



## **DRAFT Minutes**

### **WORKING GROUP 4 (IRISH SEA)**

**Wilton Park House, Dublin  
Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2017  
10:00 – 17:00**

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

The WG4 Chairman, Francis O'Donnell, welcomed the members and the attendees to the meeting. The full list of participants is included as an annex to these minutes. Apologies for absence were received from David Beard.

The Chair explained that the original intention of the meeting was to discuss an increase of the mesh size to 120 mm for the TR1 fleet in the Irish Sea. This proposal was originally brought forward at the Working Group meeting in Paris (28 February)<sup>1</sup>. In light of the results of the NWW Choke Mitigation Tool analysis<sup>2</sup> and relative small impact of the TR1 fleet on the mortality of juvenile haddock and whiting, it was decided to broaden the scope of the meeting and discuss how selectivity could be improved in the Irish Sea fisheries. The agenda<sup>3</sup> was adopted with this change.

#### **2. Discussion**

##### **2.1 Increasing the mesh size in TR1 fleet to 120 mm mesh**

Before discussion the different selectivity options, the meeting identified the different TR1 métiers in the Irish Sea:

1. A ray directed otter trawl fisheries, with by catches of plaice, sole and some whitefish
2. A haddock directed otter trawl or Seine Nets fisheries (catch is composed of 90-98% haddock)
3. A hake directed fishery (catch is composed of 50% hake, by-catches of rays and whitefish)

The current size of the TR1 fleet is small for both Ireland and Northern-Ireland. The recovery of the Irish Sea cod stock was noted as a very positive development, but it is considered too early to develop a cod fishery until the stock is fully recovered. The discarding of haddock within the TR1

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the WG 4 meeting in Paris (28 February) can be found on the NWWAC website [link](#)

<sup>2</sup> Results of the NWW Choke Mitigation Tool analysis can be found on the NWWAC website [link](#)

<sup>3</sup> All relevant documents to the meeting can be found on the NWWAC website: [link](#)

fleet is very low and comprises of fish above Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS). The increase in mesh size to 120mm mesh would primarily be an economic decision. From a biological perspective increasing the mesh size will theoretically lead to higher long term yields and may alter the size composition of the catch, allowing juvenile fish to contribute more to the spawning stock biomass..

The meeting decided that further investigation was needed as any management decision should be evidence based and take into account the diversity of métier, vessel sizes and quota management regimes.

**ACTION:** Trials would be conducted in both Ireland and Northern-Ireland in early 2018 to look at the social-economic and biological effect of increasing the mesh size in the TR1 fleet. The different participants will coordinate the trials.

## 2.2 Reducing discards in TR2 fleet

Mr Boyle pointed out that the highest mortality for juvenile whitefish comes from the TR2 fleet. Since the early 1990s a lot of research has been done to improve selectivity, but this work has mainly focused on cod and now the focus should shift to whiting, as catches of whiting exceed the TAC by far. Also, whiting was identified as the stock with the highest choke risk for the Irish Sea in the NWW Choke Mitigation Tool analysis.

Currently, there are three technical measures used in the TR2 fleet all of which have experimentally been shown to significantly reduce discards of whiting:

1. 300 mm Square mesh panel (probably the most widely used technical measure)
2. Seltra sorting box (this has several benefits including few *Nephrops* losses and high survival of discards)
3. Swedish grid (this is probably not used currently, but has been used in the recent past)

The meeting discussed the Commission's proposal<sup>4</sup> to increase the cod-end mesh size to 90 mm for the TR2 fleet. BIM has done preliminary research on the effects of different cod-end mesh sizes, but more evidence was needed to justify any increase to 90 mm.

**ACTION:** Trials would be conducted in early 2018 to look at the effect of increasing the mesh size in the Northern Irish TR2 fleet. BIM will assess the data available from previous trials in more details to investigate the effect of different mesh sizes on the reduction of whiting in the TR2 fleet.

**ACTION:** A letter would be drafted for the EC to consider postponing the increase in the cod-end mesh size in the Irish Sea *Nephrops* fishery, until more evidence is available.

**ACTION:** The Secretariat will ask for ExCom approval to allow a fast-track procedure for the NWWAC letter.

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<sup>4</sup> The industry representatives and scientific experts were informed of the Commission services non paper (16<sup>th</sup> November 2017) which updates the EC proposal (2017)645 for a Council Regulation fixing for 2018 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks, applicable in union waters and, for union vessels, in certain non-Union waters.

It was recognized that effective selection of small whiting needs to happen well before the cod-end and that any small fish escaping through the cod-end in a *Nephrops* trawl are unlikely to survive. More innovative technical solutions will be needed to further reduce unwanted by-catches of juvenile fish. Trials are conducted in various institutions with lights, short & floating bridals, counter herding mechanisms, separator meshes, etc. Both industry and policy makers would benefit from more coordination between the various countries involved. A dedicated NWW Focus Group on Technical Measures was suggested to allow discussion and coordination of trials on a more regular basis and increase the dialogue between Member States, the Advisory Council and the EC.

**ACTION:** The Secretariat will discuss options with the NWW Member States Group on how research and trials on technical measures could be better coordinated

Despite all the efforts in the last decades to reduce discards, the whiting stock remains in a state of collapse. The spawning stocks biomass has increased in the last three year, which is a positive signal, but the choke risk remains high. The meeting agreed that with the landing obligation being in effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019 further action will be required to mitigate the choke problem for whiting in the Irish Sea as ttechnical measures are only part of the solution (TCM will never fully eliminate discards). Options like removing the TAC were discussed, but it was considered that this is a last resort solution, and other monitoring and management measures will be required. The Group proposed to conduct a review of all the fisheries (TR1, TR2 and BT2) and métiers in the Irish Sea and identify the selective measures that are currently used. At the next Working Group meeting, options to further increase selectivity and mitigate chokes could be discussed.

**ACTION:** The Secretariat, with the help of the scientific experts and WG members, would conduct a review on the different fisheries and metiers in the Irish Sea and the selective devices currently used for further discussion at the next WG 4 meeting.

Mr Lordan reminded the group that the majority of Irish cod, haddock and whiting landings originate from the southern Irish Sea (area 7.a) rectangles. In the assessment process these landings are included in the Celtic Sea management area.

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

1	Trials would be conducted in both Ireland and Norther-Ireland in early 2018 to look at the effect of increasing the mesh size in the TR1 fleet. BIM will coordinate with Mr Lynch and a new staff member at Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers Organisation.
2	Trials would be conducted in early 2018 to look at the effect of increasing the mesh size in the Northern Irish TR2 fleet. BIM will assess the data that is available from previous trials in more details to investigate the effect of different mesh sizes on the reduction of whiting in the TR2 fleet.
3	A letter would be drafted for the EC to consider postponing the increase in the cod-end mesh size in the Irish Sea <i>Nephrops</i> fishery, until more evidence is available.
4	The Secretariat will ask the ExCom for a fast-track approval of the NWWAC letter.
5	The Secretariat will discuss options with the NWW Member States Group on how research and trials on technical measures could be better coordinated.
6	The Secretariat, with the help of the scientific experts and WG members, would conduct a review on the different fisheries and metiers in the Irish Sea and the selective devices currently used for further discussion at the next WG 4 meeting.

## Annex 1 – List of Participants

<b>NWWAC members</b>		
Francis	O'Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisation
Hugo	Boyle	Irish South and East Fish Producers Organisation
John	Lynch	Irish Fishermen's Organisation
John	Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary
Patrick	Murphy	Irish South and West Fish Producers Organisation
Alan	McCulla	Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers Organisation
<b>Observers</b>		
John	Kirwan	Owner Argonaut TR1 seiner
Dominic	Rihan	BIM
Paul	Bouch	Marine Institute
Colm	Lordan	Marine Institute, via video conference
Ronan	Cosgrove	BIM
Daragh	Browne	BIM
Mathieu	Lundy	AFBI
<b>NWWAC Secretariat</b>		
Sara	Vandamme	Project Development and Communications Manager

NWWAC Document  
Chairman: Francis O'Donnell  
Rapporteur: Sara Vandamme