



DRAFT MINUTES

WORKING GROUP 3 (ENGLISH CHANNEL)

Room 21.04 "Jacob Van Artevelde" - Virginie Lovelinggebouw (VAC)
Koningin Fabiolalaan, 9000 Gent

Monday, July 03, 2023

10:45 - 13:30

1. Welcome & introductions

The Chair Manu Kelberine welcomed all participants. Apologies were received from Corentine Piton, FPDR, and Gérald Hussenot, Bluefish. The agenda was adopted as drafted.

Action points from the last meeting (13 March 2023, Santiago de Compostela):

1	CNPMEM to share proposal for advice on red mullet with the Secretariat which will distribute to Working Group 3 for review and then to ExCom for approval.
	Draft from CNPEMEM circulated on 14 June – discussion under item 3
2	Secretariat to inform WG3 members on Member States Group's feedback on whelk advice
	No specific response from the Member States – discussion under item 4
3	The advice on a joint recommendation for managing the scallop fishing in the Channel is put on hold at the moment. Irish and French members will liaise regarding the use of 97mm rings and come back to the Secretariat once updates are available.
	Discussion under item 5
4	Discuss the complaint from EAA and IFSUA regarding production of advice on seabass at ExCom. Secretariat to draft procedure to clarify how lack of consensus should be addressed when advice is prepared.
	Complaint file shared with WG3 and ExCom in advance of the meeting. Non consensus procedure on ExCom agenda on 5 July.
5	Follow developments on designation of MPAs on both EU and UK sides and combine this work with the review of the CFP package.
	FG CFP established, first meeting on 22 May and then on 19 June.
6	Working Group members are invited to send their comments on exemptions to the Landing Obligation to feed the preparation of the advice on the Discard Plan 2024 being prepared by the Focus Group Landing Obligation. In particular, members are invited to reflect on measures introduced which resulted in an increase in selectivity and in survivability.



Closed – advice on the joint recommendation sent on 17 April

2. ICES advice

Brill (4, 3.2, 7.de)

- Catch advice 2024, MSY: Catch \leq 2456 t (+87%)
- Benchmark – SPiCT – 3 indices covering whole area (11 surveys); no longer using LPUE which covered only part of area
- Catches have been declining since 2019
- F also declining, below Fmsy
- Stock size declining since 2016, remains above MSY Btrigger
- Management of brill and turbot fisheries under a combined species TAC prevents effective control of the single-species exploitation rates and could lead to the overexploitation of either species. ICES advises that management should be implemented at the species level and cover the entire stock distribution area (Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d–e).

Lemon Sole

- Advice for 2024, MSY: Catch \leq 2027 t, (-30%)
- DLS method – chr – stability clause (-30%) applied
- Catches declining since; 2016 F below FMSY proxy
- Stock size indicator (now SURBAR) declining but above Itrigger
- SURBAR used to combined indices this year
- Management of lemon sole and witch flounder fisheries under a combined species TAC prevents effective control of the single-species exploitation rates and could lead to the overexploitation of either species. ICES advises that management should be implemented at the species level and cover the entire stock distribution area (Subarea 4 and divisions 3.a and 7.d).

Plaice (7.d)

- Advice for 2024, MSY: Catch \leq 2367t (-50%)
- Part of the catches in 7.d are from the Western Channel and North Sea: advice is 2826 t when taking other stocks caught in 7.d into account
- F decreased last few years; above Fmsy
- SSB decreasing since 2016 below MSY B_{trigger}
- Lower advice: decreased recruitment, downward revision of SSB and change in target F as SSB below trigger
- No UK-BTS in area in 2022 increasing uncertainty on recruitment estimate and not used in forecast
- Planned survivability roadmap

Seabass

- Advice for 2024, MSY, total removals \leq 2,432 t, advice -4%
- Under advised catch, stock expected to decrease slightly remaining below B trigger



- Benchmark planned

Sole (7.d)

- Advice for 2024, MSY: Catch $\leq 1,504$ t (-14%)
- F similar 20-22: just below F_{MSY} in 2022
- SSB decreased since 2016: below MSY $B_{trigger}$
- Recruitment lower since 2011
- Two tuning fleets missing in 2022 (UK and Belgian beam trawls)– little effect
- Planned survivability roadmap

Sole (7.e)

- Advice for 2024, MSY: catch $\leq 1,057$ t (-24%)
- Fishing pressure above F_{MSY}
- SSB above MSY $B_{trigger}$
- Recruitment variable
- SSB declining trend and revised downward (retrospective)
- One survey not completed and not used in 2022 – negligible impact

Striped red mullet (4, 7d, 3a)

- Advice for 2024/2025, MSY: catch $\leq 1,985$ t (+2%)
- New DLS method - chr
- Catches remain high: F Fishing pressure proxy
- Stock size has shown some increase
- No UK-BTS in are in 2022 and 5 stations missing from FR-GFS – minimal impact

Whiting (4 and 7d)

- Advice for 2024, MSY: catch $\leq 128,290$ t (+16.5%)
- Catches are stable
- F is decreasing and below F_{MSY}
- SSB increasing above MSY $B_{trigger}$.
- 7d common TAC with 7b-c, e-k – management should be at stock level
- About 20% of the catches are taken in the Eastern Channel area
- Increase in advice – increase in SSB and underestimation of SSB (retrospective)

Witch (SA4, 3a, 7d)

- Advice for 2024, MSY: catch $\leq 1,579$ t (+32%)
- Catches have declined
- F decreasing: above F_{MSY} below F_{PA}
- SSB some increase: below MSY $B_{trigger}$.
- Increase in advice – increase in SSB; closer to MSY $B_{trigger}$ so higher F target
- Combined TAC with lemon sole – should be species specific



The Chair thanked Morgan for presenting this information and invited questions from the floor.

Franck Le Barzic asked if the recruitment issues of sole were addressed in the various catchment areas as they are key species for the French fisheries. Regarding brill, he wondered if the distribution area was based on traditional stock statuses or scientific statistics, and if the stock was assessed as a single stock. According to the industry, trends are not the same in the North Sea and in the Western Channel. Catches of brill seem to be of 1000 tons in the Western Channel, so are there any variations when it comes to distribution areas of brill?

Morgan asked if the area query related to the nursery areas and stated that sole populations are assessed on distribution of catches and surveys. Genetic data is used when available. There are areas within a population distribution which are more important than others, and information regarding food or predation does not feed into the assessment at the moment. The assessment is not taking into account spatial differences within the population distribution. Regarding brill, distribution layers are based on surveys and catch distribution data. She was not aware if ICES had looked at trends in the different areas separately in the assessment. The stock was benchmarked in 2023 and the commercial LPUE index was removed as it covered only part of the area. Indices now cover the entire stock area. Surveys show pockets of higher abundance, for example in 3a.

Le Barzic also referred to other issues that have impact on the recruitment which are often not taken into account in the assessment now, but should be in future.

Mathieu Vimard asked how ICES developed the seabass benchmark and whether there is better knowledge of the stock based on each catch area. The advice is quite broad. He felt a more refined approach would be beneficial.

Morgan responded that one of the important aspects of the benchmark for seabass and one of the reasons why the same species are put together in a benchmark is that stock ID is going to be analysed. Work has been carried out over the past years to be brought to the benchmark to establish the right areas covered in the advice or if they should be changed or split up.

Vimard referred to 7d plaice and asked if it is envisaged that 2 TACs would be set, one for 7d and one for 7e or if a joint TAC would be set.

Morgan stated that this was outside ICES' remit who provided separate advice for 7d and 7e but setting management measures was the remit of the Commission.

The Secretariat explained that a Commission representative was to join the WG later, however, this point could be include in the planned advice on fishing opportunities.

Brouckaert added that it is clear that the SCF is going to address the TAC alignment obligation under the TCA, involving several stocks in the Channel such as brill, lemon sole and witch. He suggested to list questions to the COM representative scheduled to join in a while. He also added that the topic should also be addressed in the upcoming advice.

ACTION: Comments from members following the presentation of the ICES advice will be taken into account in the preparation of the advice on fishing opportunities by the FG landing obligation. In particular, the impact of new possible TACs (brill, lemon sole, witch) should be considered.



3. Red mullet

A document developed by CNPMEM was circulated to members prior to the meeting. The proposal addressed two main points:

- A minimum landing size of 17cm
- A thorough reflection on the increase of the mesh size in area 7d and subarea 4

Anais Mourtada explained that various professional representatives in collaboration with Ifremer decided to trigger a debate in WG 3 to develop advice to the Commission and the Member States.

Le Barzic commented that the Western Channel should be included when it comes to the debate on the minimum size. Stocks in 7d and e are closely intertwined.

The Chair stated that the position paper clearly indicated that the new minimum landing size would cover the whole of subareas 4 and 7.

Mourtada explained that the position paper was also sent to the NSAC to open the debate for subarea 4.

Vimard remarked that the Dutch industry would also be affected by any change but that unfortunately now representative was in the room. Under the proposal of raising the minimum landing size to above 17cm, small fish under 40g would be excluded from being landed and only mature fish would be landed. He felt that this new landing size would be a good starting point.

The Chair asked if members would approve this proposal of minimum catching size of 17cm to be put forward to the Executive Committee for approval.

Thomas agreed that it was a pity no Dutch representatives were part of the meeting. She added that when it comes to all those species with commercial size but no minimal size there is a mismatch with what is being caught and what can be marketed. This is an issue for several species, for example squid.

Brouckaert stated that if no further comments were received within this WG then a draft advice should be prepared for presentation to the ExCom. Regarding squid, he stated that this was being addressed already in the MS and the AC is following this up as part of the technical measures discussion.

ACTION: The CNPMEM proposal on red mullet has been approved by WG3 and will be submitted in the form of AC advice to the ExCom for approval.

4. Whelk

The Chair explained that advice was submitted to the Member States in the beginning of 2023, but no specific response has been received yet. He then added that a meeting of a dedicated working group was held in France in June, working on a position to present to the Member States Group.

Mourtada stated that this was an ongoing discussion in the CNPMEM with the representatives of the national sector. The aim is to develop technical measures, including 22mm sorting mesh and temporary closures in some areas. In addition, a maximum vessel size is being addressed as well as licensing to better manage the fishery.



John Lynch explained that no Irish vessels fishing whelk in the Channel, however there is an extensive whelk fishery in the Irish Sea. He explained that if measures are introduced in the Channel, they will also be suggested for further areas. Fishers in his organisation were quite happy with the measures that are being discussed in France, in particular with the 22mm spacing on the riddle, but he felt that regulating the actual implementation could be complex, as it is difficult to set the bars exactly at 22mm. He felt that this would need to be considered in more detail prior to implementation.

Aodh O'Donnell supported this statement and agreed a margin of tolerance was needed to deliver on the measure.

The Chair explained that the sorting grids are quite rigid in France but that may not be the case in the Irish Sea.

Lynch agreed with this but felt that a margin of tolerance was still needed. He emphasised that the Irish industry is not trying to block the proposal.

Mourtada suggested that once the final position is developed in France the document could be redrafted to include graphs and drawings for completeness of information and clarity.

The Secretariat added that the Focus Group Whelk will have another meeting to discuss the proposal.

ACTION: The NWWAC will consider the possibility to revise and update its advice on whelk following internal discussions in France.

5. Scallops

The Chair explained that on the back of a proposed regulation to the NWWAC from the French Scallop Industry, representatives of the Irish Scallop Fleet met in Port en Bessin on 3 May with the representatives of the French Scallop fishing Industry.

The items agreed include:

- ICES area 7d is closed from 15th May to 30th September 2023 and each year thereafter.
- ICES area 7e will remain open outside of 12 nautical miles of the French coast during the above closure in 7d (i.e., closure in 7e from the 1 October until 15 May)
- The Irish Scallop vessels will conduct trials of 92 and 97 mm ring size. Depending on the results, a possibility could be a moving first to 92mm ring sizes and then to 97mm ring sizes. This survey was proposed because of Irish industry concerns that the SELEDrag survey had been conducted in the near shore area and that generally scallop caught outside of 12 nautical miles are of a smaller size.
- Mathieu Vimard and John Lynch are to arrange as soon as possible a similar meeting with UK, French and Irish industry representatives to discuss the management of Scallop fisheries in the English Channel.

Lynch explained that Irish trials haven't started yet, but work is well in progress. Scientific observers will be on board during the trips. The format of the trials will be similar to the system implemented in the Seledrag project, with three different size dredges on the bar for the trial. This will happen in the summer in 7e and later in the year in 7d, once the area opens. He pointed out that there is already a



fairly big part of 7e which is closed and the Irish sector is requesting that the remaining area is left open during the closure period in 7d.

Le Barzic asked for more details regarding the rationale behind the Irish proposal to close from 1 October to 15 May. He then asked whether the trials for 97mm would take place in 7e or only in 7d.

Lynch responded that the trials will be carried out in 7d and 7e and that the rationale was based on fishers' intention to discourage extra pressure on the area. The Irish vessels tend to fish further offshore than French vessels in 7e and they feel that additional trials are necessary to potentially progress to a larger ring size in that area.

The Chair restated that the Irish vessels are committed to carrying out trials and asked for confirmation that if trials are successful, Irish fishers would move first to a 92mm ring size and then to a 97 mm ring size over the next years.

Lynch stated that if the catch rate is similar between 92mm and 97mm and if there is not much reduction from the 85mm, they may move directly up to 97mm. However, this is more likely to happen in 7d as the difference to the current size is less.

Vimard thanked Lynch for his assistance with the meeting in France which made a genuine exchanged between French and Irish fishers possible.

At the last meeting of the Focus Group Scallop, there was a misunderstanding regarding a summer closure of the whole Channel. The proposal to have a maximum bar size of 12m was also withdrawn. Closure in 7d is also consistent with measures in the UK. Regarding 7e, the proposal to keep it open during the summer when 7d is closed is important to keep Irish vessels active. The French administration was approached for an evaluation of any additional data regarding French vessel activity from May to October to consider the closure with an update due in the near future. Consistency is needed with UK measures and a discussion with British colleagues is needed to find a harmonised way forward in a joint meeting. He felt the AC has all the right tools to move forward on this topic.

Lynch added that the contact with UK organisations had not been progressed from the Irish perspective as he felt it would be more reasonable to first agree a joint approach between the French and the Irish. He then explained that if 7e was to be completely closed in summer, the time spent by Irish vessels in French waters would be very short and it would not be easy to carry two different types of gear. He felt it was good to progress the ring size issue first.

Paulo Vasconcelos stated the COM has entered into discussions in the Specialised Committee on Fisheries with the UK and the MS. The UK is developing its Fisheries Management Plans and the public consultation for the scallop FMP is slightly delayed until the end of July. The commitment is there in the SCF for the multi annual strategy on scallops in the Channel and it is very interesting for the Commission to hear these discussions in the NWWAC and the desire to interact with UK counterparts.

The Chair thanked Vasconcelos for this information. He stated that he was reluctant to interact with the UK without having an EU position in place first.

Vasconcelos stated that it was important to have an agreement between Member States on any measures which can then be presented and discussed with UK partners.

The Secretariat added that the Member States Group is waiting for proposals from the AC before



starting their own deliberations on scallop management.

Lynch stated that it would be useful to wait for the trial results. He suggested that once these are available, an in-person meeting of the Focus Group should be arranged. The trial in 7e will be completed in summer 2023. An exemption to the 7d closure could be asked for scientific purposes to anticipate the trials.

The Chair stated that if trials are taking place in 7e which are conclusive that it might not be necessary to carry out trials in 7d.

Lynch agreed that hopefully if the works carried out in 7e is successful, then it should also work in 7d and will refer back to the authorities helping in the trial design so possibly a trial just in 7e may be sufficient.

The Chair welcomed the fact that work is advancing and that is looking forward to hearing the trial results.

Brouckaert referred to the Inter-AC Brexit Forum, where the Commission has been asked to keep the AC informed about the discussions during the SCF so that any developments could be integrated in the work of the NWWAC.

Vasconcelos stated that progressing the work on scallops was agreed in the SCF. A technical meeting was held three weeks ago and the first step is to map and evaluate the measures currently in place both in EU and UK. Member States have been requested to populate a table with the measures currently in force. A WG of the SCG will meet next week and the Commission is going to ask the UK to compile a list with similar information to compare the two approaches.

ACTION: Once trials on new ring size by Irish vessels are complete, the FG Scallop will meet in person to finalise its advice. In the meantime, the Secretariat will continue liaising with the Commission on developments on the topic within the specialized committee on fisheries.

The Secretariat put forward the queries which arose from the presentation of ICES advice regarding the TAC for plaice in the Channel, if there was going to be a joint TAC or two separate TACS, as well as in relation to the Commission's intention regarding the TAC alignment obligation with the UK regarding witch, brill, lemon sole.

Vasconcelos stated that the TAC alignment had been discussed recently and agreed with Member States just before the release of the ICES advice. He asked for this to be sent in writing to the Commission for response.

Thomas thanked Vasconcelos for his attendance though an in-person attendance would have been beneficial for a better discussion.

Vasconcelos stated that COM's attendance is based on time management and that MARE C5 is extremely busy in June and July which makes a positive reply to in-person attendance invitations very difficult. However, he felt that he has made every effort possible to at least join online when the NWWAC is discussing non-quota species.

Vimard asked for confirmation that the Commission was looking forward to receiving the work from



the AC on scallops, but he also hoped that the Commission would also keep the Secretariat informed of the discussions taking place at SCF level.

Vasconcelos agreed that it is important to keep each other informed on the discussions.

6. Summary of actions agreed

1	Comments from members following the presentation of the ICES advice will be taken into account in the preparation of the advice on fishing opportunities by the FG landing obligation. In particular, the impact of new possible TACs (brill, lemon sole, witch) should be considered.
2	The CNPMEM proposal on red mullet has been approved by WG3 and will be submitted in the form of AC advice to the ExCom for approval.
3	The NWWAC will consider the possibility to revise and update its advice on whelk following internal discussions in France.
4	Once trials on new ring size by Irish vessels are complete, the FG Scallop will meet in person to finalise its advice. In the meantime, the Secretariat will continue liaising with the Commission on developments on the topic within the specialized committee on fisheries.

Vimard suggested that a list of species could be developed for which a specific framework is needed, for example squid and grey seabream, as these stocks at times can be overfished. The work that is being carried out for red mullet could be a good example to apply for other species too.

The Secretariat stated that the MS Group is also planning to work on a Joint Recommendation on squid, which also relates to the definition of directed fisheries.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions and closed the meeting.

7. Participants

NWWAC members

Name		Organisation
Lionel	Bottin	Comité Départemental des Pêches du Calvados
Emiel	Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Manu	Kelberine	Crpmem de Bretagne
Franck	Le Barzic	OP COBRENORD
John	Lynch	Irish South & East Fish Producers Organisation Ltd
Anaïs	Mourtada	CNPMEM
Erwan	Quemeneur	CDPMEM29
Dominique	Thomas	OP CME MMN
Mathieu	Vimard	Organisation des Pêcheurs Normands
Arthur	Yon	FROM Nord



NWWAC observers

Name		Organisation
Margaux	Jourdainne	CRPMEM de Normandie
Geert	Meun	VisNed
Alexandra	Philippe	EBCD

Other observers & experts

Name		Organisation
Paulien	Depickere	Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
Michael	Keatinge	Seaview Marine Economic Consultancy
Marie	Lecomte	Marine Stewardship Council
Joanne	Morgan	ICES
Eveline	Smith	NL Ministry of Agriculture Nature + Food Quality
Dirk	Van Guyze	departement LV ABCO dienst zeevisserij
Paulo	Vasconcelos	DG MARE

NWWAC Secretariat

Name	Role
Mo Mathies	Executive Secretary
Matilde Vallerani	Deputy Executive Secretary