



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
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SEPTENTRIONALES

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MINUTES

WORKING GROUP 2 CELTIC SEA & West of Scotland

Virtual

Tuesday 15 March 2022

1. Welcome and introductions

Jean-Marie Robert (Pêcheurs de Bretagne) welcomed the participants to the meeting. He explained he was a last-minute replacement for the Chair Jesús Angel Lourido Garcia (OPP 77 Puerto de Celeiro) who sent apologies for his absence due to strikes in Spain arising from the fuel crisis. Apologies were also received by Hugo González (ARVI) and Anais Mourtada (CNPMEM), who was replaced by Margot Angibaud (CNPMEM). The agenda was adopted with the addition of the fuel crisis as a topic for discussion if time allowed.

Action points from the minutes of the last meeting (09 September 2022, virtual) included:

- 1) Secretariat to follow up on the revision of the hake plan and clarification of legal interpretation with the MSG before progressing with the letter to STECF on evaluation of mesh sizes in the Irish box.

DG MARE clarified the legal uncertainty concerning the rules governing the hake fishery in the “Irish box” with a letter from 2 November 2021, confirming that the Technical Measures Regulation prevails. In light of this, the action point from this WG in July “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” seems not relevant anymore.

- 2) Secretariat to bring the main issue raised in the advice Fishing Opportunities 2022 to the attention of the MSG at the next Technical Group meeting.

Done at the Technical Group meeting of 16 September 2021.

- 3) Secretariat to refer comments on request from the PelAC on sprat and greater silver smelt to the ExCom.

A gentlemen’s agreement is being finalised between the NWWAC and the PelAC. ExCom approval procedure is in progress.



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2. Review of TACs and quotas in ICES area 6 and 7 in light of bilateral EU/UK and Tri-lateral negotiations and arrangements for TAC recommendations 2023

The Chair introduced the topic and invited Cristina Ribeiro (DG MARE) to take the floor and give details of the procedures and arrangements for TAC recommendations for 2023.

Cristina Ribeiro shared information on the elements the Commission is planning for this year. She reported that the calendar of work should start by the end of October beginning with the negotiations with the UK and hopefully be concluded when agreement is reached by early December. Both parties are fully committed to the calendar to allow all the procedures to be in place by the end of the year to allow the fishing industry and administrations to move swiftly with their work. She reported that there are some stocks that do not follow the calendar year and these negotiations will take place in the first half of 2022 and very much follow ICES advice which triggers the beginning of this consultation.

Ribeiro continued with information on the Specialized Committee on Fisheries which has three meetings planned this year. The first meeting would be in April, the second in July and then the last one in September before the consultations began. There would also be working group meetings and technical exchanges which would allow the consultations to run more smoothly.

Ribeiro highlighted that due to the war in Ukraine ICES has postponed all its meetings until early April. This will delay the advice that the Commission usually receives in early April and this may have some unknown impacts. The Commission is working with ICES to find a solution that will lessen the impact of this postponement.

Ribeiro reported that regarding planning there are many topics the priority of which have not yet been agreed. This ranking must be agreed, and these topics have to be distributed between the three meetings if all are to be discussed this year. She mentioned that it was clear from the written record that for the Celtic Sea and West of Scotland there are very important topics. There are some stocks which are misaligned with the management area and the parties agreed to discuss this with ICES. For example, Celtic Sea whiting where the TAC encompasses the North Sea whiting stock. There is still a lot of work to be done also on the stocks that have zero catch advice and regarding the mixed fisheries in the Celtic Sea.

The Chair thanked Ribeiro for her presentation and opened the floor to questions.

Julien Lamothe remarked that as yet we can't measure the consequences of the delay in the ICES advisory process but noted that the AC should be party to the talks about benchmarks and areas that could stall the ACs work. Secondly, he mentioned the mechanism of the negotiations between UK and EU which are impacting AC regarding TAC and recommendations. He suggested the AC be an active participant in anticipating and debating the social, economic and environmental topics that are relevant for the setting of the TACs for next year.

Patrick Murphy suggested that the AC identifies some key stocks that should be agreed first and for which the quotas could be set on a monthly basis to allow the fleets to operate.

Robert noted that the same stocks regularly create issues between the negotiating parties. He commented that Murphy's suggestion made sense regarding the need to start the work related to



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Brexit issues earlier as the priority stocks are known. He pointed out that certain stocks for which zero TAC have been issued have been included in the TCA to adopt guidelines. Therefore, the terms are not very clear and the guidelines for these stocks should be adopted if agreement is not reached by December. He remarked that cod in Celtic Sea is a sensitive matter for the negotiations and a lot of time was needed in previous years to agree a TAC at the last minute. He mentioned that both negotiating parties start work when ICES has released its advice and asked Ribeiro to provide more details on how this is planned so the AC could organise their work appropriately.

Ribeiro reiterated that the Commission is working very closely with ICES to find a solution. She explained that when the ICES advice is released, the Commission works very quickly and there is little time to review before negotiation, but the advice from the ACs is very relevant in this work. She advised the AC to front load as much of the work as possible and to find arrangements to share the advice on the relevant elements with the Commission so that these views can be considered. She confirmed that she had taken note of Murphy's comments and noted that the advice for the Celtic Sea mixed fisheries comes out in September/October. Regarding the zero TAC stocks she reported that ICES was requested to provide ad hoc advice to forecast the bycatch of the zero TAC stocks so the fleets can keep operating.

ACTION POINT: In relation to EU-UK TAC setting, NWWAC should identify a list of key stocks on which the AC could focus its effort to provide advice in time before the Commission discusses its proposal in negotiations with the UK.

3. Technical Measures in the Celtic Sea

François Bastardie took the floor to present an introduction and update to the STECF report results. The presentation on the STECF 21-18 Technical Measures in the Celtic Sea can be found [here](#). Bastardie gave some information on the background to the report:

- Cod and whiting stocks in the Celtic Sea are below Blim (ICES, 2019):
 - only bycatches are allowed for both stocks.
 - The EU was legally obliged to adopt remedial technical measures as safeguards, to help rebuild these stocks (Art 8, Western Waters Multiannual Plan).
- Remedial measures were for the first time adopted under Regulation (EU) 2020/123: improving selectivity by making mandatory the usage of a suite of gears that have lower levels of by-catches of cod in the areas where cod catches are significant, thus decreasing the fishing mortality of that stock in mixed fisheries.
- Later in 2020, "Remedial measures for cod and whiting in the Celtic Sea" (article 15 of the 2021 Fishing Opportunities regulation (EU) 2021/92): continuing the implementation of the measures introduced in 2020 to reduce by-catches of gadoids in TACs of species caught in mixed fisheries together with gadoids (e.g. haddock, megrims, anglerfish and Norway lobster).
- Northwestern Water Member States Group identified the need of increasing the knowledge of the performance of the technical measures for all fleets operating in the Celtic Sea and the



benefit of an evaluation of the technical measures adopted, emphasizing on the requirement for a bio-economic impact assessment.

Bastardie then outlined the Terms of reference for STECF EWG 21-18.

- ToR 1. As regarding the fleets operating in the Celtic Sea: Contribution of all fleets to the fishing mortality. Evaluation of the conditions of application of specific technical measures trigger by thresholds.
- ToR 2. As regarding seasonal closures of relevant parts of the CSPZ: Evaluate the efficiency of existing closed area and explore alternative closures in duration, season and/or geography.
- ToR 3. Bio-economic impact assessment of adopted technical measures, specifically raised-fishing line, and alternative technical measures.
- ToR 4. Evaluate the potential effectiveness of the measures to be introduced by the UK from the 5th September 2021 on cod and whiting stocks in the Celtic Sea in comparison to the current measures in EU waters.

Bastardie then gave details on each ToR.

TOR 1.1 – Who’s fishing?

Bottom otter trawl fleets using larger mesh-size (100-119mm) have the highest partial fishing mortality for cod and haddock. Fleets using smaller mesh-size (70- 99mm) contribute more to F for whiting. Fishing mortality by ICES divisions: Highest partial F for: - cod: ICES division 27.7g. - whiting: mostly in 27.7g and 27.7e - haddock was spread over 27.7e,g,h and a lesser extent in 27.7j.

TOR 1.2 – Impact of the “raised fishing line” in the CSPZ.

Evaluate the use of different species and thresholds to set the raised fishing line in terms of trips and vessel affected. Most appropriate species: haddock (in terms of catches of cod potentially avoided and in terms of negative impact on revenues). The specific >20% haddock threshold (specified in the current Regulation) impacts fewer trips and vessels while still outperforming the potential thresholds on any other species.

TOR 2 – closed areas in the CSPZ

Existing closed areas do not appear to protect areas with the highest density of cod throughout the year. It is not possible to evaluate the historical efficiency and economic impacts of Trevoise closure (no data available). Regarding new closed areas, substantial catch reductions of cod could be achieved by closing several ICES statistical rectangles off the South Coast of Ireland (Rectangles 31E1, 31E2, 30E0, 30E1, 32E1). STECF notes that considering the high importance of cod, even as a bycatch species, any closure proposal should be accompanied by a reduction in fishing effort.

TOR 3 - Bio-economic impact assessment of adopted technical measures (gears modifications & closed areas).

Static bio-economic analysis: results should be interpreted with caution as they do not include mixed fisheries considerations, and do not consider the reallocation of fishing effort or other possible selectivity devices which would reduce cod catches.

Dynamic bio-economic assessment is considered better, however still to be investigated: 1) fleet-based FLBEIA model for Celtic Sea, but the current state of development of this model did not allow exploring management strategies; 2) an alternative spatially-explicit DISPLACE model was presented to the EWG, which could be investigated and developed further to explore alternative spatial



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LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
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ADVISORY COUNCIL

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LAS AGUAS
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scenarios; 3) Several alternative models with different characteristics and capabilities can be a useful combination to explore a wide range of management options.

TOR 4 - Measures introduced by the UK Minor adjustments to exploitation patterns compared to the EU measures:

- Default gear selected by the UK, with a mesh size of 110 mm and 120 mm square mesh panel, is the most selective of the gear options included under the EU legislation.
- Different Nephrops catch threshold and the prohibition on strengthening bags may have no negative or marginal effect in affecting protection of cod.
- However, the default 100 mm and 100 mm square mesh panel in ICES divisions 27.7e and 27.7h within UK waters could negatively impact cod catches as the gear has a poorer selectivity with a lower L50 for cod than other gears
- The impact of removing the requirement to use the raised fishing line gear is still uncertain. Fishers can change the catch species profile to avoid using any alternative device.

The Chair thanked Bastardie for his presentation and opened the floor to questions.

Murphy began by asking if the catch rates were broken down by fleet, time of year and spawning area. He also wondered if the socio-economic effects of closures on fleets were examined. He also queried if the use of T90 fishing gear was considered as he felt there was evidence that this is good for avoiding juveniles.

John Lynch asked about the closed areas and cod distribution and if the data for the hot spot chart came from landings data. He wondered if the data was gathered after the closure was introduced. He felt that there could be hotspots during the spawning time of year and questioned whether the closure was in the right place.

Franck le Barzic asked about ToR 2 on the temporal space field and suggested the data be fine-tuned as he would be interested to see how the data impacts the on revenue of vessels.

Bastardie detailed how the analysis was undertaken on fleet segments, the seasonality and location of the scientific survey data. This time series analysis combining landings and survey data allowed the identification of hotspots. He reported that there were some constraints as the survey data is only collected in quarter one and also the variability in the commercial data is lower. He explained that using smaller grid resolution could lead to departing from the data which might be misleading therefore the data is aggregated at the ICES rectangle level.

The Chair reminded members to send any more technical questions to the Secretariat to pass on to Bastardie.

Emiel Brouckaert asked about putting forward advice on technical measures in the Celtic Sea to Member States Group and the Commission, specifically how the planning would work, what to take into account and where it should be sent. He felt that the hake box regulation is impacting the Celtic Sea technical measures and it would be worth combining the advice for a clear set of measures for all gears.



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LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
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Ribeiro began by mentioning that the technical measures in Celtic Sea high are high on the agenda but there was no agreement as to when talks would start. She reported that the mandate for the consultations with the UK was still in preparation and was hopefully about to be finalised. Discussion would take off at the level of the Specialised Committee on Fisheries and the information from the STECF would be key for the Member States.

Marianna Monneau, representing the MS Group, added that the AC will be informed once the topic is put on the agenda of the MS Group.

The Chair remarked that Irish members were worried that the hake issue might bring more difficulties to operating and technical measures should be simplified. He suggested that the STECF report be studied, and some specific work dedicated to this.

ACTION POINT: Preparation of NWWAC advice on Celtic Sea Technical Measures following report from STECF to be done through dedicated Advice Drafting Group or through existing Landing Obligation Focus Group.

ACTION POINT: Secretariat to follow updates from ICES considering the possible delays in publication of advice. Once more information is available, the NWWAC could consider preparing a list of priorities to submit to ICES.

4. Overview on ICES WKNSSCS benchmark

Harriet Cole from Marine Scotland took the floor to present an overview of the work that was carried out for the benchmark WKNSSCS 2022 by scientists within the ICES framework with a focus on Northern shelf haddock and plaice 7fg. The presentation can be found [here](#).

The benchmark was held on 7-11 February 2022. The report was not yet published so results may vary from this presentation.

Irish Sea cod (27.7.a)

- ASAP model had strong retrospective bias. Downgraded to a category 3 stock as a result
- Proposed assessment model: SS3 (category 1)
- Data: inclusion of recreational catches becoming more important, new natural mortality values, several surveys to consider
- Productivity of this stock is more driven by environment rather than the fishery. Considering the use of FECO as a reference point.

Northern Shelf haddock (27.46a20)

- New assessment model needed – Support for TSA soon to be unavailable
- Propose SAM as new model – TSA and SAM both state-space models – SAM run alongside TSA each year at WGNSSK
- New data (DEWK – Nov 2021) – Maturity ogives, survey indices, mean stock weight-at-age, catch data, natural mortality



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SEPTENTRIONALES

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ADVISORY COUNCIL

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New SAM assessment

- Fishing mortality reference points have scaled with rescaling of assessment
- New indices indicate that recent recruitment/SSB is lower than previously thought
- $SSB_{2021} > MSY_{Btrigger}$ – opportunity to protect large incoming year classes

Celtic Sea plaice (27.7fg)

- Previously, a category 3 stock – SPiCT assessment
- Proposed assessment model: SAM (category 1)
- Data: reconstructed discards prior to 2004 seem to be causing issues
- This stock assessment was not in a state sufficient to pass peer review by the time of the benchmark workshop. A secondary review was scheduled for after the WKNSCS 2022 meeting.

Celtic Sea plaice (27.7fg)

SAM model versions tried:

- Start year 2004 onwards to excluded reconstructed discards (not kept) – Using reconstructed discards from 1989-2003 (kept)
- Add discard survival – 50% survival (not kept)
- Changing natural mortality from “low” values as in plaice of the Irish Sea to “high” values as estimated for plaice in the eastern Channel
- Not clear which choice of natural mortality was proposed in the end.
- SAM performance for estimating reference points was sensitivity to the choice of natural mortality (M)

Murphy questioned why there would be data in the model pre 2004 if a plaice would not live this long. Cole replied that North Sea plaice has a plus group of age 10 but she was not sure if the plus group in Celtic Sea was 10 or above. She explained that the SAM model would offer more flexibility in that the model can be programmed not to trust certain data. The length of the time series without the pre-2004 would not be long enough and this could be seen through the retrospective analysis which indicates the confidence in the data.

Le Barzic posed his question regarding the choices for M (natural mortality). He asked what the elements are to define natural M with different stocks which he felt would influence future fishing opportunities. Cole explained that natural mortality was very hard to estimate and that for some stocks the estimates come out of a multispecies model. These would be primarily based on stomach content data, predation and residual mortality which has a default value 0.2. She presumed that Celtic Sea plaice doesn't have readily available data sets, so information from the two closest stocks of plaice (English Channel and Irish sea) would be used. She offered to provide a relevant paper on the age-based equation used to calculate M and apologised that she couldn't give any more details.

Robert noted that for the first time it was found that ecosystem and environmental elements were more important than fishing for cod mortality in the Irish Sea. He stated that he would like to know what the management philosophy was regarding this. He also asked about the category three stocks that have a constant exploitation rate in WK LIFE 2021 which was new. Comparison of the abundance rate of the past 3 years. Do you have anything you can share about this. Cole replied that she was not the expert on Irish Sea cod and that the development of the reference points were led by Pia Schuchert



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LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

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(AFBI). The usual reference points were not appropriate for this stock due to the importance of environmental factors driving the stock dynamics. Regarding the category three methods, these were based on taking ratios of the survey trends in different points in time and slot of extra work has been completed on this recently. She detailed more methods that were available to try and use additional data if it was available, such as a SPICT model which is a separate production model. If that doesn't work then there is a hierarchy of models which depend on the data available, but that the WKLIFE report would have more details.

Murphy mentioned the presentation given by Dave Reid in WG1 and that he found the Feco range very interesting. He was delighted that this would be included, as he felt this was very important. He asked if F was set to zero if it be the case that the cod stock wouldn't recover due to the environmental conditions. Cole replied that she felt that this was the case, but that Pia Schuchert (AFBI) should be contacted for more details.

Lynch recognised that good progress has been made on the assessment of the stocks and was pleased that Feco was being considered. He queried whether haddock in West of Scotland and the North Sea, which have separate TACs, are assessed separately or across the stock for biomass estimates. Cole replied that the stock is assessed as one unit which was decided in the benchmark in 2014 based on genetics and other ecological indicators like maturity and growth linked distributions. She also mentioned that there was information from tagging and recapture studies that haddock would not drift from their home range, and there is enough mixing to keep the sub populations in connection, but the management is not across the stock.

Matilde Vallerani asked for any further specific technical questions from the members on the presentation to be sent to the Secretariat and they would forward to the ICES experts.

5. Discussion and inputs on Discard Plan 2023

Vallerani explained that in preparation of advice on the Joint Recommendation Discard Plan 2023, comments were welcome from the group and that the Focus Group Landing Obligation would draft the advice. She suggested that due to there being no further updates from the Member States Group and time constraints, it would be pertinent to move on and discuss the fuel crisis. She also mentioned that the Secretariat would be happy to receive input on the Discard Plan via email. The Chair noted this and agreed to move on to AOB.

6. AOB - Fuel Crisis

The Chair invited the Secretariat to detail the issues that were discussed regarding the fuel crisis in the Horizontal Working Group. Mo Mathies took the floor and detailed how the NWWAC had sent a joint letter with the NSAC which requested an urgent response from the Commission and was published on the website [here](#). Mathies explained that an additional letter has been drafted based on what was discussed at the HWG, to be reviewed by ExCom the next day.

The Chair opened the floor to comments from the members.



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SEPTENTRIONALES

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Murphy explained he felt the issue was not just the price but came down to supply and storage issues. He felt this should be discussed with the Commission and Member States as fishing is an essential industry for food security.

Lamothe explained how part of the French fleet is on strike since the start of the week along with parts of the agricultural sector. The consequences of this may be difficulties in logistics and increased prices for consumers. He felt that the Commission should address this with short-term measures to allow fishers to continue despite prices. This should be followed by an energy transition plan combined with financial measures to protect and ensure the resilience of the industry in the future.

Lynch supported the idea of fuel storage as he felt supply continuity needs to be secured. He mentioned that Russian tankers have been refused to off load in Ireland. He reported that some larger vessels are tied up due to fuel and others that are presently at sea will not return to fish due to fuel. He stressed the importance of being independent in our supply of fish for food security.

Jose Beltran reported the situation in the North of Galicia where the sale of fish at auction the previous night had stopped as the transport strike was making difficult to sell fish at markets. He detailed how there was an attempt to find a solution with the administration that morning. He felt this was negatively impacting many things including supply and market of fish.

Manu Kelberine agreed with the other speakers and gave an update on the situation in Brest. He reported that the main fuel deposits were blocked with tires on fire and strikes by the transport industry and farmers. He felt that this would soon lead to a lack of fuel supply to stations.

Le Barzic reported that very few vessels had stop so no problems with supply in his region. He felt there is a dependence on fossil fuels and expressed the need to decarbonize the industry however this would take time and with this very exceptional crisis the fishermen would need help immediately.

Mathies intervened to say that she had taken note of the comments in the draft letter which would be submitted to the NWWAC Chair later that day. She reported that there were two initiatives happening at other ACs. The first was the idea to set up a focus group to examine the impact of the war in the Ukraine on the seafood sector. The other was to convene ACs urgently to draft a joint response to the Commission which was an action point for the ExCom the following day.

The Chair thanked the participants and closed the meeting.

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

1	Preparation of NWWAC advice on Celtic Sea Technical Measures following report from STECF do be done through dedicated Advice Drafting Group or through existing Landing Obligation Focus Group.
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2	Secretariat to follow updates from ICES considering the possible delays in publication of advice. Once more information is available, the NWWAC could consider preparing a list of priorities to submit to ICES.
3	In relation to EU-UK TAC setting, NWWAC should identify a list of key stocks on which the AC could focus its effort to provide advice in time before the Commission discusses its proposal in negotiations with the UK.

8. Participants list

NWWAC members	
Margot Angibaud	CNPMEM
Patrick Murphy	IS&WPO
Juan Carlos Corras	PESCAGALICIA-ARPEGA-OBARCO
Francisco Marin	O.P.P.A.O.
Manu Kelberine	CRPM de Bretagne
Gerland Hussenot Desenonges	Blue Fish
Jean-Marie Robert	Pêcheurs de Bretagne
Delphine Roncin	FROM Nord
Julien Lamothe	ANOP
Emiel Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
John Lynch	ISEFPO
Aodh O' Domhnaill	Irish Fish Producers Organisation
Jose M. F. Beltran	OPP-7 Burela
Franck Le Barzic	COBRENORD
Irene Prieto	ARVI
Jasmine Vlietinck	Rederscentrale
Experts and observers	
Harriet Cole	Marine Scotland
Marianna Monneau	French Administration
Pauline Joyeux	French Administration
Paz Sampedro	STECF
Cristina Ribeiro	DG MARE
Francois Bastardie	STECF
NWWAC Secretariat	
Deirdre Hoare	Rapporteur
Mo Mathies	Executive Secretary
Matilde Vallerani	Deputy Executive Secretary