



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
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MINUTES

WORKING GROUP 3 (CHANNEL)

Wednesday 13 March 2024

11:00 - 13:00

The Printworks, Dublin Castle, Dublin

1. Welcome and introduction

The Chair Manu Kelberine welcomed all participants to the meeting. Apologies were received from Kenatea Chavez-Hey (ANOP) and Franck Le Barzic (Cobrenord). The agenda was adopted as drafted. Action points from the previous meeting (13 September 2023) were:

1	The CNPMEM will contact the Secretariat following the meeting in France on red mullet with an updated proposal.
	Discussed under agenda item 5.
2	Members' contributions on the choke risks will be collated by the Secretariat and considered by the Focus Group on the landing obligation with a view to preparing advice. The Secretariat will share an updated version of the spreadsheet with members for further comment if necessary.
	Work is progressing via the Focus Group.
3	Members should send comments on the UK FMPs to the Secretariat by 20 September.
	The NWWAC has submitted feedback on the Scallop FMP and on the consultations on discards and REM in October 2023.
4	Secretariat to draft a letter on UK HMPA impacts to the Commission.
	Request to Mathieu for input, no action taken to date. Discussed under agenda item 4.

2. Scallop management

a. Presentation on Irish trials result (Daragh Browne, BIM)

The Chair invited Daragh Browne (BIM) to take the floor and present on the results of the trial conducted on the ring size by Irish vessels. The presentation is available [here](#).

Browne explained that the trial came about when the Irish scallop fishing Industry approached BIM to assess the potential impacts of increasing ring size under conditions representative of Irish fishing practices and gear. This was in response to French increases in dredge ring size in the English Channel scallop fishery. Following meetings with members of the scallop fishing industry a plan was agreed and a vessel was selected – the MFV Willie Joe, a 24 m scalloper from County Wexford. Fishing gear comprised Newhaven-style scallop dredges, top elevation (top left), front elevation



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(bottom left). The bags or ring backs attached to the rear of each dredge are made up of steel rings and washers. Irish vessels typically use 85 mm diameter rings, whereas the regulatory mesh size for French vessels is 97 mm from 2021 in 7d and from 2022 in 7e. The number of dredges varies from vessel to vessel but in this case there were 10 dredges per beam and the trial vessel deployed port and starboard beams.

The trial took place during November 2023, in EU waters of ICES 7e, where there is a 100 mm Minimum Conservation Reference Size for scallop. In ICES 7d, the MCRS is 110 mm. A total of 36 valid hauls were carried out, with an average haul duration of 58 minutes, towing speed of 2.5 kts and depth of 68 m.

Browne then described the trial protocol, which was agreed with the trial skipper prior to leaving port. The control gear was deployed on the starboard or right-hand side beam and comprised 10 dredges with 85 mm ring size. On the port or left-hand side beam, 92 and 97 mm ring sizes were fitted to alternate dredges. Control and test dredges were numbered 1-10, making up 5 pairs of dredges per side. On completion of a haul, the same pair of dredges was sampled from both sides. This was to reduce bias related to dredge position along a beam.

Almost 4,000 scallops were measured over 4 days. Less than 1% of the total number of scallop retained by all ring sizes was under the minimum conservation reference size of 100 mm. Browne explained that researchers plotted scallop size frequency histograms and statistically assessed proportional differences in scallop catch at width using a generalised additive model (GAM) and catch curve outputs.

Browne concluded by adding that their sampling protocol attempted to account for differences in dredge fishing power along a beam. It was impossible to change the ring bags from one beam to another to assess differences in fishing power due to poor weather. The trial skipper kept the 92 mm gear on board his vessel after the trial and reported some loss of above 100 mm MCRS scallops as the gear became more worn. These caveats aside the results are similar to the findings of a French study conducted in the eastern Channel (SELEDrag, Fouchet et al., 2019).

The Chair thanked Brown for the presentation and for the work carried out.

Dominique Thomas commented that it might have been interesting to carry out the same trial in the Eastern Channel where the 97mm is more performing in terms of selectivity. Olivier Lepretre agreed with her, adding that the yield in the Baie de Seine is increasing thanks to the use of the 97 mm size.

John Lynch thanked BIM for carrying out the trial in the winter period and reported that follow up trials are hopefully scheduled for the summer to have better weather with the same gear used in the previous study.

Browne replied that most of the time Irish vessels are fishing for 100mm scallop and they are looking for gear that is selective in parts of the Irish sea and in 7d, without having to change gear when moving from an area to another. He confirmed that BIM is considering doing more trials to hopefully have more positive results.



Anais Mourtada asked for more details regarding the trials in the summer especially in relation to timing and preparation of AC advice. Could it be possible to start drafting advice during the NWWAC summer meetings?

Lynch felt it is better to wait for the results of the second trial before drafting advice. Browne was hopeful that the trial could be carried out in May/June with results definitely ready for NWWAC July meetings.

The Chair commented that when increasing the ring size it is important to work on the quality of the steel used, this was an issue for French vessels.

Thomas asked about feedback from professionals when the trial's results were communicated.

Lynch replied that fishers had a positive reaction but feel that more information is needed.

ACTION: The WG will continue following the Irish work on scallop trials. Results of upcoming trials should be ready for the WG meeting in July. In the meantime, the Secretariat will keep members updated on work by the NWW Member States Group.

b. Organisation of workshop in 2024

Matilde Vallerani from the NWWAC Secretariat mentioned a proposal from DG MARE to organise a workshop on the management of scallop fisheries integrated into the broad field of non-quota species, scallop being the "pilot" multi-annual strategy agreed by the Specialised Committee on Fisheries with the UK. The workshop should involve NWWAC members, Member States, DG MARE, scientists and UK counterparts. It should be held towards the end of 2024/early 2025, but the Secretariat is still awaiting for more information from the Commission.

French members in the room agreed that it is important for both the EU and the UK to move to 97 mm ring size. UK fishers would like to have the same management as in France and the EU should move forward on this initiative.

3. Proposal for an exemption for lemon sole in ICES 7d by the NWW Member States Group

The draft joint recommendation by the NWW Member States Group on the de minimis exemption for lemon sole in ICES 4 and 7d was shared with NWWAC members on 5 March for review. The text still needs to be completed with French data and is likely to be further discussed at the next Technical Group meetings. The AC was invited to contribute with advice.

The Chair wondered why this exemption was addressing beam trawlers only and felt that other gears should be included.

Mourtada felt that AC advice should point out that this exemption has no negative impact on the TAC and there is no additional choke risk with this exemption.



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Emiel Brouckaert mentioned the ICES advice provided in 2018 on the contribution of TACs to fisheries management and stock conservation, which suggests that removing the EU/UK TACs for lemon sole in ICES Division 3.a, Subarea 4, and Division 7.d may generate a lower risk of the stock being exploited unsustainably. This advice was reviewed in 2022 by ICES following a EU/UK request which confirmed that the conclusion on lemon sole remains valid. He felt that this element should be included and considered in the joint recommendation.

ACTION: The Secretariat will collect inputs from WG members on the draft joint recommendation on lemon sole and draft advice to the NWW Member States Group.

4. UK MPAs

The new MMO byelaw announced on 31 January, the Marine Protected Areas Bottom Towed Fishing Gear Byelaw, is to come into effect on 22 March 2024. It will prohibit bottom towed gear in 13 MPAs. A meeting was organized by the MMO on 29 January with non-UK stakeholders and a call for evidence was open until 13 February. MS and diverse EU entities submitted strong contributions to the call for evidence. At the last Inter-AC Brexit Forum on 5 February it was agreed that ACs should consider providing input to the Commission on the 13 MPAs and sandeel closure to be implemented by the UK. The Commission's legal unit was asked how apparent disproportion would be dealt with.

Mourtada asked for an update on the legal analysis by the Commission and for clarification on how disproportionality would be addressed.

Lepretre commented that the EU is having a similar approach to the UK, with new MPAs being established where fishing is forbidden. *"If we continue like this, we are going to kill our industry. We will have to lean on imports from sources with lower social and environmental standards"*.

Participants agreed that the EU needs to ensure level playing field and that a thorough scientific and socio-economic analysis is needed to understand how to soften the impact of MPAs on fishing activities. A study on trawlers that have lesser impact on the seabed was also mentioned.

Vallerani reminded participants that the NWWAC and the PelAC have a joint Focus Group on Spatial Squeeze that will address these issues.

She then proposed to send an email to DG MARE officials asking for clarification on how the legal analysis on MPAs measures disproportionality is progressing and on the deadline for providing useful feedback to the Commission on the matter.

ACTION: The Secretariat will enquire DG MARE via email about work of their legal services analysing any discrimination, disproportionality and whether the actions are in line with scientific advice regarding the 13 MPAs established by the UK and about how this would be addressed. The WG recommends that the joint NWWAC/PelAC Focus Group Spatial Squeeze follows EU-UK discussions on MPAs and pursues the topic with advice.



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5. Red mullet – presentation by Anais Mourtada, CNPMEM

The Chair gave the floor to Mourtada to present on a position paper elaborated by the CNPMEM and agreed by French professionals, which could be the basis for AC advice on managing red mullet in the Channel.

Mourtada explained that red mullet is a benthic fish widely distributed in the North-East Atlantic. It grows rapidly during its first two years of life, and from the age of 3 there is significant sexual dimorphism, with females being larger than males (16,9 cm and 16,2 cm respectively).

The ICES stock assessment for red mullet stock in Subarea 4 and divisions 7.d and 3.a was downgraded to category 5 in 2022 as a result of a reduction in the sampling rate providing information on age and size structures and problems with the indices used. A benchmark was carried out by ICES in 2022-2023 to explore possible solutions to the difficulties encountered in the assessment and to improve the scientific advice. The benchmark highlighted an increase in biomass until 2007, followed by a very significant decrease until 2013 and peaks in recruitment abundance.

However, there were difficulties in defining reference points. The benchmark recommended the application of the ICES category 3 stock assessment methodology, based on a biomass index derived from the scientific surveys of the second half of the year, data on landings in terms of size and data on the growth of this stock. Based on stock growth data and the size structure of landings, the stock is currently considered to be overexploited and the 2023 ICES advice recommends no more than 1985 tonnes in each of the years 2024 and 2025.

Moreover, the 2023 ICES advice mentions that recent catches of this stock mainly consist of fish ages 0 and 1. Red mullet start maturing at age 1 but are not fully matured before age 3. The stock status would therefore benefit from improved technical measures to reduce the catches of small fish and contribute to more stable yields.

In light of this, Mourtada reported that the CNPMEM position paper proposes to:

- Changeover to 80 mm for all European vessels using towed gear in the ICES subareas 4 and 7;
- Consideration to be given to increasing the mesh size in 4c and 7d;
- A minimum conservation reference size of 17 cm should be introduced in ICES subareas 4 and 7.

Brouckaert asked whether this agreement between French professionals had been validated by French authorities and shared with the NWW Member States Group.

Mourtada replied that this had indeed been done and that the French administration asked the CNPMEM to bring the proposal forward to the NWWAC.

ACTION: The Secretariat will draft advice to the NWW Member States Group for a joint recommendation on red mullet based on the paper produced by the CNPMEM.



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5. Summary of actions agreed by the Chair

1	The WG will continue following the Irish work on scallop trials. Results of upcoming trials should be ready for the WG meeting in July. In the meantime, the Secretariat will keep members updated on work by the NWW Member States Group.
2	The Secretariat will collect inputs from WG members on the draft joint recommendation on lemon sole and draft advice to the NWW Member States Group.
3	The Secretariat will enquire DG MARE via email about work of their legal services analysing any discrimination, disproportionality and whether the actions are in line with scientific advice regarding the 13 MPAs established by the UK and about how this would be addressed. The WG recommends that the joint NWWAC/PelAC Focus Group Spatial Squeeze follows EU-UK discussions on MPAs and pursues the topic with advice.
4	The Secretariat will draft advice to the NWW Member States Group for a joint recommendation on red mullet based on the paper produced by the CNPMEM.
5	Secretariat to follow up with Commission on organisation of events related to developed of multi-annual strategy for King Scallop (proposed and agreed by ExCom based on dialogue with DG MARE)

6. Participants list

Members

Name	Organisation
Emiel Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Gérald Hussenot Desenonges	BLUEFISH
Manu Kelberine	CRPMEM de Bretagne
Olivier Lepretre	Comité Des Peches Des Hauts De France
John Lynch	Irish South & East Fish Producers Organisation
Anaïs Mourtada	CNPMEM
Alexandra Philippe	EBCD
Corentine Piton	France Pêche Durable et Responsable
Dominique Thomas	OP CME MMN
Arthur Yon	FROM Nord
Daragh Browne	Bord Iascaigh Mhara

Observers & experts

Name	Organisation
Daragh Browne	Bord Iascaigh Mhara
Ronan Cosgrove	Bord Iascaigh Mhara
Alexandra Philippe	EBCD



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NWWAC Secretariat

Name	Role
Mo Mathies	Executive Secretary
Matilde Vallerani	Deputy Executive Secretary