



Draft Minutes

WORKING GROUP 3 (ENGLISH CHANNEL) Hotel NH Collection Santiago de Compostela

Monday 13 March 2023
11:00 – 13:00 CET

1 Welcome and introductions

The Secretariat welcomed all members. No apologies were received in advance of the meeting. The agenda was adopted.

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

1	Secretariat to update and finalise the choke traffic light tool based on today's discussions taking into account previous NWWAC advice. Done – choke advice delivered on 9 December 2022
2	The Secretariat will organise meetings for both FG Whelk and Scallop in October to follow up on previous recommendations. FG Whelk met on 5 December and delivered advice to MS on 2 February; FG Scallop met on 31 January and advice is in progress. Further discussion under item 4.
3	The Secretariat to share link to DEFRA Focus Group on Dolphin Head HPMA and attend for reporting purposes only. Done – report circulated on 10 October. Any news on this from WG3 members?
4	Secretariat to enquire the NWW MSG about information on flyshoot fishing activities in EU waters. If data is available, an ad-hoc group could be established to respond to the UK consultation on the matter. Done at MS TG September meeting – MS didn't prepare a joint response to the consultation. Further discussion on possible follow up under item 5.

2 Election of WG Chair

Corentine Piton explained that Pascal Coquet was unable to continue his engagement with the NWWAC and would like to vacate his position for someone who is able to participate.

The Secretariat received a proposal from the French members who proposed Manu Kelberine and invited him to take the floor. Kelberine stated that it would be his pleasure to take over the Chairmanship of this group and thanked Pascal Coquet and Mathieu Vimard for their work up to date.

The Secretariat explained that Vimard's position as Vice-Chair remains unchanged. The Secretariat asked for a show of hands in favour of Kelberine's appointment: unanimous decision of the WG members to appoint Kelberine as Chair. Kelberine thanked participants for the trust and asked for patience as he had not expected to be chairing this meeting.

3 Management of red mullet in the Channel - Raphael Girardin (Ifremer)

The presentation can be found [here](#).

This stock went through a benchmark process in January using one particular method of assessment based on biomass, and not age structure.

Previously red mullet was assessed using an age based model following the Cat. 3 stock assessment methodology from ICES, meaning that the advice was based on biomass trends resulting from that model. An average of the last 4 years of biomass was used compared to the most recent years of biomass in order to calculate the change in catch opportunity.

However, in 2021 ICES decided to downgrade the stock to Cat. 5 due to many different issues, for example the lack of information on age and length. Issues were also discovered in relation to the survey data that was used in the model, which led to uncertainties in the model output. Under Cat. 5, the advice now is only based on total catches and landings. The last ICES advice for this stock was published in 2021.

Regarding the evolution of catches between 2004 and 2020, it can be seen that the catches mainly following recruitment events for that stock over the years. The advice was only based on the average of those catches all over the years with the precautionary buffer applied or 80% as is mandatory for Cat. 5 under ICES methodology, leading to catch advice of 1,950 tons. There are some issues with the assessment:

- Low sampling coverage for age data from around 40% of total landings in 2014 to 8% in 2021 mostly in 7d from French fleets
- During 2020 and 2021 assessment, unrealistic Harvest rate produced by a4a (tried to explore new a4a formulation)
- Issues with CGFS index at age calculation and sampling in 2020 (UK EEZ not covered)

Main aim of the benchmark:

1. Collate necessary data and information for the application of the surplus production model SPiCT
2. Apply the SPiCT methodology and determine the appropriateness of the data and the methodology to determine stock status
3. For stocks where the methodology is appropriate, determine the methods to derive the parameters for the catch forecast using the harvest control rule for providing MSY advice using SPiCT

The fishery catches most of age 1 individuals as other age groups are not widely available. Data is available for parts of the North Sea and the Eastern Channel from previous years as far back as the 1980s in some cases.

Stock assessment from SPiCT – conclusions:

- Issue to define reference points and to assess fishing mortality
- Stock dynamics highly influenced by recruitment
- Hypothesis of productivity changes through time (especially in the early part of the time series)
- SPiCT methodology is not appropriate to assess North Sea red mullet stock status and to produce catch advice

Recommendation from WKMSYSPICT (still awaiting ICES approval)

- Possibility to use assessment methodology for ICES category 3 stocks using life history traits of the stock, length frequency of landings and Q3-4 surveys biomass index.
- Future research: investigate SS3 assessment methodology to allow change in productivity in the model.

For the Cat. 3 assessment French data on growth and maturity was used allowing for the determination of MSY proxy.

The Chair thanked Girardin for this comprehensive presentation. He noted that studies in 7d and 4 highlight that most of the catches are for age 1. Technical measures may be needed on this for example on minimum size. Part of the problem could be solved with a change in mesh size from 40mm to 80mm in 7d. Dominique Thomas added that fishermen in 7d have noted a decrease in catches especially since the last technical regulation in 2018 when there was a move from 80mm to 40mm mesh size.

Girardin explained that information is only available for 2014 – 2021. Not many changes could be observed in these years. The size is between 8 – 20cm, though some reaching 31cm. Catches also include age 0. Maturity size is estimated at 16.2cm, with females at 16.9cm.

Thomas commented that the mesh size would need to be increased and a minimum landing size of more than 17cm should be implemented to preserve the stock. She felt that 90mm mesh size would be preferable as the stock is on a downward trend.

The Chair stated that once the measures are taken in France this could be shared in the AC with agreement of the other members to see if a recommendation could be made on the technical measures for this stock.

Girardin stated that the assessment for the western part of the Channel is still ongoing. This is a Cat. 5 stock but no additional details can be shared at this point in time. Studies are ongoing at Ifremer on maturity. There is very little information available on this stock.

Emiel Brouckaert noted the proposal on the two issues and added that there is an existing NWWAC advice on the minimum size for the squid fishery which includes support for a minimum mesh size increase to 80mm. He felt that the increase to 90mm mesh size was not foreseen and it would be useful for the AC to have more information on the MCRS of 17cm and the basis for this.

Girardin stated in the chat that the size is derived from length at 50% of maturity from a study that was published in 2013: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jai.12266>

The Chair stated that the problem came from deep-sea vessels (especially Danish seiners) working in 7d with 40mm mesh and which observe catches of very small red mullets in France, which is an urgent issue that needs solving. Thomas supported the statement by the Chair commenting that the size had decreased sharply with increased landings following the decrease in mesh size to 40mm. She added that the addition of a minimum size was positive as it would avoid a market developing for such a small size and that any proposed selectivity measures should be implemented before the fish are on board.

Hussenot Desenonges mentioned that Danish seine/flyshoot activity had been prohibited inside the 12

miles zone in Brittany, justified by the massive catches of red mullet. From what he recalled, in the technical measures regulation there was a 12cm minimum landing size for red mullet which has been removed for some reason. He then asked Girardin to explain which are the factors behind the recruitment peaks in 2007 and 2014.

Girardin was unable to explain this, it could be linked to environmental factors but there has been no study on this. What is known is that this fishery follows the recruitment trend and in the following years the recruitment level changed.

Vallerani asked for members to provide the Secretariat with a draft proposal for circulation to the WG members. The Chair stated that the French Fisheries Committee would draft a proposal and send it to the Secretariat for circulation.

ACTION: CNPMM 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.

4 Update from Focus Groups

Whelk

The Secretariat explained that the NWWAC advice was delivered to the MS on 2 February with a request to prepare a joint recommendation on whelk management in the EU waters of the Channel. MS were discussing the advice at the last TG meeting on 23 February, no updates yet but discussions expected at next TG meeting on 16 March.

- Maximum vessel length of 16 meters, except for larger vessels that have been historically fishing for whelk in the area (reference period to be defined);
- Use of sorting grid with a minimum spacing of 22mm;
- Electronic positioning systems (VMS) installed on all vessels;

Paulo Vasconcelos stated that the report from the STECF EWG NQS was not yet available and final publication is expected soon. He added that regarding the topics considered in this Working Group, whenever the advice is based on solid scientific evidence, the Commission can support proposals of measures improving the sustainability of fisheries on certain on-quota species in the Channel.

ACTION: Secretariat to inform WG3 members on Member States Group's feedback on whelk advice.

Scallop

Advice is in preparation following a proposal by French sector for a joint recommendation for management measures in the Channel. The draft has been shared with WG3 in advance of the meeting. Further discussions are expected for a compromise between the French and Irish sectors regarding the scope of the JR.

- Continuation of the closure from 15 May to 30 September in ICES 7d (ongoing discussions on extending this to 7e too);
- Prohibition of the use of dredges with an inside ring diameter size of less than 97 mm in ICES



7d (and considering 7e too). This to improve the selectivity of the fishing gear in accordance with the results from the SELEDRAG project;

- Prohibition of the use of beam longer than 12 meters in ICES 7d and 7e, to reduce the impact on the seabed.

John Lynch confirmed that the Irish fishing industry wish to take an agreement forward, but certain concerns are still there. He had liaised with Mathieu Vimard especially around the economic viability of the proposed new gear. Bord Iascaigh Mhara have not yet been available to trial this gear, however, the Irish industry have agreed to buy and trial this gear with proper scientific support. To progress this and promote the sustainable fishery of scallops in the Channel, Irish industry representatives are planning to travel to France to examine the gear and hold a dialogue with French representatives on the new proposal.

The Chair commented that the fishing gear is not new and has been used for several years in France. Data is available on the specificities of this fishery. He agreed that convincing others may still be needed in particular the European Commission, however, the visit of the Irish industry delegation was positively noted and welcomed. He felt that the French industry was happy with this mesh size and that sorting was far easier and less work was needed by the fishermen on board as the small scallops remain on the sea floor. While it was too early to issue a joint recommendation at this point in time, he felt it was important not to wait too long especially regarding the summer closure, which seemed to be an issue for the Irish industry.

Lynch stated that the industry accepted the results from Ifremer, but fishermen raised issues around the fishing methods between Ireland and France mainly relating to the towing speed. This could be resolved while the sectors meet in April so that the advice could be put forward as soon as possible.

ACTION: 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.

Seabass

The Secretariat introduced the background to the complaint from EAA and IFSUA about the advice process in 2022. The Focus Group could not agree on a document to be taken forward which contained both a majority and minority position as it was felt this was not an effective advice. Therefore, the FG decided to abandon the advice. Matilde Valleranh asked Llibori Martinez to take the floor to put forward the EAA and IFSUA complaint.

Martinez stated that reaching consensus is priority and that this is the first time this had not been possible. He felt that having only online meetings and written procedures does not help to reach consensus. He added that the position of the EAA and IFSUA was supported by strong evidence and that it should be included in the document. He felt that the procedures did not reflect what happens when a minority position is supported by two or more organisations. These failures must be improved upon which is why the EAA and IFSUA wished to present this complaint, and a document was shared with the Secretariat on this containing a summary on how this point was reached which may need to be discussed in the General Assembly.

The Chair thanked Martinez for this contribution. He stated that he had been involved in taking the



decision of not putting forward any advice. In his opinion the minority position was an accusing advice towards the industry, it had the same length as the majority advice which created an issue as it was an advice with two parts which could have created confusion as it presented two sides of a coin. Thomas agreed that there had been a majority decision and that the minority position criticised this which could not be accepted.

Martinez added that there were two positions. A first draft of the minority position made comments on the majority position. The second document had these comments removed as EAA and IFSUA did not want to accuse anyone. The opposition was based on scientific evidence. He felt that this situation should be used as a lesson as to how to improve things and how advice must be presented.

The Secretariat stated that a lot of effort was put into preparing the advice as usual. This particular advice has always been advice with diverging positions. The advice contained two different position papers in the end which is why the majority of the FG decided not to take this forward. The Secretariat continues to provide opportunities to improve the discussion process so that consensus positions can be reached. The Secretariat will reflect on a procedure to address this issue and welcomes the feedback from members on this.

The Chair thanked the Secretariat for this and added that everyone involved could do better next time. Martinez stated that a consensus is of course the goal but if this is not possible then different positions must be reflected but all the work that has been put into this topic must be considered.

The Secretariat added that the file on the complaint put forward by the EAA and IFSUA will be shared with the rest of this WG for transparency and understanding.

Thomas added that advice is not a recounting of positions but the advice should move forward in a joint manner and that the presentation of two positions cannot be considered useful advice.

ACTION: 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.

5 Management of Fishing Effort in the Channel

The Secretariat commented that this was a follow-up item from previous discussions with feedback needed from members. A consultation was held in the UK on this topic and updates on this from members or MS representatives would be appreciated.

Pauline Joyeux stated that there is no news on this as this has not been discussed at the MS group.

The Chair added a new item which is contained on the HWG meeting tomorrow regarding the CFP package announced on 21 February. He felt surprised at the ban on trawling in MPAs by 2030. He stated that for the last number of years industry and scientists have been working together to analyse the risks of this fishing practice and also to identify conservation priorities and solutions. And now this surprising announcement was made which extends for example to 40-50% of area in the Channel. The Commission is putting pressure on the MS and it is felt that this announces the end of the fishing industry. The French industry have asked their administration and their representatives at the European

Parliament to oppose these measures.

Thomas stated that the ban covers 7d and also the UK fishing grounds in the Channel which creates an even bigger issue.

The Chair stated that as a general consideration the industry has made a lot of effort and that more than half of the stocks in the NWWAC area are managed at sustainable levels which should be recognised. He commented that the Commission should realise that it is programming the death of EU fisheries and the bringing in of all imaginable kinds of imports.

Brouckaert stated that this is a very interesting subject which will be addressed in the HWG and will likely be subject of an NWWAC advice. He suggested that comments from this WG can be taken forward by the proposed FG.

The Secretariat added that these comments can also be sent in writing.

ACTION: Follow developments on designation of MPAs on both EU and UK sides and combine this work with the review of the CFP package.

6 Inputs on the Discard Plan 2023

The Secretariat explained that through its Focus Group Landing Obligation, the NWWAC is preparing advice to the MS Joint Recommendation on the post 2023 Discard Plan. For this new Discard Plan, the Commission asked MS to review all exemptions in place in the NWW and reflect on their effectiveness/usefulness.

As mentioned during the last Member States Technical Group meeting, the aim of the exemptions review is to show the impact of exemptions. The annual review cycle of this Delegated Act is a heavy administrative burden on both the MS and the Commission and the option of putting exemptions in place for a longer period of time is being considered. The timeline for the process is expected to be similar to previous years: MS need to deliver their joint recommendations by 1 May, STECF will review it in mid-May and the Delegated Act should be in place for the end of the year.

The WG members are invited to reflect on these aspects for those exemptions relevant to the Channel: Were the exemptions effective? Are new exemptions needed or should others be dropped? Among the current ones, which could be considered as the most controversial and should be given priority in the review?

Brouckaert repeated comments from the previous WG. Two aspects need to be demonstrated:

- what has been done up to now to improve selectivity up to now
- how have technical measures helped to improve the survivability of the species targeted for exemption.

These two aspects need a thorough analysis of the technical measures, and he felt that there are not enough scientists or funding available for this work.



The Secretariat added that work is being carried out on the choke tool regarding a “what if” exercise to analyse what would happen if a certain exemption was not in place. This will be presented at the HWG meeting tomorrow.

ACTION: 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.

7 Summary of actions agreed and decisions adopted by the Chair

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.
2	Secretariat to inform WG3 members on Member States Group’s feedback on whelk advice
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.
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.
5	Follow developments on designation of MPAs on both EU and UK sides and combine this work with the review of the CFP package.
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.

Participants

NWWAC members	
Emiel Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Gérald Hussenot Desenonges	Blue Fish
Manu Kelberine (Chair)	CRPMEM de Bretagne
John Lynch	IS&EFPO
Llibori Martinez	IFSUA
Corentine Piton	France Peche Durable et Responsable
Erwan Quemeneur	CDPMEM 29
Dominique Thomas	CMEOP
Arthur Yon	FROM Nord
NWWAC observers	
David Curtis	EAA
Franck Le Barzic	COBRENORD
Geert Meun	VisNed



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Patrik Murphy	IS&WFPO
Aodh O'Donnell	IFPO
NorahParke	KFO
Alexandra Philippe	EBCD
Aodh O'Donnell	IFPO
David Vertegaal	EAA
Mathieu Vimard	Organisation des pêcheurs normands
Experts and observers	
Killian Chute	EFCA
Pauline Joyeux	French administration
Pedro Riveiro	Xunta de Galicia
Paulo Vasconcelos	DG MARE
NWWAC Secretariat	
Mo Mathies	Executive Secretary
Matilde Vallerani	Deputy Executive Secretary