



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

MINUTES

WORKING GROUP 1 (IRISH SEA)

Virtual

Tuesday 15 March 2022

09:30 – 11:00 CET

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair John Lynch welcomed all participants to the meeting. No apologies were received. The agenda was adopted with the addition of the topic of the fuel crisis to be discussed towards the end of the meeting.

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

1. Secretariat to explore if any progress can be made on the WKIrish approach together with the MSG
2. Secretariat to raise the attention of the MSG on issues raised in the advice on Fishing Opportunities 2022 on haddock in 7a (re-evaluation of ICES advice following new survey results in the autumn and stock ID issue with Celtic Sea impacting TAC setting).

Both items were raised with the MSG at the Technical Group meeting on 16 September, but no specific follow up action was implemented.

2. Review of TACs and quotas in ICES area 7a in light of bilateral EU/UK and Tri-lateral negotiations and arrangements for TAC recommendation 2023 (DG MARE)

Cristina Ribeiro attended on behalf of DG MARE to present information on the TACs and quotas in 7a.

Ribeiro began by stating that the consultations will follow the same calendar as previous years. In terms of the UK consultations the bulk of work would take place after September with the plan to conclude by early December to allow swift preparation for the Council meetings. Ribeiro detailed how the calendar for the Special Committee on Fisheries would be arranged with three meetings with the UK from now until September which will be highly relevant to the Irish Sea. Ribeiro explained that for the fishing opportunities themselves she didn't have much to share at this stage. Ribeiro emphasised the main challenges in the Irish sea being the cod and whiting stocks which are not in good condition with discards being quite high. Ribeiro mentioned that this was a transversal concern across many stocks and the Commission is awaiting ICES advice on these with interest.



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

Ribeiro commented that the organisation of the Special Committee on Fisheries meetings and their topics for discussion haven't been finalised to date. Ribeiro highlighted that there are so many issues with 2022 fishing opportunities to be discussed that the Commission must identify priorities, and the priority has been given to stocks not in the Irish sea and technical measures in the Celtic Sea. The floor was opened to questions and Patrick Murphy asked about the timelines of the bilateral negotiation and whether there would be an improvement on this so that conclusions may be reached earlier to allow for planning of fishing in the following year. Ribeiro replied that last year was a learning process as it was the first year, but these consultations improved our experience. This year there is the Specialised committee and working group which will help work move quickly but there are still uncertainties as it could be difficult to find agreement. Murphy emphasized that it would be helpful to the industry for some seasonal fisheries such as blue whiting that even if full agreement wasn't reached that the full TAC not just the precautionary amount could be fished.

3. EU-UK Technical Measures

The Chair requested any relevant details on technical measures that might be worth noting. Ribeiro replied that there is a commitment from both parties to discuss whether there is a need to adjust any of the measures that are in place such as the baseline regulation and the technical measures, which comes from the 2021 written record, with priority on the Celtic Sea. Johnny Woodlock voiced his opinion that the Irish Sea and Channel areas should be prioritised by DG Mare and the Commission as the borders run through these areas. Murphy reiterated his opinion that the timeline for any changes in technical measures on the UK side must be kept allowing fishers to adjust.

The Chair commented on how the UK hasn't introduced any new technical measures in the Irish Sea since Brexit, but since August the EU has adopted the 100mm T90 in nets. The Chair went on to describe how the UK use eliminator trawls which also used to be approved on the EU side. He stated that the Commission should considered this and discuss with UK that similar measures be introduced in both jurisdictions. Ribeiro replied that she hasn't heard any discussion from the Member States on these points, but the adaptation or fine tuning of the technical measures could be added to their agenda for discussion.

4. Update on WKIrish work

David Reid from the Marine Institute gave a presentation on his work on WKIrish and F_{eco} . Reid began by explaining that management plans have various levels of B_{lim} , MSY , and $B_{trigger}$ which work as a range across which a pretty good yield would be maintained and would give flexibility in cases of mixed fisheries. However, this is generally not used and the $FMSY$ value is the point that managers stick to. The F_{eco} approach allows ranges to be put in place around $FMSY$ depending on the ecosystem indicators. The upper range would be used when ecosystem indicators are positive and conversely the lower range would be used when the indicators are negative and suggest a more precautionary F would be appropriate. Reid went on to explain that at recent Benchmark meeting of Irish sea cod and west of Scotland, Matt Lundy from AFBI presented the working document on the use of F_{eco} for the stock assessments. Reid showed a graph of the temperature change in the Irish Sea since 1870 which



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

shows how it is warming. There is a negative relationship between Irish sea temperature and cod recruitment. From the modelled biomass trend in cod there was a recovery expected since the 1990s but this has not been the case and it is clear that ecosystem drivers are an important factor. A very limited recovery was seen and the question was how to include this in the stock assessment and advice process. The inverse relationship of recruitment and sea surface temperature as an ecosystem driver is showing that the Irish Sea is not as productive as it might usually be and fisheries advice should err on the side of caution and move into the lower range of F_{eco} . Reid then showed a possible framework for the use of F_{eco} now and into the future. The single-species assessments would be used to produce the usual reference points and the ecosystem model would be used to modulate the advice. The models would be built together to allow the use of this new information. A lot of work is happening in ICES to move away from fixed reference points. For example, recommendations by ICES WKREF2 (Workshop on guidelines for reference points) include ICES guidelines to include the possibility of using the F_{eco} approach to adjust F based on ecosystem model information:

- The revised F should not exceed F_{p05}
- The ecosystem model to be reviewed as a Key Run by WGSAM
- The implementation should be evaluated and reviewed at a benchmark process.

The mechanism is now in place for F_{eco} to be evaluated reviewed and implemented in a benchmark after which F_{eco} will be in the advice. Reid recommended to the group that it would be up to them to put the pressure on the managers to consider using the F_{eco} as scientists can only offer them as advice.

Murphy remarked that he thought this work was critical for the Commission's goal of working towards good environmental status of the oceans and asked whether the Commission saw a role for this in the management of the stocks. Regarding the presentation, Murphy asked if the fishing pressure on whiting or other stocks had been evaluated as the stock levels rise and fall looking at MSY ranges, trigger mechanisms and discard rates over different time periods. Considering that when a stock has strong recruitment for a particular year class, this may contradict ICES five-year projections, Murphy enquired about the possibility to build the models to allow greater fishing pressure.

Reid replied by stating that the fishing mortality is a combination of gear, boat, skipper, and population of fish so that it is a ratio or a natural logarithm of the change. Everything may change and F value can stay the same. Fishermen get better, stock production changes multispecies interaction change, so that moving towards dynamic reference points allows all this information to be captured. Reid explained that the short answer is yes that it has been considered to represent the changes happening with F_{eco} . With F_{eco} the reference points change based on information about the ecosystem which is a dramatic change in use compared to the MSY reference points. It was thought the best way was to stick to current paradigm, which uses single species reference points based on MSY and look at what the ecosystem drivers were indicating about how that stock was going to be affected but move in precautionary ranges based on the current state of ecosystem. Currently the ecosystem is not in a good position with the oceans warming it means productivity is reduced, however this may change in the coming years. F_{eco} allows this to be incorporated into the models and when productivity is low quotas are reduced and when productivity is high quotas can be higher. The management strategy evaluation showed that over the long term the biomass was higher, but it is a slow process.



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

Woodlock asked if assessments had been done on biomass, as cod size has reduced, but the numbers may remain the same. Reid replied that this is true but that smaller fish have a reduced ability to spawn compared to the larger older females. To have healthy stock the aim is to maintain older fish in the population. Long term MSY assumes everything else isn't changing but of course it is, there are good years and bad years on a decadal scale which needs to be encompassed in our delivery of MSY advice. F eco allows you to move within the ranges with some scientific certainty of what's going on.

Murphy asked for the Commission opinion on this work and whether it could be implemented in deciding TACs. Ribeiro replied that she couldn't give the Commission's opinion, but her own opinion is that it is very interesting, and it is something that she heard before in ICES. There is a lot of potential and a strong commitment from the Commission in implementing an ecosystem approach to fisheries management, with several studies being commissioned. The CFP makes it mandatory to use best science and if these results are endorsed by science, then the Commission must use it. Reid interjected and stressed the need to keep pushing for the use of this in the advice. Previously it was suggested to do another 5 years work, however this position has changed, and ICES is more receptive to this, and it may be on the verge of being part of the advice. Once it's endorsed by ICES it will be part of the advice. Historically there was a lot of diff F values for managers to choose from, one this is endorsed it will be down to the managers to use the advice. Reid expressed his gratitude to the group for the opportunity to carry out this work.

5. Discussion and inputs on Discard Plan

The Chair requested comments from member to put forward in preparation of advice on Joint Recommendation Discard Plan 2023, which will be drafted by the Landing Obligation Focus Group. Murphy began by asking for Spurdog to be added to the list of action items as with the Horizontal Working Group. Fishermen see the stock seems to be recovering on the ground, but science is not catching up with the reality. Woodlock disagreed that Spurdog should be allowed to be caught since they are vulnerable due to their slow growth and reproduction. However, other short-lived species like squid or boarfish could be looked at. The Chair clarified that fishermen are not looking to target Spurdog but the flexibility to land them if they come up as by-catch. Emiel Brouckaert intervened to explain his confusion yesterday with the species of dogfish being discussed and to clarify that the action point is to correct the ETP listing of Spurdog and setting of TACs and quotas at the correct level for this species. Murphy highlighted the need for the measures on Spurdog to be based on science and precautionary but the trigger mechanism could be improved to enable landing when stock levels are high. Woodlock suggest that ICES is asked to re-examine the advice for this species. The Chair replied that the group does get a presentation on Spurdog every year from ICES in July but agreed that a small quota is needed in order to bring more ashore. Brouckaert added that in the UK there had been an interesting programme where an exemption was granted that allowed the landing of Spurdog, this could be reviewed and adapted for the Irish Sea. Woodlock remarked that this could be similar to the traffic light system in the UK which was used to avoid spawning aggregations of Spurdog. The arrangement involved mapping of the spawning areas by fishermen and move on rules.

The Chair requested any further issues to be raised by the members. He also noted the work on technical measures and improving selectivity is still ongoing on whiting in the *Nephrops* fishery.

ACTION: Secretariat to draft a letter to the NWW MSG on the need for new technical measures in the



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

Irish Sea *Nephrops* fishery to mitigate whiting bycatch.

Brouckaert intervened to state that the existing exemptions should be maintained. The discard plan is expiring in 2023 and any recommendations require scientific demonstration and proof that the work that has been done is very important. Woodlock added that the industry would benefit from fully document fisheries and F_{eco} would allow for increased quotas when stocks plentiful. The Chair replied that there is reference to fully documented fisheries in the ACs response to the questionnaire on the report on the Common Fisheries Policy.

ACTION: Secretariat to report members' input on discussion on Discard Plan to the Focus Group Landing Obligation for drafting of advice on the topic.

6. Comments on fuel crisis

The Chair asked members for additional comments to the discussion on the fuel crisis held the day before at the Horizontal Working Group.

Murphy commented that there had been a slight reduction in prices overnight, but the issue of storage remained, so that it can be bought when there is a reasonable price and can be used by the fleet. Matilde Vallerani assured the group that a draft letter to the Commission had already been produced and further points from the days working groups would be added and discussed at the ExCom meeting. Murphy reminded the group that during covid fishing was deemed an essential industry which is important for food security and cannot operate without fuel.

ACTION: The Working Group supports the NWWAC initiative to write a letter to the Commission with recommendations on the current fuel crisis and particularly highlights the need of having fuel storage and the importance of the fishing sector as it provides food security.

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

The Chair apologised for forgetting to Welcome Aodh O'Donnell at the start of the meeting.

Action points:

- 1) Secretariat to draft a letter to the NWW MSG on the need for new technical measures in the Irish Sea *Nephrops* fishery to mitigate whiting bycatch.
- 2) Secretariat to report members' input on discussion on Discard Plan to the Focus Group Landing Obligation for drafting of advice on the topic.
- 3) The Working Group supports the NWWAC initiative to write a letter to the Commission with recommendations on the current fuel crisis and particularly highlights the need of having fuel storage and the importance of the fishing sector as it provides food security.



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

**NORTH WESTERN
WATERS**
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

8. Participants list

NWWAC members	
Emiel Brouckaert (Chair)	Rederscentrale
John Lynch	Irish South & East Fish Producers Organisation Ltd
Patrick Murphy	Irish South & West Fish Producers Organisation
Aodh (Hugh) O Domhnaill	IFPO
Norah Parke	KFO
Johnny Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary
Experts and observers	
Cristina Castro Ribeiro	DG MARE
Dave Reid	Marine Institute
NWWAC Secretariat	
Deirdre Hoare	Rapporteur
Mo Mathies	Executive Secretary
Matilde Vallerani	Deputy Executive Secretary