



## DRAFT MINUTES

### WORKING GROUP 2 (CELTIC SEA)

Virtual meeting

5 July 2021, 13:00 – 15:00 CET

#### 1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair Jesús Angel Lourido Garcia 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	Secretariat to consolidate in a document all the comments on Celtic Sea Technical Measures that members put forward during the meeting. This should be circulated to WG2 members for further comments.
2	Secretariat to circulate any document/feedback received by the MSG on the Celtic Sea measures (expected on 16/17 March), for members to provide comments
3	Secretariat to combine all the inputs received in a paper for discussion with the MSG at the Technical Group meeting on 26 March (Secretariat and ExCom Chair attending)
4	Secretariat and WG2 Chair to consider the need for a meeting after 26 March, for further discussion and preparation of advice.

These actions could not be addressed because the NWWAC only received the draft Joint Recommendation on 30 April, one day before the deadline for the COM. The AC sent its advice on the matter on 3 June.

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

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

The presentation includes the advice released up to 30 June 2021. Full advice sheets are available for all stocks. COVID-19 impacts are inserted in the “Quality of the assessment” section. For those stocks managed by the EU and UK, advice was provided on the basis of MSY or Precautionary Approach, but the EU MAP option was provided in the catch scenario table if available.

The advice rules applied by ICES in developing advice on fishing opportunities similar to previous years.

Other advice to be released in the autumn for the following stocks: whiting (7.bc,e-k) Nephrops(FUs 16-17,19-22), red gurnard (3-8)



- **Cod in the western English Channel and southern Celtic Seas (7.e–k) – MSY: Catch 0 t**

The stock was benchmarked in 2020. The spawning stock is below  $B_{lim}$  in 2021 and not expected to reach  $B_{lim}$  even with 0 catch. The fishing pressure is above  $F_{lim}$  and recruitment has been variable, weak recently. Technical service on likely catches to be produced in autumn. This stock is caught in mixed fisheries with haddock and whiting (mixed fisheries advice to be provided in autumn). The stock includes the south of Division 7.a (rectangles 33E2-33E3).

- **Haddock in the southern Celtic Seas and English Channel (7.b–k) - MSY: Catch  $\leq$  15 946 t**

The spawning stock has increased in 2020 and recruitment in 2018 was the second highest, but followed by smaller year-classes. Fishing pressure has been reduced and is just below  $F_{MSY}$ . Discarding is high, around 30 % during 2018-2020. This stock includes the south of Division 7.a (rectangles 33E2-3).

- **Black-bellied anglerfish in divisions 7.b–k, 8.a–b, and 8.d - PA: Catch  $\leq$  18 661 t**

Fishing mortality has declined below  $F_{MSY}$  and the spawning stock increased since 2015. The recruitment index has been above average in the last two years. Under combined TAC with white anglerfish.

**White anglerfish in Subarea 7 and div. 8.a-b,d (Celtic Sea, Bay of Biscay) - MSY: Catch  $\leq$  34 275 t**

The spawning stock has been increasing since 2005 and is at highest in time-series. Estimates for 2020 were revised lower. Fishing pressure has been below  $F_{MSY}$  since 2019. Recruitment has been variable but above average in 2017-2020. Under combined TAC with Black bellied anglerfish.

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

Spawning stock above MSY  $B_{trigger}$  since 2009, near highest values but perception revised downwards. Recruitment is variable with no trend. Fishing pressure has declined and has been around  $F_{MSY}$  since 2013. The reduction in the advice is due to lower revised estimates of the stock.

- **Megrim in the west and southwest of Ireland, Bay of Biscay (7.b–k, 8.a–b, and 8.d) - MSY: Catch  $\leq$  22 964 t**

The spawning stock has been above MSY  $B_{trigger}$  since 2008. The fishing pressure has decreased since 2004 and has gone below  $F_{MSY}$  in 2020. Recruitment has been relatively stable but higher in 2019.

- **Plaice of the West of Ireland (7.b and 7.c) – Advice for 2021, 2022, 2023: PA: Catch  $\leq$  19 t**

The advice was issued in 2020. The state of the stock is unknown. Landings in 2019 were of 9 t, the discard rates are uncertain. A precautionary reduction in advised catches from 24 t to 19 t has been applied.

- **Plaice in the Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea (7.f and 7.g) - PA: Catch  $\leq$  1 735t**

Fishing pressure has declined and is well below  $F_{MSY}$ . The spawning stock has increased since 2005 and is well above MSY  $B_{trigger}$ . Plaice 7.fg is caught in mixed fishery with sole and is characterised by high discard rates (52 % during 2016-2020). This is probably due to a mismatch between selectivity and the minimum landing size and relatively low market value of plaice. The decrease in advice is due to the recent decrease in the spawning stock index.



- **Plaice in the Celtic Sea South, southwest of Ireland (7.h-k) - Advice for 2022 and 2023: PA: Catch = 114 t**

The benchmark in 2021 introduced a survey index which covers the whole stock area and estimates total catches by incorporating discards. Because of high interannual variability in discard rates, the benchmark concluded to apply a long-term average discard rate to the data years for which discard data are available. Stock abundance has declined in recent years but is above its lowest levels.

- **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 and have been the lowest in 2019-2020. Data on recreational catch are extremely poor, but impact thought to be significant. Fishing pressure is considered to be below reference points.

- **Sea bass in divisions 4.b–c, 7.a, and 7.d–h - MSY: Catch  $\leq$  2 216 t**

Spawning stock has been above Blim in 2020 and 2021 and the fishing pressure is below  $F_{MSY}$ . Recruitment has been poor except for 2013-2014 and 2016.

- **Sole of the West of Ireland (7.b and 7.c) – Advice for 2021, 2022, 2023: PA: Catch  $\leq$  19 t**

The advice was issued in 2020. The state of the stock is unknown. Landings in 2019 were of 18 t and discards are considered negligible. A precautionary reduction in advised catches from 24 t to 19 t has been applied.

- **Sole in the Bristol Channel, Celtic Sea (7.f and 7.g) -MSY: Catch  $\leq$  1320 t**

The spawning stock is near the highest in time-series. Fishing pressure has declined and has been below  $F_{MSY}$  since 2017. The advice is lower than that for 2021 because of downward revision of SSB compared to previous assessment.

- **Sole in the Celtic Sea South, southwest of Ireland (7.h–k) - PA: Catch  $\leq$  213 t**

There is little information on stock identity and on the possibility of 2 stocks based on fishery distribution. There is no appropriate method for evaluating stock status and trends, as the sampling is not representative.

- **Black scabbardfish in the Northeast Atlantic and Arctic Ocean, Advice for 2021 and 2022 - PA: Catch  $\leq$  4 506 t**

The advised catch is split among areas, based on the catch distribution in 2013. The precautionary buffer was applied last year as the stock size is not increasing, while there is evidence of decreasing fishing effort.

- **Alfonsinos in subareas 1–10, 12, and 14 (Northeast Atlantic and adjacent waters), advice for 2021 and 2022 ,PA: Landings  $\leq$  224 t**

There are two Beryx species: most catches are in the Azorean EEZ and in the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. Landings are not indicative of stock abundance. This stock is characterised by aggregative behaviour near seamounts and can only sustain low exploitation rates. Exploitation of new seamounts should not be allowed.



- **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.

- **Greater silver smelt in other areas (7–10 and 12, 6.b), advice for 2022 and 2023 - PA: Catches  $\leq$  124 t**

58% of catches in 2020 were discarded. Landings have been less than 100 t since 2006. Spanish survey on the Porcupine Bank indicates that abundance is about average but lower than in 2016–2017.

- **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 decreasing since 2013. Catch per unit effort based on the Norwegian longline fleet remains high.

- **Ling in the Northeast Atlantic and Arctic Oceans (6–9, 12, and 14, 3.a and 4.a), advice for 2022 and 2023 - PA: Catch  $\leq$  15 092 t**

Landings have been slightly higher in the last 3 years. Discards have declined in 2017–2018. Catch per unit effort based on the Norwegian longline fleet is high. Low abundance in Subarea 7 and 8. Uncertainty about the stock structure.

- **Roundnose grenadier in subareas 6 and 7 and division 5.b and 12.b, Advice for 2021 and 2022 - PA: Catch  $\leq$  3 177 t**

Landings have declined since 2004 and the fishery has moved to shallower waters in recent years.

## Question & answers

**Emiel Brouckaert:** Are indications of survival of discards taken into account in the Bristol Channel plaice? For sole in 7f,g there was a benchmark last year and reference points were reviewed for  $F_{MSY}$  and  $MSY B_{trigger}$ , which actually led to a 50% reduction of the TAC for the advice for 2021, despite the positive scenario for the stock. There was never a very clear explanation for this reduction. This year, we still have a positive scenario and we are still facing a reduction in the advice. Is it correct to say that in a positive stock status you advised again for a TAC reduction this year?

**Ghislain:** Regarding the inclusion of discards in the assessment, where there is survival, for plaice in Irish sea it is currently included because of survival studies examined at the benchmark of WKIrish. In the beginning of 2021, there was WKSURVIVE to address these issues in the context of other stocks as well. All discard studies and survival studies were reviewed and, when adequate, they would be included in the evaluation at the benchmark. For sole, we used longer timeseries in the benchmark to review the reference points and the revision of the models can also result in different estimates of spawning stock and recruitment. The relationship between these two is critical in the definition of reference points. When we compared the advice from previous years, the perception of the stock was showing the same trends, but at a reduced level compared to 2020. That can result in a reduction of



the advice. With each year that we add, we don't only get information about the current status but we get information of what the status that we had estimated for the previous year is now with that additional information. That is what sometimes I know can be disconcerting, particularly if there's a trend, but every time we update the model there's a possibility that the estimates for the previous years will be either above than what they were last year or below.

**Patrick Murphy:** There seems to be a new emphasis from ICES on the last two years of recruitment, has that taken into consideration covid-19 and the change in effort? Are we going to look at the F ranges from year to year, to see if that would adapt to match the different recruitment and the different year classes?

I have concerns about haddock and the advice that was given last year. Despite it being very favorable, you seem to see another revise downwards. Has there been a change and evaluation on the fishing effort?

The other concern is hake, as we keep seeing this stock revised downwards while all the trends seems to be saying the opposite.

**Ghislain:** About the recruitment, we always use the best estimates that we get from the model and these estimates are largely based on what the surveys are telling us. The surveys are done in the same manner, year after year. We also test the surveys to determine whether they track recruitment well. Generally, when we have lower estimates of recruitment in our assessments in the recent years, that is an indication that the surveys show less recruitment. That is then used in the projection and in the projection there is always an assumption. For example, here in the advice for 2022 we have an estimate for beginning of 2021, but we don't have an estimate for 2022. Typically, what is assumed is the long-term average. Sometimes, if there is a clear reduction in recruitment over time, it is going to be a shorter time series, which is characteristic of the recruitment seen recently.

In relation to your second question, the catches in the fishery are sampled, so, if there was less catch taken, that is taken into account. If some métiers were not involved in the fishery last year because of COVID, that is also implicitly considered because these métiers do not have catches. The catches reflect what has happened in the fishery. The exploitation rates are then derived from the assessment that used those catches relative to the abundance that's estimated. For the haddock in the Celtic Sea for example we see a decline in 2020 which may have been linked to the fact that maybe there was not just as much effort, because of COVID.

**Patrick Murphy:** For me, the understanding is that if you increase the volume of the stock, then in turn this will increase the recruitment and that is one thesis. Another is that you have to fish down a certain year class because that becomes dominant in the fishery and otherwise you won't have good recruitment. We have all the other trends going upwards, and yet recruitment is still going down. Is there going to be a viewpoint from ICES to look at the F ranges in the various year classes?

**Ghislain:** The more biomass you have, you would generally expect higher recruitment, but there comes a point where when you get high biomass, the recruitment will fluctuate as it is affected by other things. Survival of eggs and larvae, for example, can be affected from year to year by environmental conditions. In the stock recruit relationship, we estimate a biomass, where  $B_{lim}$  is the



biomass below which we could expect that recruitment is going to reduce quite considerably to the extent that it could endanger the stock. Above  $B_{lim}$ , we can generally expect higher recruitment but that would fluctuate, so that you could, in some years, have lower recruitment even though you have good spawning biomass. In terms of having a special viewpoint on F ranges, ICES does provide these ranges and those that are provided could inform the discussions on the management measures to implement.

**Sean O'Donoghue:** It would be useful to indicate which stocks are under the Transparent Assessment Framework (TAF) system and which are still ongoing, as the quality assurance issue is a key issue and ICES has a good roadmap for this in relation to the advice. The issue is that for some stocks this is not so advanced as for others, so this indication would be very useful to have in the assessment table.

Regarding cod in the Celtic Sea, I noticed that the model is giving an overestimate of biomass and an underestimate of fishing mortality. This could relate to data/model issues. I am wondering when the stock is going to be benchmarked?

On haddock, the two statistical rectangles in the Irish Sea are included in the assessment for Celtic Sea haddock. I noticed that while the catches in these statistical rectangles have a small effect on the Celtic Sea haddock, they account for 43% of the Irish Sea haddock. This should be taken into account when the TAC is being looked at. Has ICES done that exercise?

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.

Finally, we seem to know very little about pollack. 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:** I note your comment on the TAF and that will be communicated to our team. The requesters of the advice would also be interested in this issue. For the cod, the stock was actually benchmarked last year but we still have some uncertainties on the model. In terms of the retrospective that you saw, because we are dealing with very small numbers, the main retrospective we look at is the spawning stock biomass. For the haddock, we are indeed advising the managers that those two statistical rectangles are considered when setting the TAC. 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. Finally, pollack 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.

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



**Jean Marie Robert:** I have a couple of questions on sole and plaice in 7h,j,k. It is clear that the management unit nor the evaluation unit are appropriate. ICES has been trying to evaluate two different populations. This has already been identified by the stakeholders as to be considered in TAC setting, but year after year we continue to see advice that does not take into account the reality of things.

Secondly, quality assurance in the assessment is fundamental. We acknowledge that assessing a stock is a very complex task and when we consider the context in 2020, with the impacts of covid and Brexit, I think it was even more challenging than usual. However, I am surprised that for many species, such as cod and haddock in the Celtic Sea, ICES is reporting that covid hasn't impacted the assessment too strongly and that the data used in the assessment are almost as good as in previous years. I am aware that ICES does its best and with the best data available, but I am confused how this is possible and I think we should avoid any surprises for next year.

**Ghislain:** On the sole, certainly the management areas that was used tended to reflect what was the understanding at the time. We do raise the issue of the stock unit, but we don't have enough evidence to confirm they are two different stocks. This is the advice we can provide with what we have. To address your second comment, certainly the covid impacts are reflected in the advice especially in terms of catches. The issue lies in estimates of market sampling for example, if the sampling could have not been conducted in a certain time of the year. We indicated the reductions in samples in the assessments where needed. Most advice sheets have a section indicating what quality issues affected the assessment.

### 3. Hake mesh size in the Irish box

**Chair:** The Secretariat circulated a proposal prepared by NIFA to increase the mesh size to 120mm in the Irish Box for gillnets targeting hake. Meanwhile, the NWW MS Group discussed about the articulation between the Technical Measures Regulation and EU regulation 494/2002 regarding the mesh size for the hake fishery. I would like to invite the French Presidency of the NWW MSG to take the floor.

**Pauline Joyeux:** Thank you Chairman. I would like to give you an update on the state of play of these discussions. As you know, the Technical Measures Regulation from 2019 seems to be in contradiction with the Hake Plan. We requested legal assistance to the Commission, asking to clarify the applicable rules. There are still juridical issues to be addressed and we also need to consider possible interactions with other regulations applicable in the area. We will resume discussions on this topic at the next Technical Group meeting in September.

**Jean-Marie Robert:** I think that the two regulations mentioned by Pauline are on different levels and that further legal questions need to be addressed. In the Annexes specifying the conditions for directed fishing for hake, certain depths are indicated that do not make precise reference to the 600m depth limit, for which a derogation is in place. This derogation is clearly applicable to all the areas not deeper than 600m and to all the Irish Box area. Have you considered this in your discussions?



**Pauline Joyeux:** Indeed, this is part of our discussion too. We didn't get precise mentions to the different depths in the reply we got from the Commission. The Commission suggested a Joint Recommendation to amend point 9.1 of Part C of Annex VI of the Technical Measures Regulation for the reintroduction of a mesh size of 120mm in that specific area, but we haven't reached a consensus on this in the MSG. We are waiting for the technical analysis from the Commission to decide on our way forward.

**Chair:** I now invite Alex Crowley from NIFA to quickly present their proposal. Jean-Marie also prepared some reflections on the proposal which he can explain after Alex's intervention.

**Alex Crowley:** I hope that the proposal is self-explanatory, but I would like to hear the others' views about it. Our members see the Irish Box as a biologically sensitive and important area for the hake stock. We feel that more selective gears should be used. Ample research has been done comparing the 120mm and the 100mm mesh. We would also welcome clarity from the MS and the Commission on the regulatory framework applicable.

**Jean-Marie Robert:** ([presentation available here](#)) It is clear that, when we use the 120mm, the average length of catches is higher (75cm) than with the 100mm (65cm). However, if we look at catches below MCRS, our data shows that there are fewer discards when using the 100mm, despite both gears have proved to be very selective in this sense. In proportion, far more juveniles are caught with the 120mm mesh. The average catch size cannot be the only parameter taken into account, thus I did a research through scientific literature looking at average size at first maturity. According to FishBase, this corresponds to 42.7 cm. Another important element to consider is the difference between male and females size proportion. According to a study done in the North Sea, the proportion of males and females below 60cm size is the same, but from 60 to 90cm we see an increase in the females. Therefore, the 100mm mesh seems to be far more efficient regarding both the proportion of juveniles caught and a more balanced exploitation of the stock regarding the sex ratio. We also considered the issue of bycatches, as we should also consider selectivity on other species not specifically targeted by that fishing activity. The 100mm mesh allows for a more targeted hake fishery than the 120mm mesh, limiting cod and spurdog bycatches.

**Juan Carlos Corrás:** I agree with Jean-Marie. Hake is being harvested sustainably, with the stock being inside the safe biological limits. I think we should keep the current mesh size and I look forward to clarifications from the Commission on the regulatory framework as previously discussed.

**Sean O'Donoghue:** There are two issues here: one is the legal certainty, the other is the 100 vs 120mm. To solve the latter, we need to base ourselves on scientific evidence. Thus I propose that we put a request to STECF to verify what has been presented today by Jean Marie.

**ACTION:** NWWAC to recommend the COM to request STECF evaluation on the use of 100mm vs 120mm mesh for gillnets for hake in the Irish Box.





#### 4. Update on restructuring of the NWWAC

Following the decision of the GA, WG2 will be merged with WG1.

**ACTION:** Members to send feedbacks to the Secretariat on the name for WG1+2 and send nominations for new Chair and Vice-Chair to be elected at the meeting in September

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

1	NWWAC to recommend to the COM to request ICES that information on quality assurance is included in the advice sheet for each stock.
2	NWWAC to recommend to the COM to request STECF evaluation on the use of 100mm vs 120mm mesh for gillnets for hake in the Irish Box
3	Members to send feedback to the Secretariat on the name for WG1+2 and send nominations for new Chair and Vice-Chair to be elected at the meeting in September

#### Participants

NWWAC Members	
Patrick Murphy	Irish South & West Fish Producers Organisation
Luis Francisco Marin	O.P.P.A.O.
Jose Beltran	OPP-LUGO
Victor Manuel Novo Rodriguez	PESQUERAS NOVO, S.L.
Franck Le Barzic	OP COBRENORD
John Lynch	Irish South & East Fish Producers Organisation Ltd
Juan Carlos Corrás Arias	PESCAGALICIA-ARPEGA-OBARCO
Purificación Fernandez	ANASOL
Julien Lamothe	ANOP
David Milly	OP PECHEURS D'AQUITAINE
Manu Kelberine	CRPM de Bretagne
Alex Crowley	NIFA
Jean-Marie Robert	Pêcheurs De Bretagne
Suso Lourido	Opp77 Puerto De Celeiro
Sean O'Donoghue	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation Ltd
John Ward	IFPO
Experts and Observers	
Ghislain Chouinard	ICES
Pauline Joyeux	Presidency NWW MS
Marianna Monneau	Presidency NWW MS
Juan Antonio Espejo	Secretaría General de Pesca - España



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Mo Mathies	Executive Secretary
Matilde Vallerani	Deputy Executive Secretary

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