



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
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DRAFT MINUTES

WORKING GROUP 4 (IRISH SEA)

Virtual meeting

2 July 2021, 13:00 – 15:00

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair, John Lynch, welcomed all the participants to the meeting. Apologies were received from Pauline Joyeux, from the French presidency of the NWW Member States Group.

The agenda was adopted. Action points from the last meeting (10 March 2021):

- 1) Secretariat to distribute draft Terms of Reference of webinar on WKIrish to Horizontal Working Group for comments. Forward invitation also to other ACs and to the COM.

Webinar on WKIrish held on 29 April.

- 2) Proposal to add a question to the list prepared by the Focus Group Control on control issues after Brexit, requesting clarification on agreements on fishing closures (for example the Irish Sea cod closure).

Done, questions sent to COM on 18 March. However, no reply has been received from DG MARE yet.

ACTION: Secretariat to follow this up with DG MARE.

- 3) Secretariat to relaunch the request sent in April 2020 about TAC setting for haddock and cod once EU-UK negotiations are concluded.

Relaunched in April 2021. COM's reply: "Please note that we are still engaged with the UK in annual consultations on the setting of fishing opportunities for 2021. As soon as we have concluded, we will begin the work of the Specialised Committee on Fisheries. It is in that context that we will, together the UK, discuss any specific issues relating to future TAC setting and management of certain fisheries/areas. We think it will be very important that your advice feeds into this process, and hence, we will seek to have the issue taken up by the Committee. We will ensure to keep the NWWAC informed of all developments in this regard in the coming months."

ACTION: Secretariat to follow this up with DG MARE.



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- 4) Secretariat to relaunch letter on potential for whiting stock improvement in relation to new technical measures. Secretariat also to mention this at the next MSG meeting. BIM scientists involved in the gear trials will be asked to present the results to the WG.

Relaunched in April 2021, same answer as last year: “DG MARE will not provide a reply as this is considered as part of the wider submission on technical measures from the NWW MS Regional Group.” Possibility to address this issue in September with presentation from BIM.

ACTION: Contact BIM experts to present on their trials results at the September meeting of WG4.

- 5) Secretariat to include the Chair’s proposal to combine WG1 and 4 to the restructuring proposals of the Focus Group Brexit

Done, the proposal was also presented to the General Assembly in an extraordinary meeting on 1 July

Sean O’Donoghue: I think it would also be important to contact the COM in relation to the UK Technical Measures. This is a very urgent matter. If these measures are different from those in the EU, huge problems will arise for the fishers. This has been discussed in the HWG, but as Irish Sea WG we need to put this forward to the ExCom. This issue has to be sorted by the Specialised Committee on Fisheries under the TCA.

ACTION: Prepare a letter to the COM on the urgency of having cohesion between EU and UK technical measures.

Dominic Rihan: There are only subtle differences between the two set of measures, but I will send the document to the Secretariat, including an analysis done by the MSG comparing the UK measures and the EU existing ones.

ACTION: Secretariat to share the document with UK Technical Measures and comparison with existing EU measures done by the MSG with all the NWWAC membership.

Emiel Brouckaert: Is the UK asking for COM’s feedback by 8 July?

Dominic: The COM is currently looking for comments from the MS, which would then be combined with their own comments as well. I am not sure if 8 July is the agreed deadline, but the MS were asked to provide feedback by early next week.

John Ward: There are obvious differences in the UK and EU that would cause problems for example for UK vessels crossing the line into EU waters. Is there some facility to solve these issues or are we going to be stuck with them?

Dominic: It seems that the UK is going ahead and that those will be the measures in their waters, whatever EU regulations will be, so they would have the same issues in reverse. I think there will be discussions in the SCF but not before September. I think that UK measures will come into force and



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there will be a situation where measures between EU and UK waters will be different. The UK is allowed to do this in its waters as sovereign state.

Emiel: They can do whatever they prefer as long as it is applicable to all vessels, both their own and with foreign flags.

Chair: We are probably stuck with the UK measures and will have to work around them as best as we can, though it seems like EU measures are stronger and stricter than UK measures, bar a few exceptions.

2. ICES advice for the Irish Sea

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

The presentation includes all advice released up to 30 June 2021. Full advice sheets are available for all stocks. The COVID-19 impacts were inserted in the section “Quality of the assessment”. For the stocks managed by both the EU and the UK, the advice was provided on the basis of MSY or PA. The EU MAP option was provided in the catch scenario table if available. The rules applied by ICES in developing advice on fishing opportunities are similar to previous years.

Advice for Nephrops (FUs 14-15-19) will be released in the autumn.

- **Cod PA: Catch \leq 74 t**

Category 3 advice was used for this stock. The harvest rate declined to low level but is slightly higher in 2018-2020. The biomass index has been near long-term low. The reduction in advised catch is due to reduction in ratio of the recent biomass index. Landings from south of Division 7a (rectangles 33E2-3) are not considered part of this stock (included in cod 7.e-k stock) and this should be taken into account when setting catch options for 7a and 7e-k. There is the intention to benchmark the stock at the beginning of 2022, hopefully we’ll have an analytical model as a result.

- **Haddock MSY: Catch: \leq 2761 t**

As a consequence of the covid impacts, the NIMIK survey was not available in 2020. The spawning stock is high in 2021 and the fishing pressure has declined, being below F_{MSY} since 2012. Recruitment has been variable, but estimated to be very poor in 2020, the lowest in 25 years. Thus, the stock is anticipated to decline, but still well above MSY $B_{trigger}$. Landings from south of Division 7a (rectangles 33E2-3) are not considered part of this stock.

- **Sole MSY: Catch \leq 787 t**

The assessment was affected by Covid-19 and only one survey was used in the assessment. The UK (E&W)-BTS-Q3 survey was unable to cover Division 7a, thus the assessment was conducted without index. The spawning stock has been below B_{lim} until 2017 but has increased and is now above MSY $B_{trigger}$. Fishing pressure is below F_{MSY} . Recent recruitment is higher than in the early 2010’s.



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- **Plaice MSY: Catch \leq 2 747 t**

The UK (E&W)-BTS-Q3 survey was unable to cover Division 7a. Estimates of young fish are more uncertain, and perception was revised downwards. The spawning stock has increased since 2012 and is well above MSY $B_{trigger}$. Fishing pressure has declined and has been below F_{MSY} since 2011. Recruitment has fluctuated but decreasing since 2014. Discarding is high and variable, 40% of discards are assumed to survive.

- **Seabass MSY: Catch \leq 2 216 t**

Spawning stock has is above B_{lim} in both 2020 and 2021. Fishing pressure is below F_{MSY} . Recruitment has been poor, except for 2013-2014 and 2016. Under the advised catch, the stock should remain just above B_{lim} . The catch 2020 was of 1 814 t (1042 t commercial, 325 t discards and 447 t recreational).

- **Whiting MSY: Catch = 0**

The stock size is extremely low. The spawning-stock biomass has been well below B_{lim} since the mid-1990s. Recruitment has been low since the early 1990s. Fishing pressure is above F_{MSY} and F_{lim} in 2020. Discarding is high: 97% in 2020 on catches of 1 118 t. DG MARE requested a technical service on what would be the likely catches, released on June 30th, which is based on bycatch in the Nephrops fishery. Likely catches in 2022 would be 957 t.

- **Rays and skates**

Advice was issued in 2020 for 2021/2022. There are 4 stocks related to the Irish Sea. For 3 of those, the advice is based on the survey index, while for the blonde ray it is based on historical landings reduced progressively as we move forward (category 5 advice, only based on landings).

- **Spurdog**

Advice was issued in 2020 for 2021/2022: no targeted fisheries (kind of a 0 catch advice as it is a bycatch). Catch in 2020 was around 25-2600 tonnes. The stock was benchmarked in 2021 which resulted in new catch estimates including discards, additional survey indices, fecundity data and reference points. A new assessment using the benchmark results will be done in 2022.

b) Comments/inputs feeding advice on Fishing Opportunities 2022

Sean: How is ICES assessing whether the full quality control has been affected across the stocks? Some of the stocks have gone through more quality control parameters. I acknowledge the efforts done by ICES in terms of quality assurance. How can we identify the stocks that have been more thoroughly quality assured?

Ghislain: We made progress on the accreditation of data management and data flows. We implemented the Transparency Assessment Framework (TAF) ensuring that the code for the assessment is validated again. I could provide with list of stocks that are currently in TAF for the Irish



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sea. In terms of benchmarks, we have the benchmark oversight group within ICES, examining the results of benchmarks making sure the process followed the right procedures and approaches.

Sean: In relation to cod, we had a benchmark some years ago. Are there plans to update the benchmark? The issue of those rectangles and the actual mixing of that stock with the Celtic Sea, how is that taken into account?

Ghislain: Indeed, there used to be an analytical assessment on this stock, which is now a category 3, but there has been a couple of workshops on methods this year. Now there seems to be a good prospect for an analytical model based on stock synthesis approach and this is on the list of benchmarks that will be done in 2022.

Sean: For haddock, having looked at the ICES advice, what is driving the 17% reduction here is the virtual collapse in the recruitment in 2020. We don't think that that is correct. I'd like to hear your comments and take it forward from this group that this stock should be relooked at in terms of recruitment.

Ghislain: You are right, we didn't have the NIMIK survey and the Northern Ireland Quarter 1 survey showed very low estimate for recruitment. Now we will have the Northern Ireland Quarter 4 survey which should be happening at the end of the year. Then again we would have Quarter 1 at the beginning of 2022, which would inform us about the size of the year class. These new surveys will give us a new estimate of where the situation is.

Sean: Concerning spurdog, how was the MSY figure calculated, what parameters were used?

Ghislain: The issue here was that we were using assumed catches from the period 2010 to the present for previous assessments. We didn't know exactly where the biomass was, but the assessments showed that it was lower than $MSY B_{trigger}$. Knowing that they are bycatches, the advice used the precautionary approach and indicated no targeted fisheries on this stock. Thanks to the benchmark, we should now be in a better position with reference points to provide advice next year. With the information gathered on landings and estimates of discards, we have an estimate of catches to be used in the assessment in 2022. Typically, we produce advice on a two-year basis for this stock.

Sean: It seemed to me that the MSY value was set at a relatively high level and I was wondering what the technical basis is. If that figure is questionable, it does make a huge difference in terms of the next assessment.

Ghislain: I forgot what the new MSY is, but it was updated with the benchmark. The current assessment is not based on the benchmark results.

Patrick Murphy: Did the activity of the fleet during covid have impact on any of the advice given? Was it taken into consideration?

Ghislain: This is a bit difficult to estimate at this point in terms of how to insert that into the stock assessment, because the timing likely would have changed and in some cases our issue was that market and discard sampling was disrupted. It was kind of difficult to factor these impacts at this



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point. In the models, we factored what the actual catches were in the best way possible. For example, we compared the weights at age that we obtained with data from previous years.

Patrick: Was there landing data taken into consideration that might not have reflected what would have normally occurred? Did the data reflect the actual nature of what a normal year would be without the covid impact, since many fishers couldn't participate in the fishery?

Ghislain: We estimated a number of fish of each age taken by the fishery and that is done by metier. If a metier wasn't active, there would be no catches and no sampling. A bigger problem would be if a metier was participating in the fishery but it was not possible sample because of covid. In this case we would have to assume the weights at age for that metier.

Patrick: For example, fishing effort for haddock in the Irish Sea was very low; could it be that in this case covid impacted the assessment?

Ghislain: No, if the indexes indicate that the stock is high and the catch is much reduced compared to previous years, the estimate of F would be less. For the estimate to show something lower, it would have to be shown in the index. For the haddock, the issue is the low estimate for the 2020 year-class based on only one survey.

John Ward: We are all disappointed with the haddock figure. It seems that it is a healthy stock but because of the lack of one survey, this is getting a very severe reduction. Any consideration given for having a roll-over of the TAC from last year?

Ghislain: We used the best evidence we had. The estimate for the 2020 value was used in the projections. If indications from the two surveys would have been very different in the past, we wouldn't have considered them, but usually surveys were showing very similar results. We tried to assess to which extent the lack of the NIMIK survey had an impact on the results of the assessment. We did these sensitivity analyses, repeating some of the previous years' assessments, assuming that in those years we didn't know the last value for that particular survey. Then we did the assessment and compared it with the assessment using that value, and for most of the stocks there were not tremendous differences in the estimates.

John W: It think this brings us back to Sean's point on quality control, because it is really hard for fishers to accept that the 7% increase from last year is completely wiped out this year.

Ghislain: When you look at the stock and at the projections, the value that changes often is recruitment. A stock might be increasing strongly but if recruitment is coming down, it impacts the advice.

Sean: Is haddock one of those stocks in TAF? Given the importance of ICES work on the quality assurance issue, it would be useful if it was identified in the advice sheet for each of the stocks whether a stock has gone through the whole quality process or not.

Ghislain: All stocks go through the same quality assurance process, which we are trying to improve even more. The haddock was benchmarked recently through the WKIrish process, the issue of the 2020 recruitment was fully discussed and considerations on the survey that was missing were made.



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Not sure haddock is in TAF. The issue here is mostly in terms of the information we have available, which was examined as well in terms of quality assurance. Certainly, as we will get more information on that year class, the assessment will be revised.

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

ACTION: NWWAC to recommend to the COM to request ICES a re-evaluation of the haddock stock in the Irish Sea after the autumn survey.

Sean: In relation to WKIrish and the work done on the ecosystem approach, I was of the understanding that this was going to be discussed last year in ACOM in view of utilising it. Why didn't this happen this year?

Ghislain: Discussion was to take place last September but was delayed in March. There was as well the webinar organised by the NWWAC on this very issue. The view now is certainly that this could be incorporated as an option in the catch scenario table, not this year for timing issues, but could be produced for the coming years if the advice requesters desire. The approach is precautionary so there is no reason for not including it in the catch scenarios. We want to pursue this and incorporate ecosystem productivity in the assessment and in the advice.

ACTION: NWWAC to recommend to the COM that the ecosystem approach is included in the ICES catch option table.

3. Update on the restructuring of the AC

Following the vote of the General Assembly, WG1 will be combined with WG2. The Irish Sea WG will continue to exist. The Secretariat proposes that WG Irish Sea becomes WG1 and members agreed.

4. Elections' procedure of WG Chair and vice-Chair (Secretariat)

The tenure for the current Chair and Vice-Chair is coming to an end in September. Members will have to elect a new Chair and Vice-Chairs at the meeting in September with an open vote. Nominations can be sent to the Secretariat via email in advance of the meeting. Members already mentioned that they would like to propose the re-election of the current Chair and Vice-Chair.

Chair: I propose to use this WG in a proper fashion to achieve results even in terms of the ecosystem approach or address other issues that might reach beyond the group.

ACTION: Secretariat to reach out to OIG members to ask if they would be interested in joining the group.



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

1	Secretariat to follow up with DG MARE on the letter sent on TAC setting for cod and haddock in the Irish Sea.
2	Secretariat to follow up with DG MARE on the list of questions on control issues in relation to the TCA.
3	Secretariat to contact BIM experts to present on the results of trials for measures to improve the whiting stock at the September meeting of WG4.
4	Prepare a letter to the COM on the urgency of having cohesion between EU and UK technical measures.
5	Secretariat to share the document with UK Technical Measures and comparison with existing EU measures done by the MSG with all the NWWAC membership.
6	NWWAC to recommend to the COM to request ICES that information on quality assurance is included in the advice sheet for each stock.
7	NWWAC to recommend to the COM to request ICES a re-evaluation of the haddock stock in the Irish Sea after the autumn survey.
8	NWWAC to recommend to the COM that the ecosystem approach is included in the ICES catch option table.
9	Secretariat to reach out to OIG members to ask if they would be interested in joining the group.

Participants

NWWAC members	
John Lynch	ISEFPO
John Ward	IFPO
Patrick Murphy	IS&WPO
Emiel Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Sean O'Donoghue	KFO
Norah Parke	KFO
Experts and Observers	
Ghislain Chouinard	ICES
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Dominic Rihan	BIM
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Mo Mathies	Executive Secretary