That ICES be requested to consider whether the length of the data series used for stock assessments could be reduced (from 5 to 3 years perhaps)
- 4** That the request to evaluate the effects of the cod recovery plan, as well as to review the genetic stock composition of cod to ascertain if the management units supported the recovery of the stock be taken up in the NWWAC TAC consultation response.
- 5** The Secretariat to inform the Irish north and south east RIFFs about the possibility to join WKIrish.

NWWAC Document
Rapporteurs: John Ward, Barbara Schoute
Review and editing: Conor P. Nolan

Annex 1 – List of Participants

NWWAC members		
Hugo	Boyle	Irish South & East FPO
Emiel	Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
John	Crudden	European Anglers Alliance
Barrie	Deas	National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations
John	Lynch	Irish Fishermen's Organisation
John	Ward	Irish Fish Producers Organisation
Sean	O'Donoghue	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
Liane	Veitch	ClientEarth
John	Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary
Observers		
Emily	Baxter	UK Wildlife Trust
Stéphan	Beucher	Consultant
Tom	Bryan-Brown	Mallaig and North West Fishermen's Association
Ghislain	Chouinard	ICES
Vera	Coelho	The Pew Charitable Trusts
Paul	Duane	Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority
Siobhán	Egan	Birdwatch Ireland
Roy	Griffin	European Commission
Jenni	Grossmann	Client Earth
Juana	Poza Poza	Ministerio de Agricultura, Alimentación y Medio Ambiente
Despina	Symons	European Bureau for Conservation and Development
Ross	Dougall	SFF
John	Anderson	SFO
Iain	Young	SWFPO
Lydia	Chaparro	Fundació ENT
Mindaugas	Kisieliauskas	European Commission
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