



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
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Minutes

FOCUS GROUP on SKATES and RAYS

**CNPMEM, Paris
Wednesday 3rd February 2016
16:00 – 17:30**

Chairman: John Lynch
Rapporteur: Richard Brouzes

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair, John Lynch welcomed AC members, Commission and Member State representatives and observers to the meeting.

The agenda¹ was adopted as drafted. The rapporteur, Richard Brouzes, informed the Group that he will retire and as a result a new rapporteur would have to be appointed for the group at the next meeting. There were no action points from the last meeting.

The Chair introduced the purpose of the meeting by reminding the AC of the advice drafted previously and the Terms of Reference from the last meeting (17th September 2015, Dublin) that aimed to develop a management plan for skates and rays.

The objective of this meeting was to decide on how to make progress towards drafting advice before the end of 2016, taking into account the latest scientific expertise, and efforts made at a workshop in Amsterdam on 1st and 2nd February 2016.

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



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2. Presentation of recent scientific work

The Chair invited Dave Reid (Marine Institute, Ireland) to present his research on an alternative management method for skates and rays, compatible with MSY and avoiding the disadvantages of a multispecies TAC, which would not safeguard endangered species and could result in the suboptimal harvesting of healthy species. It was also noted that the lack of species-specific data had prevented single-species, analytical assessments.

The work presented was part of the European [MyFish](#) project and was published in 2015 ([link to article](#)). The project aimed to develop a spatial management tool for the management of skates and rays in the Irish Sea. During the presentation a general invitation was made for stakeholder input in order to further improve the management tool.

* Summary of the presentation

Key to spatial management is the closure of a particular area for fishing to allow species to recover from overfishing and to be self-sustainable. To identify those areas to be closed, distribution maps based on survey and habitat data were constructed, showing the likely spatial autumn distribution of a ray species (the data was limited to autumn as this was when the surveys took place). Stakeholder input was requested to verify if the autumn distribution was representative of the annual distribution as if scientists know the annual distribution of the species, it can help determine the timing and length of a possible closure e.g. a full year or only during the spawning season.

In the next step, species distribution maps were compared with Catch-Per-Unit of Effort data (CPUE, based on logbook and VMS data) to allocate the fishing effort. The model was developed and tested with input from the TR1 fleet. In reality this would be expanded to include all métiers that have a significant impact on a stock. Stakeholder input was requested on this point, as it would be valuable to know what métiers should be included in future analyses. Overlaying maps of fishing effort and survey-based species distribution allowed trade-off's to be assessed such as that between the size of an area closure to protect a species (e.g. protect 15% of the species), whilst limiting effect of such a closure on the fishery as much as possible (e.g. minimising fishing effort displacement).

The model can be expanded to include many different species and the possible effects of windfarms, marine protected areas and other influences on fishery access and fishing practices.

The meeting concluded that the work presented was very informative and could be extended to other areas. It provided a good example of an area where science and industry could work together to close data gaps and look at different management strategies for data poor species.



3. Feedback from Expert meetings on Skates and Rays

Irene Kingma (IK) presented a summary of the two meetings organised by the Dutch Elasmobranch Society, who were asked by the Dutch Government to provide advice on the recovery of skates and rays in the North Sea.

The main problems that were identified during these meetings were the lack of data, the (un)suitability of management using total allowable catch (TAC) and how elasmobranch species should be dealt with once the Landing Obligation (LO) is in place.

* Summary of the presentation

1) Lack of data

It was made clear that the lack of scientific data is caused by the fact that most ray species are rarely caught during surveys. This is because survey areas do not match areas of elasmobranch species distribution and are designed to target more commercial species using gears, which are inappropriate for the efficient capture of elasmobranch species.

Additionally, identification problems have been noted for ray species, both at the level of industry (i.e. logbook data and at fish auctions) as well as by scientists. Jim Ellis (JE, CEFAS) pointed out that a lot of work has been done to clean up CEFAS survey datasets to determine the main species by area and their abundance. These revised datasets have been incorporated by ICES working groups.

Limitations on the availability of industry data were also identified (IK) with an unwillingness to share data understood to be due to the perceived potential implications of such data to close fisheries.

2) Management using multispecies TACs

Evaluations of the performance of multispecies TAC management showed that this approach does not work well as the biological status of individual ray species within the TAC can be very different. A multispecies TAC has been shown to restrict the availability of abundant species, while at the same time failing to provide protection for depleted species. Alternative measures such as a zero-TAC, or moving species to the prohibited species list, have not addressed the problems either. During the meetings several alternative options were presented and discussed (e.g. the MyFish spatial management tool).

3) Landing Obligation

The unknown level of discarding of skates and rays causes a large uncertainty in the ICES assessment resulting in a low TAC. For this reason, skates and rays may become choke species once the Landing Obligation is enforced. Species, where a zero-TAC is advised, are under investigation to consider how the application of the advice would be compatible with the Landing Obligation.

Although elasmobranch species are known to have a relatively high survival rate following discard, evidence for post-discard survival rates for all species in all areas and by métier is not expected to be available until the middle of 2018.



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The meeting was informed (IK) that in order to prepare for the Landing Obligation, several scientific projects will be required on:

- Survivability and on board handling,
- Avoidance measures (e.g. spatial management tools),
- Gear modifications (e.g. selectivity measures).

Invited scientific experts (DR and JE) pointed out that each mitigation measure has its disadvantages. Survival experiments have been very interesting but have been case specific, time demanding and have not provide data on long-term survival. Tagging experiments would be able to provide information on long-term survival, but were very expensive, considering the training required for scientific personnel and rewards for fishermen for returned tags. Experience from CEFAS had shown that in the North Sea the return rate from tagging experiments was only 20%, and this did not provide information on post-release mortality. Regardless of these inadequacies and the fact that survival rates can be very variable, it is also important to note that STECF have yet to define what is meant by “high” or “low” survival rate..

Industry members asked how fishermen could help improve data, and whether logbook data could be a valuable input. It was acknowledged (JE) that such information would indeed be valuable if the data quality was good enough particularly in the area of species identification.

Other Interest Group Members (IRL) suggested that recreational fishermen could help with tagging experiments should a large-scale tagging experiment be set up (as suggested by DR). Although scientists had not yet considered this option it was agreed that recreational fishermen could represent a valuable experimental group, as the survival rate of elasmobranch species in recreational angling is considered to be very high.

In summary (IK), the meetings had been very productive and interesting as they had allowed the identification of data and knowledge gaps and had addressed possible solutions. Furthermore, the mix of industry, Other Interest Groups and scientific representatives allowed a good dialogue to take place between all stakeholders. The input of scientists was particularly helpful as it provided possible solutions and pointed out limitations, advantages and disadvantages of different research projects.



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4. Identification of a way forward – Terms of Reference

The chair invited attendees to discuss the work needed in the near future to address the key issues:

- i. Resolving data deficiencies;
- ii. Recording of catches by species;
- iii. Multispecies TACs or TACs set at individual species level;
- iv. Other options.

Industry representatives (ESP) indicated that since the TAC for skates and rays had reduced by 50% since its introduction. It was questioned as to whether this reduction had improved the status of skate and ray stocks and it was also of interest to know the trajectory predicted for these stocks.

Scientific experts clarified that the ICES advice indicated that the original TAC had been set too high and that the TAC now corresponds with the landings and survey observations. Further reduction of the TAC would be counter-productive and would not add to the protection of skate and rays stocks, as it would only create more discards. ICES advice also concluded that the overall status of skates and rays had been the best on record, but not all species have shown a positive assessment. Fine scale management actions will, therefore, be needed to protect the most vulnerable species.

The EC confirmed that they agreed with the conclusion that a multispecies TAC does not provide a sustainable fishery. On this basis, the EC welcomed alternative management strategies but highlighted the fact that splitting the TAC into individual species is also not considered a solution as this might create more choke species. The option to move to area-based management would be similar to the Functional Units structure, under which *Nephrops* stocks are assessed. It was acknowledged, however, that the implementation of this method would be more complex for skates and rays as the fishery is based on a mixture of many species.

On the basis of this discussion, the following management scenarios were discussed by the group:

1) An inter-genus based TAC

As the distribution of a genus is usually area specific and several commercial species are within the genus, the possibility exists to set TACs by genus.

It was noted (IK) that this scenario did not solve the main problem of data deficiency and could only be applied to data rich species. Should this method be applied, data deficient species from within a management genus would either act as choke species or be listed as prohibited species resulting in discard.



- 2) Applying a weighting system within a multispecies TAC, to protect the most vulnerable species. France had conducted research on improving the system used to implement a multispecies TAC, by applying a weighting system, assigned either by number or weight, to protect the most vulnerable species.

ACTION: Richard Brouzes to provide the Secretariat with information on the work conducted by France on alternative management scenarios for skates and rays.

The EC reminded the meeting that the project conducted by France focussed on the landing of two species and also indicated that there might be problems regarding control and monitoring of such a system. Moreover, close collaboration between Member States would be required if this method were to be used more extensively.

- 3) A spatial management tool (as presented by Dave Reid).
This type of tool could focus on the protection of the most vulnerable species by closing certain areas, e.g. spawning areas for certain fisheries or by season. In response to questions from industry members about the timeline for making such a spatial tool available, it was clarified (DR) that this would take a couple of years, if there was a need for this type of application and appropriate support. It was noted, however, that the project that had developed this tool had finished, and it would be necessary for further development work to be conducted by national institutes or STECF to enable the implementation of the tool.

It was decided that the Advisory Council would ask scientists (STECF) to evaluate alternative management scenarios, which can form a basis for advice. If such an evaluation could be organized before the next meeting, in July, the Focus Group could discuss the scenarios at this time and provide pro-active advice. Members of the Focus Group were asked to suggest alternative management scenarios.

ACTION: The Secretariat will consult with the EC to determine how and when an evaluation of the proposed scenarios could take place and to circulate a proposed time table once this had been completed.

ACTION: Members were asked to suggest alternative management scenarios, to replace the multi species TAC. A selection of alternatives is to be evaluated by scientists.

It was also noted (JE) that the vulnerability of the different elasmobranch species would need to be assessed and a workshop was suggested for this purpose. The EC (Laurent Markovic) indicated that ICES had agreed to host a workshop on skates and rays organised for industry, science and Member States (to be confirmed but not before September 2016)



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5. Summary of actions agreed and decision adopted by the Chair

ACTION:

- Secretariat to provide more information regarding previous management for skates and rays.
- Richard Brouzes to provide the Secretariat with information on the work conducted by France on alternative management scenarios for skates and rays.

The EC reminded the meeting that the project conducted by France focussed on the landing of two species and also indicated that there might be problems regarding control and monitoring of such a system. Moreover, close collaboration between Member States would be required if this method were to be used more extensively.

- The Secretariat will consult with the EC to determine how and when an evaluation of the proposed scenarios could take place and to circulate a proposed time table once this had been completed.
- Members were asked to suggest alternative management scenarios, to replace the multi species TAC. A selection of alternatives is to be evaluated by scientists.



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Annex 1 – List of Participants

NWWAC members	
Emiel Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
John Crudden	European Anglers Alliance
Paul Francoise	CDPMEM 14
Caroline Gamblin	CDPMEM
Daniel Lefèvre	Comité Régional des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins de Basse Normandie
Dominique Thomas	Coopératives Maritimes Etaploises & Armement Cooperatif Artisanal du Nord
Richard Brouzes	Copeport Maree OPBN
Francois Hennuyer	FROM Nord
Rachel Lagièrre	OP COBRENORD
John Lynch	Irish Fishermen's Organisation
Francis O'Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisation
John Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary
Hugo Boyle	Irish South and East Fish Producers Organisation
Eibhlin O'Sullivan	Irish South and West Fish Producers Organisation
Irene Kingma	Dutch Elasmobranch Society
Geert Meun	Stichting van de Nederlandse Visserij / Dutch Fisheries Organisation (2)
Severino Ares Lago	Fundación Rendemento Económico Mínimo Sostible e Social
Lydia Chaparro	Fundació ENT
José Luis Otero Gonzalez	Lonja de La Coruña S.A.
Juan Carlos Corrás Arias	Pescagalicia-Arpega-Obarco
Heather Hamilton	ClientEarth
Alan McCulla	ANIFPO
Paul Trebilcock	Cornish Fish Producers Organisation
Dave Cuthbert	New Under Ten Fishermen's Association
Jim Portus	South West FPO
Observers	
Emily Baxter	Northwest Wildlife trust
Stéphan Beaucher	Consultant
Vera Coelho	The Pew Charitable Trusts
Gonzague de Moncuit	Ministère de l'écologie, du développement durable et de l'énergie
Paul Duane	Sea Fisheries Protection Authority
Robert Griffin	European Commission
Laurent Markovic	European Commission
Glenn Quelch	EFCA
Loes Vandecasteele	ILVO
Patrick Murphy	Irish South & West Fish PO
Jim Ellis	CEFAS
Kristy McGregor	DEFRA
NWWAC Secretariat	
Conor Nolan	Executive Secretary
Barbara Schoute	Deputy Executive Secretary
Sara Vandamme	Project Development and Communications Manager