



## MINUTES

### WORKING GROUP 2 (CELTIC SEA)

#### Virtual meeting

Tuesday 7 July 2020

14:30 – 16:00 CET

#### 1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair, Suso Angel Lourido Garcia, opened the meeting and welcomed the members, observers, ICES and COM representatives to the meeting.

No apologies were received in advance of the meeting. The agenda was adopted as drafted.

Action points from the minutes from the Spring electronic procedure were discussed:

1. Draft advice on remedial measures for cod and whiting in the Celtic Sea

See item 3 below.

2. (From September 2019) Pursue the request to ICES recommending an ICES working group to look at the effects of seismic activity on fish stocks and review the potential to harmonize exploitation patterns in protected areas.

Following from the investigations the NWWAC carried out on the impact of seismic activities on fish stocks in the NWW in Year 14 and its subsequent request to the European Commission, the Secretariat has been approached by the Pelagic Advisory Council (PelAC) to establish a joint Focus Group. The aim of this group is to develop a joint proposal for Terms of Reference of an ICES research project for consideration by the European Commission. The proposal is being finalized and will be sent to ExCom for approval via written procedure by the end of July.

#### 2. ICES advice for the Celtic Sea

- **Presentation by Ghislain Chouinard (ACOM Vice-Chair)**

Mr. Chouinard presented the advice released up to 30 June 2020. An explanation of the rules that ICES uses to provide advice can be found in the presentation at the NWWAC meeting in Ghent, July 2019), as these were largely unchanged from last year.



Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, all of the work for the advice for the NWW had to be done through remote means. Thus, for most of the stocks, only abbreviated advice could be produced, presenting the main advice and supporting graphs and tables. However, in annex to each of the advice sheets, the previous advice for the individual stocks is included, so reference points are available. This only for the stocks where there hasn't been a benchmark. For stocks which were benchmarked in early 2020, a full advice sheet was produced.

One other thing of note is that the benchmark for Celtic Sea Cod, Haddock and Whiting started well in 2019. However, due to data issues that were uncovered late in the process following the benchmark workshop in winter 2020, the benchmark could not be concluded. Work is ongoing now to resolve these issues and the advice will be released on the 30th of October 2020.

- Black bellied anglerfish in divisions 7.b k, 8.a b, and 8.d

The advice for 2021 based on the precautionary approach is catch of 15,551 which is an increase over the advice for 2020. In terms of catches, there has been an increase: in 2019 they were about the same as in 2018, slightly lower than the peak but still among the higher values.

Over time the fishing mortality has declined and is below FMSY and the biomass index shows an increase since 2015. The recruitment index has been above average in the last two years. In terms of fishing pressure, we consider the stock to be below the FMSY. We don't have a reference point for the stock size so that's unknown but we know that the stock based on the abundance biomass index has been increasing.

- White anglerfish in Subarea 7 and div. 8.a-b, d (Celtic Sea, Bay of Biscay)

The advice for 2021 is based on the EU MAP. The advice for FMSY is 34,579 tons which is also higher than the advice that was given in 2020. The two F-lower and F-upper catches range from 23,000 to about 46,000. Catches have been a bit lower in the last year. Fishing mortality has been declining and is now below the FMSY. The recruitment is variable but has been above average in 2017-2019 and the biomass is also increasing. The two anglerfish species are not totally separated in the landings and under combined TAC with the black-bellied anglerfish. In terms of the stock status, the fishing pressure is below FMSY. In terms of stock size, we're well above the MSY Btrigger.

The catch in 2019 for this anglerfish was 22,710 with 6% discards. The assumptions for 2020 is that it's the recent average fishing pressure and that would mean that by beginning of 2021, the biomass would be 72000 tons, higher than the MSY Btrigger and so we provide advice at the full FMSY.

- Hake Northern stock (3.a, 4, 6, 7, 8.abd)

The advice for 2021 based on MSY is the catch of 98,657 tons, slightly lower than the advice we had for last year. The catches have been a bit lower than that recently, but higher than what they've been prior to 2010. In terms of the fishing mortality, it's been declining and now it's just around the FMSY. The spawning stock is well above the MSY Btrigger. Recruitment is variable and there's no obvious trend although the estimates for the recent two years are not bad.



The stock is still considered to be high, but there has been some reduction due to revised perception of the stock. Here we provide the advice based on MSY because there's other parties involved, but the EU MAP option is provided as well.

The catch in 2019 was 87,238 with about 6% discards. The assumption for the fishing mortality in 2020 will be about FMSY 0.263. That's the average of recent years, around FMSY. The SSB in 2021 is well above the MSY Btrigger. We anticipate that assuming average recruitment, there would be a slight decline in SSB by beginning of 2022.

- Megrim in the west and southwest of Ireland, Bay of Biscay (7.b–k, 8.a–b, and 8.d)

The advice for 2021 based on the EU MAP is a slight reduction over last year. The spawning stock has been above MSY Btrigger since 2008. The fishing pressure has decreased since 2004 and below FMSY in 2019. Recruitment has been relatively stable although it is a bit lower for the most recent year than in 2017. The status is pretty similar to what we had previously and the stock is still showing some increase.

In terms of fishing pressure, we're below the FMSY and above MSY Btrigger. The catch in 2019 was 13,000 tons with 8% discards. The fishing mortality assumed for 2020 is 0.21, which is the average of the last three years.

- Plaice of the West of Ireland (7.b and 7.c)

This is a stock where we only give advice every three years. The advice of 19 tons this year is for '21, '22, '23, based on the precautionary approach. The state of the stock is unknown. The landings in 2019 were 9 tons. The discard rates are uncertain. The previous advice was 24 tons, so the reduction to 19 is based on the precautionary reduction in advised catches every three years if there's no new information. Again, in terms of fishing pressure and stock size, we don't know exactly where we are, but we know the catches. The landings have been quite low in recent years compared to the past.

- Plaice in the Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea (7.f and 7.g)

The advice, based on the precautionary approach, is also for reduced catches for 2021 to 1,911 tons. This is a category 3 stock where we use the assessment as an indicator of trend. The fishing pressure has declined and is below FMSY. The spawning stock has increased since 2005, well above MSY Btrigger, but there has been some decline in the last few years, so that's why there is decline in the advice for 2021. In terms of fishing pressure and stock size, the stock is also considered being fished below FMSY and the stock is above the MSY Btrigger.

- Pollack in the Celtic Seas and the English Channel (6 and 7)

There is limited information available: the catch advice is the same as in the previous year, so 3,360 tonnes. Most of the catches are coming from subarea 7. There has been some decline in catches, and they're the lowest in 2019 in the series. The recreational catch is unknown but is thought to be significant. There's work ongoing to try to get some estimate around that, and the fishing pressure is considered below reference points, even though we don't have a clear indicator. The stock size is



unknown. The recreational catch is unknown: the advice is for commercial catches for 2021 of 3,360 tonnes, which is unchanged.

- Sea bass in divisions 4.b–c, 7.a, and 7.d–h

The advice is a slight increase over last year to 2,000 tonnes. The assessment is pretty similar to what we had last year. The stock is slightly above Blim and fishing pressure is below the FMSY. The recruitment after 2007 has been poor but a bit better in 2013, 2014 and 2016. Fishing pressure is below the FMSY, however, in terms of stock size, we're below the MSY Btrigger, just around Blim basically. The assumption for 2020 is that the average pressure from the commercial fishery will be the same as last year and there will be full compliance in the recreational, which means two sea bass retention for the period where it's allowed.

There is an issue with the projection of the commercial discard. 464 tonnes discards were observed in 2019, ICES projection for 2021 is only 121. We use a model that used the whole time series, and this has to be reconsidered. The projected total commercial catch (landings and discards) would be the same, but the division between the two might not be exact.

- Sole in the West of Ireland (7.bc)

ICES gives advice every three years. In this area, the advice now is a reduction over the previous advice, down to 19 tons. The catches in 2019 were 18 tons and the discards are considered negligible. The status of the stock is unknown. As we normally do when there's no other information, a precautionary reduction is advised every three years, unless there's information that suggests otherwise.

- Sole in the Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea (7.f and g)

The advice is for 1,413 tonnes for 2021 at the FMSY, lower than the advice for 2020. The stock was benchmarked in 2020. This has led to an upward revision of SSB, and that might seem counter-intuitive in terms of reduced advice, but the benchmark has also recalculated the reference points as is normally done during a benchmark. The reference point now for FMSY is 0.251 as opposed to the 0.297 that was there previously and this is the reason for the reduced advice. Both the fishing pressure and the stock size are within the reference points; below FMSY and above the MSYB trigger.

- Sole in the Celtic Sea South, southwest of Ireland (7.h–k)

The advice is unchanged, based on the precautionary approach. There was hope that maybe we could move to category 1 and so there was a benchmark in 2020. There's little information on the stock identity. The catch in the map suggests the possibility of two stocks based on the fishery distribution: one off the southwest of Ireland and another further to the southeast. There's wasn't any appropriate method thought to be adequate to assess the stock; the sampling was not considered to be representative of the catches. The advice is based on recent catches reduced by 20%, which is the approach used when applying category 5 approach for the first time.



- Black scabbardfish in the Northeast Atlantic and Arctic Ocean

The advice for 2021 and 2022 is for some reduction to 4,506 from the previous two years. The catches in 2019 were 4,317 tons, discard is considered negligible. It's considered to be a single stock migrating throughout the Northeast Atlantic. The decline in the advice is largely due to the application of the precautionary buffer.

- Blue ling in 6–7 and 5.b (Celtic Seas, English Channel, and Faroes grounds)

The advice for 2021 and 2022 is MSY based: 11,522 tons for 2021, 10,859 tons for 2022. Catches have been around 5,000 tons for several years now. The fishing mortality is lower, and the stock has been increasing, although the advice is lower due to the revision downwards in perception of the stock. The fishing pressure is below FMSY and the stock size is above MSYB trigger.

Ghislain then gave a summary for other deep-sea stocks that were assessed this year: for many of them there is little information in terms of their status, exploitation, or state of the stocks.

**Question:** In the hake fishery, we've seen landings consecutively down since 2018, 2019. We see all the indicators saying that the stock is not only staying constant, but the stock biomass is increasing. What is the reasoning for this?

**Ghislain:** The perception of the stock is still considered to be high, but the perception of the stock in terms of absolute estimate has been revised downwards from last year. That is the main reason for what might, on the surface, seem like inconsistent advice. The trend is the same but the absolute estimates are revised downwards.

**Question:** The retrospective bias in the hake assessment is quite significant. Across several stocks, when the retrospective bias is large, after a couple of years of this when there is a benchmark, it seems that the assessment begins then to be downgraded. How important the retrospective bias is in terms of the hake assessment whether this could lead to a significant downgrading of the assessment?

**Ghislain:** Actually, this is more of a case where we have had variability as opposed to a retrospective. For example, the advice or the assessment for the year before last (2018) was much higher than that before in 2017, but the recent estimates have been reduced. It is now showing some retrospective and we need to be concerned about it. There was a workshop held in November 2019 which examined cases where maybe advice should be downgraded because the retrospective is too strong. For hake, it was still considered to be okay to provide advice this year because we use a five-year retrospective.

**Question:** The advice for both black and white anglerfish is truncated because of the COVID. The advice mentions that both stocks are managed together and that this could lead to over-exploitation of one or the other. However, when you look at the information that's been supplied in relation to both the black and the white anglerfish, you will see that there is no way you could conclude that being a problem in the last 10 years or so. Why this got such prominence being alluded to within the advice?



**Ghislain:** I agree, it's not the case currently, but it is a warning that this is always a bit more difficult when the two are combined. If all the catch would be taken from one stock, then this could eventually affect one of the stocks, detrimentally.

**Question:** The stakeholder information seems to have been deleted from the truncated advice. Was that a decision taken at the ACOM? In certain cases, even for some of the stakeholder information, was always useful information to have within the advice.

**Ghislain:** Indeed this was a decision that ACOM took but then forwarded the proposals to the recipients of the advice to see whether they were in agreement with that, and we did not receive any comments so assumed this was agreed. Certainly, we hope that we will be able to get back to the full advice sheet.

**Question:** Considering the ongoing lack of data for plaice and sole stocks in the Celtic Sea: for example, plaice in 7b and c, we have landings data going back to 1908. We are waiting two years for advice and then we have no data to tell us anything about the population. Likewise, sole in 7f and g has gone into a benchmark without any additional effort to secure additional data. As a result, we have had the downgrading of the advice. It appears that the economic value of these stocks is negatively impacting data collection advice, and ultimately, management.

**Ghislain:** Indeed, for some of those stocks there's no survey that's considered adequate. Therefore, it is hard to have information that could provide advice for the plaice in 7b and c. The landings have been quite low recently. For 7f and g, we were using category 3. We try to make use the best of all the information available, but sometimes the available information is considered to be insufficient to provide advice. If there's no survey or indicator, you're limited. There are some approaches that can be used and need to be explored: for some of the data limited stocks, there's a new model (SPiCT) and ICES is planning a benchmark next year to use that approach for a number of stocks where there's less information.

**Question:** For sole in 7f and g there was a full benchmark this year. After the benchmark with the necessary corrections and the timelines, the results were very good on all categories, and remained very good. However, this somehow triggered the review of the reference points, which is the main reason for a reduction in advice. Why exactly and how are those reference points downwards for F and upward for MSY Btrigger being based on? How can that be explained that, with good results from the benchmark, those reference points are changed? For sole 7hjk the benchmark indicated an intention to analyse the stock basis and eventual overlap with areas 7e and/or 7fg. Could this also be relevant for addressing the precautionary zero TAC-advice for plaice 7hjk?

**Ghislain:** There are some cases where the reference points have been there for a while. When reference points are re-examined, all the information up to the most recent period is examined. Then this is combined with average weights and biological parameters. This is the case where the reference point for FMSY is being reduced substantially in a sense, but it is taking the most up to date information from the stock, including the stock and recruit relationship with the most recent



data. This is a case where the stock has been revised upwards, but because of the revision in the reference points, you get a lower advice. For 7hjk, surveys are needed.

**Question:** Are there any scheduled plans to start collecting more data on those stocks where there is less information to come to some better references or some better assessments of potential?

**Ghislain:** The effort is there and there are surveys that exist that sometimes could be further analysed and might be able to provide an abundance indicator. ICES tries to encourage all the expert groups and member countries to be able to do that through their surveys. In some cases, there's no survey and ICES doesn't have per se the resources to conduct its own surveys.

- **Drafting advice to inform the development of the EU TAC proposal**

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

### 3. JR measures for cod and whiting for 2021 and the opinion of the STECF

The AC sent a letter to the Commission on 8 May where industry members asked for a postponement of the implementation of new technical measures, considering that the possibilities to act upon new technical measures are substantially reduced as suppliers and fishermen are hampered by reduced activities under the current corona-crisis production and market situation. However, E-NGOs highlighted that any potential positive short-term impact of a temporary reduction in fishing pressure due to the current crisis is uncertain and not a substitute for effective remedial measures, which are crucial for the recovery of Celtic Sea cod and whiting, and for the continuation of the mixed fishery.

The Commission's reply, received on 25 June, informed that an amendment to article 13 of the Fishing Opportunities Regulation was agreed by the Council and should enter into force in the course of June. This amendment will allow vessels equipped with mesh sizes of 100 mm and 160 mm square mesh panel to keep using this equipment beyond 1 June and until the end of the year 2020.

The Commission also requested the NWW Member States Group to come up with a joint recommendation transposing the remedial measures for the Celtic sea via the regionalisation process. This JR has been received in May and will be transmitted to the STECF for a thorough review.

### 4. Upcoming elections of the 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 had 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 proposed to extend the term of the chair and vice-chair for another year.

In this Working Group, the Vice-Chair is a UK member. Some of the UK members will remain full members until the 31st of December. It is up to this Working Group to decide which way they would like to go forward. 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	Members to send their comments/input to feed the drafting of the NWWAC advice to the Commission's TAC & quotas proposal.
2	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	
Name	Organisation
Barrie Deas	NFFO
Caroline Gamblin	CNPMEM
Emiel Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Erwan Quéménéur	CDPMEM du Finistère
Fintan Kelly	Birdwatch Ireland
Franck Le Barzic	Cobrenord
Geert Meun	Stichting van de Nederlandse Visserij
Hugo Boyle	ISEFPO
Javier Lopez	Oceana
Jean Marie Robert	Pêcheurs de Bretagne
Jim Portus	South Western Fish Producers Organisation
John Lynch	IFO
José Beltran	OPP-07-Lugo
Julien Lamothe	ANOP
Luis Francisco Marin	OPPAO
Manu Kelberine	CDPMEM du Finistère
Matilde Vallerani	NWWAC Secretariat
Mike Park	SWFPA
Mo Mathies	NWWAC Secretariat
Patrick Murphy	Irish South & West Fish Producers Organisation CLG
Paul Trebilcock	CFPO
Puri Fernandez	ANASOL
Sean O'Donoghue	KFO
Suso Angel Lourido (Chair)	Puerto de Celeiro S.A.

Other participants	
Name	Organisation
Elsa Tudal	Direction des pêches maritimes et de l'aquaculture
Ghislain Chouinard	ICES
Jonathan Shrives	European Commission - DG MARE
Juan Antonio Espejo	Ministerio De Agricultura, Pesca Y Alimentacion