



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR  
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES  
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN  
WATERS  
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA  
LAS AGUAS  
NOROCCIDENTALES

## Minutes

### WORKING GROUP 4 (IRISH SEA)

**CNPMEM, 75116 Paris**  
**Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2017**  
**14:30 – 15:30**

#### 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 John Crudden and Dave Cuthbert.

The Chair proposed that point 3 on the draft agenda be addressed first (MPAs), and the agenda<sup>1</sup> was adopted with this change. The chair asked for a volunteer to draft the minutes and Paul Duane agreed to act as rapporteur for this meeting.

The following action points from the last meeting in Edinburgh (6<sup>th</sup> July 2016, Edinburgh) had been completed:

- 1 That the Secretariat 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) at the MIACO meeting (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> January);
- 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 That the Secretariat inform the Irish north and south east Regional Inshore Fisheries Forums (RIFFs) about the possibility of joining WKIrish.

The Chair mentioned the effects of Brexit on the relevance of advice from the NWWAC on Irish Sea management, and considered the possibility of contacting the UK directly in future. Liane Veitch commented that, considering the UK was still requesting stakeholder advice on their MPA proposals, the NWWAC should continue to provide advice to the UK. Barrie Deas considered that the policy changes in fisheries management would be affected at different rates. Official sources suggested that continuity in the development of MPA management, as well as technical conservation measures

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

(TCMs) would be relevant to all stakeholders around the Irish Sea to begin with. He considered it more likely that the management process for setting TACs and management plans would change, depending on the outcome of negotiations. Emiel Brouckaert reminded the meeting that the Executive Committee and the General Assembly had decided that Brexit would not be part of the workplan for the NWWAC and that the AC would address Brexit related issues, as required on a topic-by-topic basis.

## **2. Effects of the Landing Obligation (LO) in the Irish Sea**

In order to prepare further advice on the LO, the working group was asked to share specific experiences of the implementation of the LO in the Irish Sea.

Hugo Boyle noted that in future, when stocks with zero or very low TACs like cod, sole and whiting would be phased-in, the fisheries would quickly run into choke scenarios and fisheries would be closed early in the year if no alternative measures were found. John Lynch agreed and added that for cod, the LO would be very difficult to implement in the event that the stock continued to increase. Johnny Woodlock pointed out that this problem would be relevant in all north western waters.

Mr Boyle had attended part of the ICES ecosystem benchmark meeting in Belfast in September 2016, and remarked that this was a very technical meeting and progress on this important matter was extremely slow. Data collection was limited and new data were not available for stock assessments in good time, given the recent example of the Irish Sea haddock stock. It was concluded that the benchmark was moving too slow for Irish Sea stakeholders.

Allan McCulla commented on the ICES benchmark meeting in Galway in February 2017 referring to the single species benchmark. He had been informed that the single species assessments evaluated at this meeting would prepare for the ecosystem benchmark in 2018. He agreed that the process was taking far too long for stakeholders, and considered that the political system in ICES was hampering the use of relevant data that were available for Irish Sea stocks. He noted that the ICES advice for Irish Sea cod showed a biomass, which was at the level of 25 years ago, while the TAC advice was far lower. The situation for haddock would likely improve given an update of advice based on the benchmark. He suggested that for Irish Sea whiting the TAC might be removed altogether similar to the dab and flounder TAC in the North Sea. This would follow the example of Norway, where TACs are only set for the main commercial species. Mr McCulla supported further use and research of technical measure alternatives that were under development.

The Secretariat (Barbara Schoute) noted that ICES depends on the input from national scientists and that their efforts depended on the manpower made available to them. A stakeholder workshop to prepare the ecosystem benchmark was being considered to gather data from stakeholders. Mr McCulla commented that he feared that the quality of the available data would not be sufficient to benchmark the ecosystem properly. The fact that the Irish Sea ecosystem was the first to be benchmarked seemed to result in a reluctance from some scientists to commit to options that could serve to set a precedence in other areas, specifically for cod in the Irish Sea.

On the matter of implementation of the LO in the Irish Sea, Mr Deas commented that phasing was used to allow fisheries to address implementation in a sequential and systematic way. This was only partially successful, as it had mainly pushed back the really difficult issues. He noted that the approach adopted by using thresholds for each fishery instead of a species approach, made it difficult to determine the effects of the LO. It was important that the NWWAC had flagged choke-species, and the lack of toolbox exemptions to deal with choke scenarios, which had been picked up by Member States. He suggested that future advice should centre on the implementation and extension of the

choke action plan before further phasing-in of difficult species. He stressed the importance of developing contingency arrangements to avoid tying up fishing vessels when a fishery is choked.

Mr Deas suggested that scientists might be asked for an evaluation of implications of the reduction of by-catch stocks under a TAC, and evaluating alternative management options.

The Chair agreed, and suggested that the *de minimis* exemption be retained at 7% for all stocks, which could solve part of the problem, at least. Julien Lamothe commented that a flexible implementation of the *de minimis* threshold could indeed help resolve problems, and stressed the need to implement and expand the toolbox to avoid choke scenarios.

Liane Veitch concluded that for stocks with a low TAC, *de minimis* exemptions might not solve the main problem, especially since this would be taken into account when setting the TAC, reducing the landing options. This could reduce the TAC over the years, which might increase the choke problems. She suggested that changes to fishing patterns to reduce unwanted catches should always be the primary objective, instead of exemptions which could have unintended consequences. Such changes should seek to minimise socio-economic impacts. Additionally, options should be looked for that would improve the use of unavoidable unwanted catches.

Mr Lynch agreed with the idea to extend the period for *de minimis* exemptions for some fisheries in order to allow time for fleets to improve the selectivity of their gear. Mr Boyle commented that although this would be a first step, a *de minimis* exemption alone would not be sufficient to solve all choke situations, and proposed alternative levels and time-scales for *de minimis* exemptions be evaluated.

**ACTION:** The input from the Working Group to be brought to the attention of the HWGLO, including the proposals to evaluate the consequences of removing the TAC for bycatch species and extending the period of *de minimis* exemption at 7% for all stocks.

### 3. Developments of Marine Protected Areas

The Chair invited the meeting to reflect on the presentation by Defra<sup>2</sup>, in order to provide input to the informal consultation on the proposed measures, specifically the sites in the Irish Sea (i.e. Croker Carbonate Slabs SCI and the Pisces Reef Complex SCI) and their impact on the fishing fleets active in these areas.

The meeting asked for clarification on the coordinates of the Croker Carbonate Slabs SCI considering the proposed expansion of the area. Rachel Bower informed the meeting that the coordinates would be made available on the JNCC website.

The meeting was informed that the NWWAC response to the informal consultation would be finalised by the end of March.

**ACTION:** The input from the Working Group to be included in the NWWAC response to the informal consultation, which would be finalised by the end of March.

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<sup>2</sup> All relevant documents to the presentation can be found on the NWWAC website: [link lien enlace](#)

#### **4. Technical measures**

The Chair noted that a proposal to adapt the Codbox closure in the Irish Sea had been brought forward, extending the seasonal closure (1<sup>st</sup> Feb to 15<sup>th</sup> March) for the TR1 fleet to the TR2 fleet, in order to make the closed area more effective for the protection of cod. Hugo Boyle agreed that the closed area should be closed to both fleets, since cod catches were unavoidable for both TR1 and TR2 fleets. He could therefore, reluctantly, agree with the proposal to close the area to all vessels in order to protect cod.

Alan McCulla indicated he could not accept this proposal, considering the economic consequences for the Nephrops fleet. Mr McCulla informed the meeting that ICES considered that the cod stock has increased since the Codbox closure was put in place and, therefore, there should not be a reason to extend these measures.

John Lynch indicated that the cod TAC had been low even though the cod stock had shown an increase, resulting in a lack of quota at the end of the year. He stressed the need to resolve this problem. Mr McCulla commented that a pilot fisheries project was being developed with the authorities to improve demersal fisheries selectivity (e.g. a cleaner hake fishery), which might be a more efficient solution than the suggested extension of the Codbox.

The Chair concluded there was no general agreement to support this proposal.

The Chair introduced a proposal to increase the mesh-size in the TR1 fleet in the Irish Sea from 100mm to 120mm in order to protect the haddock fishery.

Mr McCulla could not agree with this proposal, since he considered that the perceived problem (i.e. bycatch of juvenile haddock) was low, specifically for the Northern Irish TR1 fleet. He noted the need for scientific underpinning of the specific measures proposed. Mr Lynch noted that the proposal aimed to protect the haddock year-class that had appeared recently, and noted that the mesh size increase was already part of the EC technical measures proposal.

The Chair concluded that there were two different positions on both proposals and unfortunately no consensus could be reached.

#### **5. Benchmark Irish Sea – preparation of the 2018 ecosystem benchmark**

The Secretariat (Barbara Schoute) briefly referred to the points made during the meeting and suggested that the WG4 be updated by correspondence once new information on the benchmark process was received from ICES.

**ACTION:** The Secretariat to update the WG by correspondence on further developments concerning the Irish Sea Benchmark.

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

1	The input from the Working Group to be brought to the attention of the HWGLO, including the proposals to evaluate the consequences of removing the TAC for bycatch species and extending the period of de minimis exemption at 7% for all stocks.
2	The input from the Working Group to be included in the NWWAC response to the informal consultation, which would be finalised by the end of March.
3	The Secretariat to update the WG by correspondence on further developments concerning the Irish Sea Benchmark.

NWWAC Document  
Chairman: Francis O'Donnell  
Rapporteur: Paul Duane  
Contributions: Barbara Schoute  
Review and editing: Conor P. Nolan

## Annex 1 – List of Participants

<b>NWWAC members</b>		
Francis	O'Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisation
Emiel	Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Javier	López	Oceana
Liane	Veitch	ClientEarth
Julien	Lamothe	Les Pêcheurs de Bretagne LPDB
Hugo	Boyle	Irish South and East Fish Producers Organisation
John	Lynch	Irish Fishermen's Organisation
John	Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary
Sean	O'Donoghue	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
Alan	McCulla	Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers Organisation
Barrie	Deas	National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations
Kenny	Coull	Scottish Fishermen's Federation
Dave	Cuthbert	New Under Ten Fishermen's Association
David	Beard	Manx Fish Producers Organisation
John	Hermse	Scallop Association
Ken	Moran	Fleetwood Producers Organisation
<b>Observers</b>		
Anna	O'Sullivan	Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, Ireland
Paul	Duane	SFPA
William	Stewart	EFCA
Alex	Kinninmonth	Stichting BirdLife Europe, represented by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Antoine	Balazuc	CRPMEM de Haute-Normandie, Comité Régional des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins
Despina	Simons	EBCD
Dimitri	Rogoff	CDPMEM Calvados
Dominique	Thomas	Organisation de Producteur Cooperative Maritime Etaploise Manche Mer du Nord
Emily	Baxter	North West Wildlife Trusts
Enda	Conneely	IIMRO
Erwan	Quemeneur	CDPMEM du Finistère, Comité Départemental des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins 29
Franck	Le Barzic	Cobrenord
Francois	Hennuyer	FROM Nord
Gaël	Lavialle	OP COBRENORD
Geert	Meun	NL Fisheries
Jesús	Lourido	Puerto de Celeiro S.A. OPP-77
Ken	Kawahara	PPPAF
Manuel	Evrard	Copeport Maree OPBN
Marina	Le Gurun	Blue Fish
Olivier	Lepretre	CRPMEM du Nord / Pas de Calais / Picardie, Comité Régional des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins
Pascal	Coquet	CRPMEM de Haute-Normandie, Comité Régional des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins
Paul	Francoise	CDPMEM 14
Peter	Smith	Scottish Fishermen's Organisation

Purificación	Fernandez	ANASOL
Rachel	Bower	Joint Nature and Conservation Committee (JNCC)
Sinead	Cummins	Birdwatch Ireland
Sonia	Muller	CRPMEM de Haute-Normandie, Comité Régional des Pêches Maritimes et des Élevages Marins
Sonia	Muller	CRPMEM HN
Tony	Delahunty	NFFO
Vera	Coelho	PEW
<b>NWWAC Secretariat</b>		
Conor	Nolan	Executive Secretary
Barbara	Schoute	Deputy Executive Secretary
Sara	Vandamme	Project Development and Communications Manager