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ANNOTATED AGENDA

WORKING GROUP 1 (WEST OF SCOTLAND)

Virtual meeting

05 July 2021, 15:15 – 17:15 CET

1. Welcome and introductions

The interim Chair, Sean O'Donoghue, welcomed all the participants to the meeting. Apologies were received from Caroline Gamblin (CNPMEM) and Dominic Rihan (BIM). The agenda was adopted as drafted. Action points from the last meeting (10 March 2021) include:

1	Members to resume discussions on issues related to cod in 6a (assessment, natural mortality and stock ID) at the next WG meeting in July
	Cod 6a included as priority stock on the agenda for discussion
2	Proposal for ExCom to consider a new timeframe on how the AC will prepare advice on fishing opportunities for 2022 in light of the deadlines included in the TCA agreement.
	At the HWG, the Secretariat proposed a work plan for this task following DG MARE's Communication on Fishing Opportunities 2022. The task would be taken up by the Landing Obligation Focus Group.
3	Secretariat to circulate the TAC analysis prepared by the Focus Group Brexit to all members in the NWWAC
	The TAC analysis is available online in the Members Area.
4	Proposal to request ICES to present their advice on all the stocks in the NWW as identified in the analysis from the Focus Group Brexit.
	Done, see item 2 on this agenda.

2. ICES advice for the West of Scotland

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

Ghislain Chouinard (ICES ACOM vice-chair) presented the ICES advice for 2022. Full advice sheets is available for all stocks. COVID 19 impacts are inserted in the section "Quality of the assessment". For the stocks managed by the EU and UK, the advice was provided on the basis of MSY or Precautionary Approach, but EU MAP option was also provided in the catch scenario table if available.

Advice to be released in the autumn: Anglerfish (3.a,4,6), Megrim (6.b), *Nephrops*(Fu 11-13).

Cod in the West of Scotland (6.a) - Advice for 2021 and 2022, MSY: Catch = 0 t

The stock was benchmarked in 2020, however the issue of stock structure remains. The spawning-stock biomass (SSB) is extremely low and has been below B_{lim} since 1997. Fishing mortality is above



F_{pa} and recruitment has been low since early 2000s and impaired. ICES has provided estimates of the likely catches of several stocks under the assumption that TACs for the target stocks are set in line with ICES advice. For cod in Division 6.a, catches in 2022 are estimated to be between 1319 tonnes and 2362 tonnes, assuming that the fishing mortality on cod changes by the same proportion as the changes advised for saithe or haddock. Under the scenario resulting in lower catch, SSB in 2023 is expected to increase by 17% while the higher catch option is expected to result in a decrease in SSB of 25%.

Cod at Rockall (6.b) - Advice for 2021, 2022 and 2023: PA: Catch \leq 14t

Limited information is available on this stock. The new survey (SIAMISS) suggests some increase but abundance is considered low. The stock identity is unknown and advice is based on recent advised catch.

Haddock in the North Sea, West of Scotland, Skagerrak (4, 6.a and Subdiv. 20) - MSY: Catch \leq 128 708 t

SSB is mostly above MSY $B_{trigger}$ since 2002 and fishing pressure is slightly below F_{MSY} in 2020. More abundant year classes were produced prior to 2000; recruitment since then has tended to be consistently lower. However, the 2019 and 2020 year classes are estimated to be the largest since 2000, which significantly impacts the catch forecast but also increases the risk of catching undersized fish. In 2020, TAC in 6.a was about 9.5 % of TAC for the stock.

Haddock at Rockall (6.b) - MSY: Catch \leq 5 825 t

The advice for 2022 is lower than the advice for 2021 because the perception of the stock has been revised downwards. Recent assessments have revised SSB downwards, while F has been revised upwards in 2018–2020. The spawning stock has been above MSY $B_{trigger}$ since 2015 and currently near highest. Fishing pressure slightly above F_{MSY} in 2020, but below F_{pa} and F_{lim} . Recruitment is sporadic, 2017 and 2021 year-classes are estimated above average.

Hake –Northern stock (3.a, 4, 6, 7, 8.abd) - MSY: Catch = 75 052 t

The spawning stock is above MSY $B_{trigger}$ since 2009, near the highest values, but estimates have been revised downwards over 2020. Recruitment is variable with no trend. Fishing pressure has declined and has been around F_{MSY} since 2013. The reduction in advice is due to lower revised estimates of the stock. The advice is based on MSY but the EU MAP option is also provided.

Megrim in the northern North Sea and West of Scotland (4.a and 6.a) - MSY: Catch \leq 7 350 t

The spawning stock has been increasing since the mid-2000s and is above MSY $B_{trigger}$. We have seen some decline in recent years. Fishing pressure has decreased well below F_{MSY} since mid-2000. The TAC is for subareas 4 and 6 and includes Division 6.b, for which advice is given separately. This advice is for the two species, *L. whiffiagonis* and *L. boscii* combined. Available information indicates that *L. boscii* constitute a negligible proportion, based on historical sampling of the Scottish and Irish megrim catch.

Pollack in the Celtic Seas and the English Channel (6 and 7) - PA: Commercial catch \leq 3 360 t



We have limited information available on pollack in this area. Catches have declined since the late 1980's, lowest in 2019-2020. Recreational catch is unknown but thought to be significant. Fishing pressure is considered to be below reference points.

Saithe in the North Sea, Rockall and West of Scotland, Skagerrak and Kattegat (4,6,3.a) - MSY: Catch \leq 49 614 t

The spawning stock has been fluctuating without trend and has been above MSY $B_{trigger}$ since 1996. Fishing pressure has increased recently and was above F_{MSY} in 2020 and recruitment has been lower in recent years. The stock has been declining since 2017 as a result of poorer recruitment. In 2021, quota in 6 is 9.4% (6175 t) of TAC for the stock.

Whiting in division 6.a - MSY: Catch \leq 4 114 t

This stock assessment was benchmarked in 2021 and, as a result, the stock was changed from category 5 to category 1. The assessment, which is now based on SAM, includes revised catch and survey data and updated biological parameters and also accounts for changes in fishery selectivity. Reference points were also revised. These changes have resulted in a more reliable assessment and a change in the stock status. The spawning stock has been above MSY $B_{trigger}$ since 2020. Fishing pressure has been well below F_{MSY} since 2005 and recruitment has been low since 2000. Discards are very high, 61% of 2020 catches.

Whiting in division 6.b, Advice for 2022, 2023, 2024: PA: Catch \leq 7 t

Only landings data are available. There is uncertainty on the accuracy of historical landings. Some discard data are available, but they are based on a low number of samples, so the estimates are too uncertain to quantify total discards.

Tusk in the Northeast Atlantic (4, 7–9, 3.a, 5.b, 6.a, and 12.b), Advice for 2022 and 2023, PA: Catch \leq 7 821 t)

Catches have been low since 2013. Catch per unit effort based on the Norwegian longline fleet remains high.

Tusk in division 6.b (Rockall), Advice for 2021 and 2022, PA: Catch = 280 t

There is no assessment for tusk in this area. Only commercial catches are available.

Blue ling in 6–7 and 5.b (Celtic Seas, English Channel, and Faroes grounds) - MSY: Catch \leq 10 859 t

The stock has increased since 2004 and has been above MSY $B_{trigger}$ since 2010. Fishing mortality has been lower than F_{MSY} since 2004 and recruitment is estimated to be stable. Discarding is negligible. Advice is slightly lower for 2022 due to the recruitment assumption.

- **Discussion & questions with WG1 members**

ACTION: NWWAC to recommend the COM to request ICES that information on quality assurance is included in the advice sheet for each stock.



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Chair: On hake in 6 and 7, the reduction is really surprising. Looking at the advice, there is no information on issues around the assessment, which makes it difficult to understand the reduction. A benchmark is much needed here.

Ghislain: For the hake, the issue with the new assessment is largely the estimates that have been revised downwards. When you get new information, it doesn't provide only new information about the current state, but also on the previous state. When you compare their historical assessments with the previous ones, you see this gradual decline or the lowering of the level and that's what's happening here for hake. We actually have a benchmark planned in 2022.

Chair: We seem to know very little about pollock. We only have a few catch data and we're looking at a very extended area. Is there any intention at ICES level to try and improve the assessment?

Ghislain: Pollock is indeed a difficult stock where we have very little information. Work needs to be done to estimate recreational catches, that are thought to be substantial here. Another issue is that the surveys are not thought to be representative of the stock status. A benchmark was planned in 2021 but could not take place because of difficulties in getting the estimates of recreational data. We hope we will be able to have a benchmark soon.

Chair: For megrim, in terms of presentation, the ICES advice is given separately for 6a and 6b, but the management area is combined. It would be useful that the advice presentation mentions at the beginning that the TAC is based on the two areas rather on the combined area.

Ghislain: Thank you for the feedback, I will make sure to include this in the presentation the next time.

Patrick Murphy: I have a comment on hake. Would ICES have a breakdown of the catch rates for the different métiers and would that have an impact on the advice? I know this is assessed as one stock across the different areas, but would the different catch rates have an implication on the advice? If you had a radical change in the different areas, would you see that in the advice? I am trying to understand why the advice has been decreased with all the different parameters going in a positive direction.

Ghislain: The assessment for hake does use a number of different surveys. There are four survey indices used. The assessment tries to cover the range of the stock and these surveys would measure the stock in the different areas. This can be a problem when a stock is such largely distributed and migrates at the same time, but the estimates from the different areas are factored into the model. Typically, since they are measuring the same thing, indices should show similar trends. One examination that is done when the assessment is conducted is to look at whether all of these indices show the same trends. Sometimes you might have a survey that has a slightly different opinion on the status of the stock and that can influence the estimate either up or down. But generally, when the stock is benchmarked, this kind of issue is examined. There is more information in the working group report as referenced in the advice.

Jean Marie Robert: Ghislain, I assume you assisted to the discussion on the mesh size for fishing hake we had in Working Group 2. We all know that the more the exploitation pattern can be improved, the more the biomass would be relevant and would produce maximum yield. In the case of hake, there are very sensitive growth variations between males and females (this also relates to plaice). We would



need to strike a balance between yield and catches, should we balance catches between males and females? Could this influence stock productivity? Has this balance work been done somewhere else and when? How are these growth differences accounted for?

Ghislain: It is true that in general the more we increase the size of fish, the better the yield. At some point, if you continue to increase the mesh size and the fish size, natural mortality would take the yield, so you would not reach a MSY but a lower yield. This is an extreme example which is probably valid for 90cm and longer individuals, since once we get to this size, growing will be minimal. Many advice take into account dimorphic growth. Generally, it would be a sustained yield calculated on the mixture of the two. The size would vary according to the age, but the age ratio would be similar provided that both sexes are caught with the same proportion. I should look into the reference in the work we have done and come back to you.

Chair: The benchmark carried out on cod 6a recognised the identity issue involving the stock 6a and the North Sea. In terms of the benchmark, was there any progress other than identifying the issue? Any considerations on how to address this? We really need a genetic project to sort this out.

Ghislain: Indeed, there was a benchmark and also a workshop on North Sea cod stock identity and a benchmark on North Sea cod. The workshop concluded that there is movement of North Sea cod in 6a North, but this would result in having different stock units. The issue was going to be addressed by getting finer scale information from the samples to recalculate the catches at age from the past. This would have addressed the North Sea side. The North Sea cod benchmark couldn't get to the point of disaggregated catch, since there was a data call for that, but it unfortunately was during covid-19 time. When the benchmark looked at what the disaggregated data looked like compared to the prior aggregated data that existed, here were unusual discrepancies that could not be explained. The North Sea benchmark decided to assess the stock as it was before but included the natural mortality factor to count for some North Sea cod migrating 6a part of the year. On the 6a side, additional work would be useful. The critical thing is then to go back and split the catches that were taken in 6a between the new defined stock units. This is an issue that still needs work.

Chair: Haddock in 6a is assessed as one stock with the North Sea and 10% of the TAC is allocated to 6a. There is this dichotomy between what the TAC should be in the North Sea and in the 6a area. Is there any discernable difference in terms of mixed fisheries between the North Sea and the West of Scotland?

Ghislain: I am not sure I can answer to this question now. I know that the assessment is using the IBTS survey q1 and q3 and may not have a lot in terms of stations in 6a. I don't know whether we would have the resolution there to give you an answer.

John Ward: Genetics is a very important tool to become more and more involved in demersal fisheries. Going forward, if there was a program for more widespread genetics, I think it would be very useful to get away from the arguments we have when we have TACs that are over such an extensive area as the North Sea and 6a. What is ICES planning in the future regarding the use of genetics as a tool?

Ghislain: Genetics has progressed tremendously, it was a laborious technique but will become quite easy. ICES depends on what can be done in the MS in terms of sampling. I'm sure that these things are



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being considered, but with the developments we've seen in recent years, I think it might become feasible to have it part of a sampling eventually. ICES has its group to look at stock identity issues and the genetic work is featured more and more because that is a good way forward.

Chair: In the case of Rockall haddock, when you have such a significant revision happening with a benchmark, how reliable are the retrospectives?

Ghislain: First of all, the plots that you see in the advice sheet are the historical assessments. When you remove the last observation and you run the exact same model looking at whether the previous estimates are the same or not, if they're not the same and they go all in one direction, then we have a retrospective. So far, we the benchmark concluded that there was no retrospective in the model, but we'll have to keep an eye on it.

Chair: The benchmark changed the whole perception on whiting 6a, what were the key drivers in that?

Ghislain: I think it was a reanalysis of all the surveys and we felt that some of the items that had been looked at in the previous benchmark should have been better examined. In terms of where we were before, advising on zero catch, even after the new benchmark we saw that not too far back we were below B_{lim} , but the stock has been increasing over the last few years and now we're just above $MSY_{Btrigger}$. The previous advice is still fairly consistent with the view we have now, but the methods used this new benchmark allowed us to see that we are slightly above the line.

Chair: Indeed we were seeing this improvement on the ground and fishermen have reported that recruitment hasn't been bad in the last few years. I think this assessment will give a lot of confidence to fishermen that what is happening on the ground is actually being reflected in the science. Looking at the blue ling, I am a bit surprised since all the parameters are really good, but we're getting a reduction in the advice. I find it hard to see where it could be coming from.

Ghislain: It is not a big reduction. If you look at recruitment plot, the projection assumes that recruitment is going to be a bit lower than the one that is estimated. Once we have a new assessment, this could change again next year.

3. Comments/inputs WG1 members on Fishing Opportunities 2022 for the following stocks

Chair: For cod in 6a, given the benchmark that was carried out this year, which identified that the stock ID issue remains to be resolved, we should ask that the issue is put back on the agenda to see if this can be resolved. It does change the whole perception of the stock if the northern part of 6a is really the same stock as the North Sea, well, it completely changes the assessment.

ACTION: Secretariat to draft a letter to the COM recommending that the identity issue related to the 6a cod and the North Sea cod is resolved. In the Fishing Opportunities advice, include a comment on importance of genetic information for the 6a cod and in general as a tool for the ICES assessment.

Chair: I think it should be reported in the advice on Fishing Opportunities that is going to be prepared by the NWWAC that we welcome the results of the benchmark on whiting 6a, which made significant change in the perception of the stock, moving from category 5 to category 1.



Kenny Coull: Last year, in the North Sea there was a large increase proposed for haddock, but that was constrained due to cod mortality. Should the TAC be constrained in the West of Scotland as well?

Chair: Indeed, I think we should ask ICES to clarify if those constraints are related to 6a as well. The problem here is that the assessment is for the one area, but the management is split into two areas.

ACTION: Secretariat to draft letter to the COM requesting to ask ICES whether the TAC constraints for haddock in the North Sea are also related to 6a haddock and, more in general, if there are differences in the mixed fisheries between the North Sea and area 6.

Chair: I am very concerned about the assessment on haddock in 6b and the retrospective bias. Given that we had this radical benchmark in 2020, now the first year after the advice we get a huge retrospective difference. I think this should be re-examined.

ACTION: NWWAC to submit question during ICES benchmark for hake this Autumn in relation to variations in growth rates between males and females and how this can impact the yield (Secretariat to contact Jean-Marie Robert for the exact wording).

Members can send any other comments to the Secretariat via email until Friday 9 July 12:00 CET.

4. Update on restructuring of the AC

Secretariat: As you are aware, this group and has been incorporated by vote from the general assembly into WG2. This new structure will start from this September. What would members like the new group to be called? Celtic Sea & West of Scotland? We would be delighted to hear any suggestions.

Chair: noting that this working group to be dealing with all of the stocks in I mean we have to allow to continue on doing all the stocks, one after another is going to this isn't going to work we're going to have to have brakes and disliked you know.

Secretariat: In future for this working group and minute scheduled, there will be a break scheduled in the middle and you have to look at maybe four hours, it's going to be massive.

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

1	NWWAC to recommend the COM to request ICES that information on quality assurance is included in the advice sheet for each stock.
2	Secretariat to draft a letter to the COM recommending that the identity issue related to the 6a cod and the North Sea cod is resolved. In the Fishing Opportunities advice, include a comment on importance of genetic information for the 6a cod and in general as a tool for the ICES assessment.
3	Secretariat to draft letter to the COM requesting to ask ICES whether the TAC constraints for haddock in the North Sea are also related to 6a haddock and, more in general, if there are



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	differences in the mixed fisheries between the North Sea and area 6.
4	NWWAC to submit question during ICES benchmark for hake this Autumn in relation to variations in growth rates between males and females and how this can impact the yield (Secretariat to contact Jean-Marie Robert for the exact wording).

6. Participants

NWWAC Members	
Patrick Murphy	Irish South & West Fish Producers Organisation
Luis Francisco Marin	O.P.P.A.O.
Jose Beltran	OPP-LUGO
John Lynch	Irish South & East Fish Producers Organisation Ltd
Juan Carlos Corrás Arias	PESCAGALICIA-ARPEGA-OBARCO
Puri Fernández	ANASOL
Julien Lamothe	ANOP
Manu Kelberine	CRPM de Bretagne
John Ward	IFPO
Kevin McDonell	WSFPO
Jean Marie Robert	Pêcheurs de Bretagne
Suso Lourido	Opp77 Puerto De Celeiro
Sean O'Donoghue	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation Ltd
Experts and Observers	
Kenny Coull	Scottish Fishermen's Federation
Ghislain Chouinard	ICES
Juan Antonio Espejo	Secretaría General de Pesca - España
Maeve White	DAFM
NWWAC Secretariat	
Mo Mathies	Executive Secretary
Matilde Vallerani	Deputy Executive Secretary