



# MINUTES

## WORKING GROUP 4 – IRISH SEA

Virtual meeting (Zoom)

**Wednesday 10 March 2020**

**15:15 – 16:45 CET**

### 1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair John Lynch welcomed all the participants to the meeting. Apologies. The agenda was adopted as drafted.

Action points from the last meeting (03 September 2020) include:

1. Secretariat to prepare proposal for virtual Focus Group style meeting for WKIRISH discussion for late autumn.

The organisation of the webinar is in motion, experts such as David Reid and Ghislain Chouinard have already been contacted. Dates to be considered are in the second half of April.

**ACTION:** 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.

2. Follow up letter to the COM mentioning that catches of cod, whiting and haddock in the two Irish Sea statistical rectangles, 33E2 and 33E3, are included in the relevant assessment for the Celtic Sea, not in the Irish Sea assessment.

It is not clear how this translates into setting the TACs for these stocks in the Irish Sea and Celtic Sea. Letter sent to the COM on 2 October, reply received on 30 October. The COM had replied that further clarifications on the future of TAC setting for the Irish Sea region would have followed once negotiations with the UK had concluded. The issue is going to be addressed under item 3 of the agenda.

ICES was unfortunately not able to attend this meeting and explain the methodology as the date coincided with an ACOM meeting.

### 2. Discussion on Irish Sea cod closure in the context of Brexit

**Chair:** The NWWAC sent a letter to the COM in April 2020 requesting clarification of current terms of the closed area for conservation of cod in the Irish Sea. The COM replied very clearly. However, does the group need to discuss this closure any further, in the context of Brexit? There is a concern that the UK would not participate in the closure, using different derogations.

**Sean O'Donoghue:** Has there been any discussion on the closures with the UK in the bilaterals? We should examine what is in the TCA about closures, as they are part of negotiations with the UK.



**John Ward:** There seems to be doubt regarding the UK's position, but what would be our position if the UK decide to go an entirely different way?

**Chair:** If there were different interpretations on both sides of the Irish Sea, it would certainly create a lot of difficulties for the vessels. This would need to become part of the negotiations then. The AC could certainly make suggestions on this, but would not be part of the negotiations.

**Sean O'Donoghue:** Given the importance of this topic, this might have been a question in terms of the TCA for clarification by the COM. Maybe we can add it to the control queries?

**ACTION:** 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).

### 3. TAC setting for haddock and cod in the south Irish Sea

**Chair:** Since we got no clear answer on this from the COM, I was thinking we could directly ask ICES. Are we allowed to do that?

**Sean O'Donoghue:** If we have to ask a question to ICES, we need to put it through the COM. This is the correct procedure to follow.

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

### 4. Potential for whiting stock size improvement in relation to new technical measures

**Chair:** We've been discussing a lot of technical measures and alternative technical measures with experts as well, but the zero TAC advice is still going to be a problem in the Irish Sea if we don't figure out the issue of whiting below MCRS in the Nephrops fishery. Last week, I received some information from BIM on the work they have been carrying out, considering alternative types of trawls and alternative riggings for the current type of trawls to reduce the herding of whiting into the net. A short summary of this work has been distributed to members in advance of this meeting.

The Secretariat shared the document on screen.

**Secretariat:** When the letter was sent to the COM last year for STECF to evaluate the measures in place in the Irish Sea, the COM replied that they would not reply on this as it would have been considered part of the wider submission on the Technical Measures Joint Recommendation from the MSG. The MSG is preparing a submission on the Celtic Sea technical measures, but maybe they are proposing to prepare a submission similarly on this?

**Chair:** We should wait for trials to finish first, but I think this is a good way to put this forward.

**Emiel Brouckaert:** I am fully supporting the activity, but what objective shall we put forward in this process, when are we supposed to act upon the results and what do we want to achieve? I think it would be worthwhile already to ask the question from the AC via the COM if this is providing the



possibility to get away from the 0 TAC advice.

**Chair:** I agree with Emiel. The 0 TAC advice is mainly due to the fact that the stock above MCRS is not very large. The stock of whiting is there but the fish never gets to grow to a mature size.

**ACTION:** 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.

## 5. Input on how to improve the functioning of the NWWAC

**Sean O'Donoghue:** The Focus Group Brexit worked out numerous proposals and agreed on those presented here to bring forward to the members of this AC. In my view, continuing on with this WG on its own does not make sense with only 5 members and 6 stocks. I would like that view to be conveyed to ExCom assuming that all in this meeting agree.

**John Lynch:** In my opinion, it is pointless to carry on with WG4 on its own as it has become so small, so we do need to find a spot where it may fit in. During WG1 meeting, I proposed the merging of WG4 and WG1, especially because they share similar issues and technical measures are very much aligned between the two areas. So WG2 and WG3 can stay untouched, as they are very busy.

**Emiel Brouckaert:** Sean, is it a suggestion from this WG to rule out proposal 1? Also, regarding John's proposal, was this addressed at the FG Brexit?

**Sean O'Donoghue:** No, John's proposal was not dealt with. Maybe the reasoning was because we had quite a large list which was already whittled down for the FG. Part of the reason was the connection between the Celtic Sea and the Irish Sea, and not really much between Irish Sea and West of Scotland. There would always be the option of combining WG4 somewhere in option 1 as well though that would create one very large WG. The Irish Sea as an entity with the UK gone does not make much sense on its own. The issues for the stocks though are still extremely relevant. John's suggestion should be considered and put forward to the ExCom.

**Patrick Murphy:** Just a reminder that there were a lot of choices given at the FG Brexit, for example regarding the establishment of two large Horizontal Working groups with sub-Focus Groups to address individual areas.

**Chair:** I think that option was discounted at the Focus Group, I am not sure if members would like to bring it up again at ExCom.

**Secretariat:** Just from a Secretariat point of view, we believe that our idea of establishing two large horizontal working groups with regional sub-groups would have give us an easier option to communicate with our UK counterparts. The idea was to establish a horizontal working group addressing climate change, ecosystem-based management, etc., while the other group would consider EU regulations. Underneath that, we would have four regional subgroups dealing with the ICES advice for fishing opportunities. In this way, the UK counterpart could have been involved in horizontal issues and left out from discussions on regulations.

**Patrick Murphy:** Yes, Mo is correct: this would have allowed a working group more inclusive on common issues.



**Chair:** Is there any timeline for us to take a decision on this?

**Secretariat:** We really need to work on this restructuring, as it will affect all the work in the AC, including elections, and the General Assembly has to vote on it in September.

**Emiel Brouckaert:** In WG4 we have very useful and structural meetings in one language, so there is also a disadvantage in abandoning this group. While I agree with my colleagues, I also think this change will not make work easier.

**Sean O'Donoghue:** I do think we need to get a proper home for WG4. Just to comment on the horizontal proposal and can see the advantages in this. The only thing is that the membership as I see it seem to be quite large number that did not want to depart from the regional WGs and as Chair of the FG I had reflect on what was agreed to be put forward. Unless someone wants to bring this up at ExCom we will look at restructuring base on regional groups.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to include the Chair's proposal to combine WG1 and 4 to the restructuring proposals of the Focus Group Brexit. In any case, WG4 should not exist as a standalone group anymore.

## 6. Review of progress, summary of actions agreed and decisions adopted (Chair)

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.
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).
3	Secretariat to relaunch the request sent in April 2020 about TAC setting for haddock and cod once EU-UK negotiations are concluded.
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.
5	Secretariat to include the Chair's proposal to combine WG1 and 4 to the restructuring proposals of the Focus Group Brexit. In any case, WG4 should not exist as a standalone group anymore.

## 7. List of participants

Name	Organisation
Sean O'Donoghue	KFO
Norah Parke (Vice-Chair)	KFO
John Lynch (Chair)	IFO
Emiel Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Egon Patteeuw (observer)	NWW Member States Group (BE)
Maeve White (observer)	NWW Member States Group (IE)
Paulie Joyeux (observer)	NWW Member States Group (FR)
John Ward	IFPO



Patrick Murphy	IS&WFPO
Gérald Hussenot (observer)	BlueFish
Matilde Vallerani	Secretariat
Mo Mathies	Secretariat

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