



MINUTES

WORKING GROUP 3 (ENGLISH CHANNEL)

Virtual meeting

Tuesday 7 July 2020

11:45 – 13:15 CET

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair, Pascal Coquet, opened the meeting and welcomed the members, observers, ICES and COM representatives to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Mathieu Vimard and Olivier Lepretre in advance of the meeting. The agenda was adopted as drafted.

Action points from the minutes from the 2020 spring written procedure were discussed:

1. Caroline Gamblin to prepare a proposal for an AC advice to the MSG to look into a Joint Recommendation on management of the anchor seine fishery in area 7d.

See discussion under item 5 below.

2. (From September 2019 meeting) Proposal to ExCom to establish a Focus Group on Scallop.

The Group has been established and met twice, once virtually in January and then in person in March in Madrid. The Chair is Mathieu Vimard and the vice-Chair is Hugo Boyle. The FG has been trying to arrange to meet in July to continue working on an advice to manage the Scallop stock in the Channel: discussion has been focusing especially on the creation of a scallop stock recovery area, with seasonal closure, in the intermediate zone of the Eastern Channel within the French exclusive economic zone in ICES division VIIId between Parallel 49°42' N and the limit of French territorial waters. If a July meeting cannot be arranged, then a date in September will be selected.

2. ICES advice for the English Channel

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

The presentation included the advice released up to the 30th of June 2020. Usually this would also include a general presentation on the basis for the ICES advice, but this remained the same as last year. The general presentation that was given last year is available on the North Western Waters



Advisory Council website. Obviously, because of COVID-19, this has been quite a change for the conduct of the assessment and the preparation of the advice this year.

Usually expert groups meet physically and go over their assessments and reviews, as well as the advice drafting groups. This year everything had to be done through web conferences and as a result, the advice sheets are abbreviated, and this was communicated earlier on in the year. The abbreviated advice provides the salient points and graphs, with little text. However, there were a number of stocks that were bench-marked earlier this year and in those cases the full advice sheets as we normally provide is available, as there is a number of changes particularly in terms of reference points.

- Brill

The advice this year for brill is lower than the advice last year. The advices were catches of 2,047 tons compared to the advice for 2020 which was 2,559. Catches have been relatively high in recent years. In terms of the biomass index, the index had increased consistently up until around 2016 and now there's been some decline. In terms of a stock status, consider that they're both fine in terms of fishing pressure and stock size. The advice is reduced because there's a decline in the biomass index.

- Cod in Subarea 4 and Divisions 7.d and subdivision 20

The advice for 2021 is for a slight increase over what was advised in last November. The advice catch is 14,755 compared to 13,686. Here the catches have been quite a bit reduced over time. Fishing pressure had been reduced, but now has increased since around 2015-16. In terms of spawning stock biomass, the stock was increasing, but now have been decreasing since 2015 and is now below B_{lim} . Please note that for this assessment there was a downward revision of estimates. There is a benchmark planned for 2021 an also a workshop this summer looking at stock structure for the North Sea cod stock, which includes as well division 7d. Fishing pressure is above the FMSY. However, we can still provide catch advice because it is anticipated that this stock could increase above B_{lim} by the end of 2021. The SSB is below B_{lim} , but it still allows for some catches because by the end of 2021 (beginning of 2022), the stock would be expected to be just above B_{lim} , even with those catches, assuming average recruitment.

- Lemon sole in the North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat, E-English Channel (4, 3.a, 7.d)

The advice is for a reduction to 3,742 tons compared to the advice for 2020, which was 4,279. The landings now are lower than the late 1980s. In terms of biomass, there was an increase in the late 2000. It's relatively stable recently, although there's some decline in the last few years. The fishing mortality has fluctuated without much trend, and the recruitment is slightly higher in 2019. In terms of fishing pressure, it's considered to be below proxy. The advice is based on the change in index (category three advice). The catch in 2019 was 3,873, with 15% discards, and the landings in the Eastern Channel in 2019 were 104 tons as much of the fishery takes place elsewhere.

- Plaice in the eastern English Channel (7.d)

The advice is for some reduction over the advice from previous years. The FMSY is 8,402 tons. The advice based on the EU MAP, range from 6,066 to 11,130 tons. This is a bit lower than last year. Part of the catches of plaice in 7d are from the Western Channel and North Sea stocks. Taking this into account, the range, for the catches in 7D would be between 7,190 and 13,192 tons. The spawning



stock basically has increased during 2008 to 2015, but it has been declining since 2017. It's still well above MSY Btrigger. Fishing mortality has declined, but it has been increasing and now is above FMSY in 2019, and recruitment is high in 2019. This stock is caught in mixed fishery with sole and there are high discards of plaice: the catch in 2019 was 9,047 tons with 69% discards.

- Plaice in the Western English Channel (7.e)

The advice is for lower catches in 2021 of 2,177 tons compared to the advice for 2020 which was 2,721 tons. Again, some of the catch for the stock are taken in division 7.d in the first quarter. For 7.e, the catches would be 1,961. Discards are not in the assessment but are taken into account and added to landings when producing the advice for the catches. The spawning stock has increased since 2008, very similar to what we see in the Eastern Channel, but declined in the last few years, and the biomass graph shows the decline in the index. The fishing mortality declined substantially after 2007, but has increased a little bit again since 2015, and is slightly above FMSY currently. Recruitment has been fluctuating without trend, but it is lower in recent years in this case. Fishing pressure is above the FMSY, but in terms of stock size, it is still above MSY Btrigger.

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

The advice for 2021 uses the EU MAP, the FMSY is 2,000 tons, the range is 1,680 to 2,000. That is just a little bit higher than the advice was last year. The FMSY was 1,946 tons. In terms of the stock, the fishing mortality is below FMSY, the spawning stock is slightly above Blim in 2020. Recruitment has been poor generally since 2008 except with 2013, 2014 and 2016, where it was a bit higher but still somewhat lower than in the early time period. Fishing pressure is below the FMSY, but the stock size is below the MSY Btrigger and just above the Blim. The SSB in 2021 is just slightly above Blim. It's at 11,450 compared to Blim of 10,300, but it's below MSY Btrigger, so advice is not given at the full FMSY, it's given at a fraction of that based on the ratio of the current biomass and the MSY Btrigger. The catch in 2019 include 464 tons of discards. In terms of the projection, we have a model that use what is seen over time, and where commercial discards are estimated at 121 tons for 2021, which is lower than what has been observed in 2019. This is something that we will need to look at further, and one part of an issue with the assessment of sea bass.

- Sole in the Eastern English Channel (7.d)

The advice is based on MSY for a catch of 3,248, which is an increase over the advice given last year for 2020, was 2,846. This stock was benchmarked in 2020. However, it still remains an assessment indicative of trend due to some data issues. The spawning stock is above MSY Btrigger, since 2010, and the fishing pressure has been declining and is below FMSY since 2016. The recruitment estimate in 2019 is highest in the time series. Fishing pressure is below the proxy. The stock size is above the proxy for the MSY Btrigger. This is an assessment based on model results used as trend.

- Sole in the Western English Channel (7.e)

The advice is based on the EU MAP and there is an increase. The FMSY for 2021 is 1,925 tons with the range of between 1,141 and 2,200, roughly. The catches have been increasing recently and there has been good recruitment in recent years. The spawning stock biomass has been above MSY Btrigger since 2019 and is increasing, and it is at the highest level. The fishing mortality has been below FMSY since 2009. There has been some increase in the last year but is still below the FMSY. Fishing pressure is below the FMSY and the stock size is above the trigger.



- Whiting in the North Sea and eastern English Channel (4 and 7.d)

The advice is for an increase as well for 2021, 26,340 tons for 2021. About 20% of the catches are taken in the Eastern Channel area. The spawning stock is near MSY Btrigger, it was below and has been gradually increasing. The fishing pressure is slightly above FMSY and recruitment is variable and above average.

Question: The observed discards in the sea bass assessment are considerably lower than the reported discards. How recent are the observations, and if they're not recent, are there any plans to get more recent observations?

The estimates of discards for recent years are based on observations during the year. There are difficulties in the projections, where a model was used that looked at discards from previous years: in the time-series now there seems to be a change with a few more discards and that's not fully taken into account. This is something that needs to be looked at.

Question: The sea bass stock doesn't seem to have increased by very much, and no data is given for when the stock would reach Btrigger. What time frame, if fishing pressure and recruitment stays stable at the moment, can be expected for getting back to Btrigger?

First of all, the time frame for getting back to MSY Btrigger hasn't been examined in terms of the advice provided by ICES. The advice ICES provide is based on the ICES advice rule and gives an indication of where the stock is expected to go in the next year. At the current rate, it would take some time, if everything stays stable. While there is not clear projection that has been made, it is likely to take some time at the current rate from the information available at this point with catches at that level. If there were no catches, for example, in 2021, the stock would increase at best by 12%. That's the kind of increase to expect with little catches to no catches, for example. It would take a number of years to get above MSYBtrigger, at that rate and longer if there are catches obviously.

Question: As a stock is very close to Blim, the longer it is there, the higher the risk that something is going to go wrong, e.g. with recruitment. Is ICES considering this? One would think there would be a desire to get the stock back above Btrigger under a relatively quick time frame to reduce that risk.

Ghislain: Obviously, once you are at Blim or below Blim, there is always increased risk that you could have recruitment failure and that the stock would be clearly affected with even longer difficulty recovering. In terms of the ICES advice, we use the advice rules that we have, but obviously it is recognized that the closer you are to Blim, there is a possibility that if you did get bad recruitment, you don't have a cushion anymore. You could fall in through that part of the biomass where recruitment is impaired. That is why ICES give indication of what we anticipate would be SSB changes so that that information can be taken up when decisions are made in terms of catches to be taken.

Question: For sole, the discard rate in the East Channel is 12.7%, while in the West Channel, the discard rate is only 1%. I can fully understand a very low discard rate for such a valuable fish. Therefore, I cannot understand why there is still such a high discard rate for sole in the East Channel. They are essentially the same fishery and the same vessels are exploiting the stock.

Ghislain: The higher discard rate in 7.d has been noticed in previous years as well. It is based on observations at sea. Probably the reason is the increase in recruitment.



Question: Why was sprat not included in this presentation of the ICES advice for the Channel? Although it is a pelagic specie, it is not covered by the Pelagic AC.

Ghislain: Apologies, this was my oversight. For sprat, the biomass index has shown some increase over the last years. The advice for 2021 is for 1,446 tons, slightly lower than before. The stock is going up, but since the stock status is still unclear, a precautionary buffer is applied.

Question: In terms of the biomass index and the precautionary buffer on the sprats, I was told that it's applied every three years, but they just changed from the three over two to the one over two method of looking at the biomass index, and surely under those circumstances, the precautionary buffer should not have been applied on this occasion.

Ghislain: Actually, it's more of the reverse. Now, this is not a big change in terms of the method, but typically when you go, for example, from a category one to a category three advice, and you use that method, and that method is different, then you apply the PA buffer the first year. In that sense, we would have applied the PA buffer and here we apply it because it hasn't been applied since 2017.

Question: Concerning the sea bass assessment, on which basis is it classified and what classification is used to separate commercial catches from those coming from recreational activities?

Ghislain: Certainly, the estimates of recreational catches for sea bass, or the fishing mortality for sea bass associated with the recreational fishing is based actually on one estimate in 2012 which gives an estimate of fishing mortality that's applied through, and then that's corrected given the change in the regulations pertaining to the recreational fishery.

- **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. Update on the Sea bass management tool

DG MARE: At the beginning of the year, we did initially explore with ICES the possibility of having the online tool with a slightly more complicated model behind it, that also looked at the utilization of the individual vessel catch limits. This is because the current model assumes full utilization of the vessel catch limit, which may well not be the case for several of the different fishing gears that are incorporated in the model.

Unfortunately, with the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions this year, this could not be implemented, and instead what will be provided to us is effectively the same online tool as last year, but with the updated catch advice that has just been presented put into the tool.

It will operate fairly similar to the tool from last year. We are still waiting for it to be published, we expected it to be last week. Maybe it will be a matter of weeks, hopefully, until it's published. It's certainly our intention to reuse the tool again, because of course the catch advice only gives you a total amount that can be extracted. We still need to then break that down into different methods, different fishing gears, and the tool is very useful for that.



ACTION: Proposal to the ExCom to re-establish the Seabass Focus Group to produce advice on seabass management for 2021.

4. Discussion on whelk stock management

Whelk stock in the Channel has increased significantly in the last 10 years. It's a profitable resource and its marketing is well developed, not only in Asia, where it has a large market, but also in smaller scale markets locally. In France, there are regulations since 2018. The fishery is developing, but it needs to be managed sustainably in the long term. France has had working groups meetings in the last two years upon the initiative of the industry. Since there are many vessels fishing for whelk, there should be some sort of contingent to limit the catches.

Whelk is becoming a very significant stock in the UK as well. The UK industry has established a working group through the Sea Fish Industry Authority and the National Fishermen's Federation. Several members of this AC are involved in the UK Whelk Management Group and agree entirely that this fishery need to be managed. There are concerns about reaching the limits of exploitation without having adequate data and other biomass and fisheries pressure information. The approach should be precautionary and not allow unregulated increasing of activity before the status of the stock is known. More work on this topic by the AC would be very welcome.

Question: Since in the United Kingdom there is the working group that seems to be working already, do you have any specific concrete ideas as to what this Advisory Council to do to further develop some advice on the management of this fishery?

The COVID-19 has interrupted the Group's ability to meet successfully, but two meetings already happened. The Group is certainly making some progress and the information can be shared with the AC.

ACTION: Jim Portus to keep the AC informed on the progress of the UK Whelk Working Group. He would send to the NWWAC the web-page about the Whelk Group as information and background.

Normandy and Brittany whelk fishing goes back a long time, there are several areas where more than 5,000 tons of whelk have been caught, but there's very strict detailed regulation about quotas, fishing days, closures. There's also an eco-label for whelk and there's an official quality label as well and a determination of origin in the bay of the River Seine.

For 70 years now, there has been large increase in catches with the licensing system. Whelk is the third product in value in Normandy and this fishery has a weight. There are many vessels involved, almost 150 vessels that are exclusively fishing for whelk, so any regulatory device is of the essence.

Especially outside the territorial waters, it is important to work at the inter-regional level with colleagues from neighbour countries. Work is being carried out trying to standardize the regulations so that the vessels cannot fish during the weekend as a technical measure, perhaps the most important one. Also, that has to do with the fishing gear in order to properly select the right size whelk.



It would be interesting if the AC could work on a project for a Joint Recommendation to the NWW Member States.

ACTION: Proposal to the ExCom to create a Focus Group on Whelk.

5. Anchor seine fishing in the Eastern Channel

Caroline Gamblin presented the main ideas of the draft advice to NWW Member States on seine fishing in the English Channel. Unfortunately, the advice had not been completed for the meeting.

The Channel is an area with many high level species that are not submitted to quota (e.g. squid and red mullet), because there are discussions since 2012 with trawlers and seiners and a common agreement had to be reached so that they could work together in the best way possible.

The regulation context has evolved within the Channel for cod. For example, the effort regime from the cod recovery plan was removed in 2016. The capacity ceiling (that included Eastern Channel and North Sea) was modified to a capacity ceiling only for the Eastern Channel, in application of the North Sea management plan in 2018. There was an increase of the number of the seiners in 7d and enlargement of their geographical distribution, therefore French saw the need to talk about trawlers again with colleagues from Belgium and the Netherlands.

Management of the French fishery since 2019: implementation at the national level of a list of fishing vessels authorized to use seines in 7d in 2019; replaced in 2020 by a license system. The goal is to manage the seine activity in 7d, following the concerns about the sustainability of the resource and about spatial cohabitation.

At the European level, this is a shared concern with the Belgian and Dutch colleagues. Many meetings concerning this topic were held. The idea is to use this advice to come up with common rules for fishing gears, for example limitations for seine fishing in the 12 miles area. There is also the intention to update scientific data and share them. Unfortunately, agreement hasn't been reached yet, that's why that advice was not ready for the Working Group meeting.

The draft will be sent to the AC as soon as it is finalised, for further comments and then request for ExCom approval via written procedure by the end of July. This is quite an urgent issue as Member States need to send a Joint Recommendation to the Commission before the STECF meeting in Autumn.

ACTION: Caroline Gamblin to forward the draft advice for AC consultation and approval by the ExCom via written procedure.

A member pointed out that the United Kingdom wasn't mentioned in Caroline's presentation, even though the United Kingdom industry has similar concerns about the proliferation of anchor seine in the Channel. One of the reasons for this proliferation of activity is because of an effort transfer to the Netherlands to enable this activity to take place. The main transfer of effort from one nation to another is believed to be from France to the Netherlands, so it is curious that all of these concerns are being raised. That needs to be considered in any report.



From the Dutch industry point of view, discussions on measures want to take are still going on and there were some delay because they have to consider these measures not only for 7d, but also for 7e and maybe also for the North Sea 4c. It was clarified that the Netherlands has had the maximum limit of 24 licenses in force for at least 15 years and there was no swap of effort with France in this particular case.

6. 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.

7. 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	Proposal to the ExCom to re-establish the Seabass Focus Group to produce advice on seabass management for 2021.
3	Jim Portus to keep the AC informed on the progress of the UK Whelk Working Group.
4	Proposal to the ExCom to create a Focus Group on Whelk.
5	Caroline Gamblin to forward the draft advice for AC consultation and approval by the ExCom via written procedure.
6	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.



8. Participants list

NWWAC participants	
Name	Organisation
Caroline Gamblin	CNPMEM
David Curtis	European Anglers Alliance
Delphine Roncin	FROM Nord
Dimitri Rogoff	CRPMEM de Normandie
Dominique Thomas	Organisation de Producteur Coopérative Maritime Etaploise Manche Mer du Nord
Emiel Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Erwan Quemeneur	CDPMEM du Finistère
Franck Le Barzick	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	Irish Fishermen's Organisation
Lliborio Martinez	IFSUA
Manu Kelberine	CDPMEM du Finistère
Pascal Coquet (President)	France Pêche Durable et Responsable
Matilde Vallerani	NWWAC Secretariat
Mo Mathies	NWWAC Secretariat

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
Kenneth Patterson	European Commission - DG MARE