



MINUTES

WORKING GROUP 4 (IRISH SEA)

Virtual meeting
Tuesday 7 July 2020
10:00 – 11:15 CET

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed all participants to the meeting. The agenda was adopted.

Action points from Spring electronic procedure:

- 1 Have Dave Reid's presentation on the work of WK Irish postponed to a future face to face meeting where the subject can be given the attention it deserves.

This presentation is on the agenda under Point 2.

- 2 Draft question to COM on the legal possibility to remove the whiting TAC in the Irish Sea, on the condition that new technical measures, as demonstrated by BIM gear trials, are applied to reduce the below MCRS whiting in the *Nephrops* fishery.

A Letter was sent to the Commission on 21 April requesting for STECF evaluation regarding the potential for stock size improvement in relation to new technical measures for whiting in ICES 7a. This letter is available on the NWWAC website. We are still awaiting a reply.

- 3 Draft a request to the COM asking to clarify the terms of the cod closure in the Irish Sea and the derogations currently in place. Depending on what the actual position is, the AC may need to look for a review of the closure.

Comment: ICES issues 0 catch advice for this stock which should be discussed today along with the ICES technical service advice which was issued under standing contract between COM and ICES:

https://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2020/Special_Requests/eu.2020.05d.pdf

A letter sent to the Commission on 9 April. Reply received on 29 May, both are available online.

Comment from the Chair: The group may wish to revisit this topic in the future.

2. Results from WKIRISH ([link](#))

WKIRISH was a collaboration between the NWWAC and scientists in the Marine Institute, the Scottish Association for Marine Science, AFBI, IFPO, EMB, and Cefas.



Towards the 1980s landings of round fish, pelagics and flatfish in the Irish sea went down while at the same time catches of invertebrates seemed to stay the same or increase. As the fisheries went down, there was also a drastic reduction in effort in TR1 and BT2. This was done as part of a recovery plan but unfortunately there was never a sign of much recovery.

Work was started in 2015 and funding was secured in 2016. A data evaluation workshop was held in September 2016 followed by a stock assessment benchmark in January 2017. NWWAC members were brought in in October 2017 for the Ecosystem model stakeholder workshop.

The WK is working with Ecopath with Ecosim in conjunction with Scottish AMS in Oban. The model includes fishing drivers as well as environmental drivers, for example the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO) and the Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation (AMO).

Sea surface temperature shows a slow but steady rise, so has primary productivity of the system. Zooplankton remains one of the key drivers of the system.

The model worked well in predicting variations for a large number of species and helped explain what was going on in the Irish Sea system at this time.

Over the last few years a period of declining production can be observed. This has the potential to impact the FMSY ranges where more caution may be needed.

During the last meeting in November 2019, the group concentrated on cod, whiting, sole, herring and *Nephrops*. Cod, whiting and sole respond negatively to the increasing temperatures in the top layers of the water column. Sole has also been impacted negatively by food web interactions. Decline in zooplankton is the main factor affecting herring populations. *Nephrops* is not affected by any of the climate variables or the zooplankton but strongly dominated by predation from above, particularly by cod. All species are affected by fishing pressure. For each species fish larval mortality was included with the fish as part of the juveniles.

What the group is recommending for fisheries management is an F_{ECO} which is above F_{MSY} but within $F_{MSYupper}$ and $F_{MSYlower}$ bounds.

The WK has found key links to species productivity and can identify F_{ECO} values for most species. ICES is keen to incorporate use of the model in its integrated ecosystem assessments.

The members of the NWWAC were instrumental in bringing this work together and it would be great to see this brought to conclusion by becoming official advice.

New project from the Marine Institute: IFISH is investigating the potential use of information sharing networks in Irish fisheries as a tool to avoid unwanted catches. Please participate and spread the news. Contact Julia.Calderwood@marine.ie if you would like more information or to participate!

Question: Can the same analysis be carried out for the other species in the Irish Sea? Also, in terms of the interaction between Irish Sea and Celtic Sea herring, was that included in the model, or how was that taken into account? Could a presentation be made to the PELAC?

DR: Yes, a presentation can be made to the PELAC. The models are spatially closed. This model is only for the Irish Sea and is not capable on its own to say what is migrating in or out. Work is being carried out on this and the model can be fed information from other research.

Question: Is F_{ECO} always within the F_{MSY} range or can it be outside as well? How does that relate to the ICES advice?



DR: It is absolutely within the range which was done so as not to create new reference values for particular aspects. Once it falls below Blim then the model moves to normal harvest control rules.

Question: Does this model work retrospectively?

DR: Yes, that information is available on one of the slides. There are five published papers on this and the sixth is underway.

Question: What level of confidence can we have in this model? The model is really dependent on the data it is fed, specifically on “who eats who”.

DR: Data is always the issue when modelling. The error line is included in the analysis, and the model says that the results are somewhere in this range. That’s why the model is not used to set F levels or let it set its own F levels. The F_{MSY} ranges have been evaluated as precautionary but the model is adaptive to the current productivity of the relevant stock.

Question: ICES indicated that everyone uses this model. Are any of the management models linked or could they be linked to WKIRISH, for example DAMARA and MAREFRAME?

DR: There are a few more EU projects coming up and it is hoped to expand this and use the same approach in the Celtic Sea. That would include some of the information coming from DAMARA and MAREFRAME as well as other. The Marine Institute is also carrying out a project under national funding which is looking at F_{MSY} ranges and taking the model from DAMARA forward.

3. ICES advice on the Irish Sea (7a) ([link](#))

The advice presented will be slightly different from last year and includes the advice released up to 30 June 2020. The advice rules applied by ICES in developing advice on fishing opportunities remain similar to previous years. This advice was developed at the same time as the beginning of the health crisis and communications had to be done electronically instead of physical meetings. ICES is providing abbreviated advice for most stocks due these limitations. The advice given previously for the stocks is included to provide background. For stocks that have been benchmarked, all information is provided in the advice. The advice for *Nephrops* will be released at the end of October.

- Cod

Advice is based on the precautionary approach catch of 108 tonnes. This assessment is using a Category 3, i.e. a change in the index approach. The biomass index is below the long-term average in recent years so there is a slight reduction in the advised catch. Fishing pressure and stock size are currently unclear in relation to reference points as there is no analytical assessment available for this stock at the moment. Landings from south of Division 7.a (rectangles 33E2-3) are not considered part of this stock (include in cod 7e-k stock) and to be considered when setting catch options for 7a and 7e-k.

- Haddock

Advice is based on the EU MAP, i.e. a range advice, and there is a slight increase in the advice compared to last year, with the catch range of 2491 – 4092 tonnes. Fishing pressure has declined and is below F_{MSY} since 2012. The recruitment is variable but slightly above average, but stock is anticipated to decline after the catch in 2021 unless there is a good year class being produced.



Fishing pressure and stock size are both in the green. Landings from south of Division 7a (rectangles 33E2-3) are not considered part of this stock.

- Plaice

Plaice is a bycatch. Last year the advice was based on the precautionary approach, this year the advice is based on MSY (based on DGMARE request) which implies a much lower advice than was available last year: 2846 tonnes. The spawning stock has increased since 2012 and fishing pressure has declined below F_{MSY} since 2011, but recruitment has fluctuated in the past years. There are a lot of discards of this stock but based on recent studies it is estimated that 40% of these survive. There is some evidence of downward revisions in stock biomass as data is being accumulated.

- Seabass

Advice based on EU MAP is slightly above last year's with catch range 1680-2000 tonnes. The assessment is very similar to last year's. Recruitment generally is good, spawning stock is slightly above B_{lim} , and fishing pressure is below F_{MSY} . There has been a change in the bag limit for the recreational fishery in 2020. This assessment has an issue with the estimates of commercial discards for which a model is used, however, it seems that discards are typically above of what is predicted.

- Sole

Advice is based on MSY and set at 768 tonnes. This stock was quite depleted but has improved over recent years. It is now at MSY $B_{trigger}$ and recruitment is slightly higher than previously. Fishing pressure is below F_{MSY} , but there is an increase in the estimation for 2020.

- Whiting (advice from 2019)

This advice was given last year for 2020 and 2021 with no new assessment carried out this year. The stock size is extremely low, and the fishing pressure is above F_{MSY} and F_{LIM} with discarding high. ICES has now an outstanding request from the Commission to provide an estimation of what catches would be expected given the other fisheries in the area. Much of the catch for whiting is a result of bycatch in the *Nephrops* fishery which estimates 930 tonnes catch of whiting in 2021 as bycatch.

Question: There are only 15 minutes left to deal with this key topic, maybe in future more time will need to be allocated to this. Specific questions:

Cod in 7a: As the benchmark was no longer used and this is now a Cat 3 stock, did the same quality assurance go into it this year as last year?

Haddock in 7a: If you look at F , recruitment and spawning stock, yes there is a small change in the advice, but it seems we are well below the fishing mortality and at a very high stock size, and the recruitment is still quite good. If the WKIRISH model was run on this stock, where would this fall in with the F ranges and should we be looking at the F_{ECO} , and was this considered by ICES when providing advice?

Whiting: Question is around the 0 catch advice. The bycatch provision is the most important provision here. Is the Commission basing their proposal on the additional 0 catch advice in relation to the bycatch as such?

Plaice: 50% reduction in catch advice – this is next to impossible to explain to the industry how this could happen with the stock being in such a healthy state. This could not have been the result of retrospective bias.



GC: Regarding cod, the benchmark assessment was rejected in the previous assessment because of some of the retrospective patterns, so in this assessment the Cat. 3 was used again. The quality control was similar to previous years. Haddock: work of WKIRISH is just now becoming public and ICES is quite interested in incorporating some these approaches in how they provide advice but was not considered for this particular advice. It will be discussed in September on how this can be included in the advice, and discussions will need be held with clients regarding how this should be presented and received. Whiting: the bycatch question more for Commission. Plaice: much of the change of the advice is due to the change in the basis for the advice. Last year, ICES was asked to give advice based on the precautionary approach and this resulted in an increase compared to the advice for 2019 which had been based on the MSY approach. This year, ICES was asked again to provide advice based on the MSY approach and thus the reduction because the change in advice basis. Catch advice from 2019 and 2021 is much more similar as they are based on the same approach.

Chat: In my understanding the explanation for the decrease in advice is the change of advice basis, because last year for some reason the COM asked for Fpa advice, and this year it is based on F_{MSY} again. In any case if I remember correctly the advice is still a lot higher than the recent catch (2800ish t versus 1000ish t caught in 2019), so it would still allow for an increase in catch, even if it was a 50% decrease in advice.

ACTION: The Secretariat will collect and collate any further queries on the ICES advice from the Working Group members and send them to Ghislain.

ACTION: Members to send their comments/input to feed the drafting of the NWWAC advice to the Commission's TAC & quotas proposal.

4. Upcoming elections of Working Group Chair and Vice-Chair

The Working Group Chairs and Vice-Chairs are elected for a term of three years. This three-year term is coming to an end this September, so elections are upcoming.

However, the Secretariat has a proposal to all the members of this Working Group simply because the Advisory Council overall is facing some difficult times at the moment. Not only with the COVID crisis, but also with Brexit coming. To keep the stability going of the Working Groups and of everything that has been established over the last three years, the Secretariat proposes to extend the term of the chair and vice-chair for another year.

No decision needs to be taken right now, but members should contact the Secretariat prior to the meeting in September.

ACTION: Members to inform the Secretariat if they want to continue with the current Chair and Vice-Chair and delay the elections until next year September, or rather wish to see elections this September.



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

1	WG Group to participate in further projects regarding Irish Sea that arise out of WKIRISH.
2	The Secretariat will collect and collate any further queries on the ICES advice from the Working Group members and send them to Ghislain.
3	Members to send their comments/input to feed the drafting of the NWWAC advice to the Commission's TAC & quotas proposal
4	Members to inform the Secretariat if they want to continue with the current Chair and Vice-Chair and delay the elections until next year September, or rather wish to see elections this September.

6. Participants list

NWWAC participants	
Ghislain Chouniard	ICES, ACOM Vice-Chair
David Reid	Marine Institute/ICES WKIRISH
John Lynch (Chair)	IFO
Norah Parke	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
Sean O'Donoghue	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
Johnny Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary
Hugo Boyle	ISEFPO
Emiel Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Barrie Deas	NFFO
Jenni Grossmann	ClientEarth
Javier Lopez	Oceana
John Ward	IFPO
Matilde Vallerani	NWWAC Secretariat
Mo Mathies	NWWAC Secretariat

NWWAC observers	
Fintan O'Toole	Birdwatch Ireland
Jesús A. Lourido	Puerto de Celeiro, OPP-77

Other observers	
Jonathan Shrives	DG MARE
Juan Antonio Espejo	Spanish Administration
Simon Bolger	DAFM
Guillaume Carruel	EAPO