

MINUTES

WORKING GROUP 1 (Irish Sea)

Online meeting on Zoom
 Wednesday 9 October 2024, 12:45 – 14:00 CET

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair John Lynch welcomed participants to the meeting from the Chair. No apologies were received in advance of the meeting. The agenda was adopted as drafted. Action points from the last meeting include:

1	WG 1 members have elected Aodh O'Donnell as new vicechair.
2	Comments made following presentation of ICES advice will be taken into account in the preparation of the AC advice on Fishing Opportunities by the FG Landing Obligation. Members are invited to send any other contribution via email before the FG meeting on 24 July.
	This action point was completed, the NWWAC advice on fishing opportunities for 2025 was delivered to the Commission in August.
3	The WG will continue to follow ICES work related to expanding the use of the stability clause.
	Recommendation to expand the use of stability clause included in advice on fishing opportunities and to be raised at MIAC meeting with ICES in Jan 2025.
4	Proposal to elaborate a request to DG MARE to enable the possibility to expand ICES advice beyond catch advice and consider management measures where needed.
	Discussion on review of management measures in the Irish Sea under agenda item 3.

2. Review of draft advice on choke risk in the NWW – Irish sea stocks

Matilde Vallerani explained that the choke traffic light spreadsheet was updated with the latest ICES advice and would be shared with members, with the last column left blank for feedback. Members were invited to add their comments and return them. This document will consolidate feedback from all working groups and feed the work of the Focus Group Landing Obligation to prepare advice on choke risk in the NWW.

The Chair mentioned the positive outcomes of the benchmark of sole, which resulted in an increase in the quota and a TAC advice as opposed to having a zero advice and working on a bycatch TAC. He acknowledged the leading role of the produced organisation Rederscentrale pushing for that to be undertaken. Regarding cod, in Ireland the uptake on the bycatch TAC is very low this year, so it's not as critical as it was before. However, there is still zero catch advice for cod and whiting and there is also a decreasing advice for plaice, which may lead to future choke issues.

Emiel Brouckaert mentioned the importance of elaborating and expanding advice on skates and rays.

The Chair noted that the EU is moving forward with plans to manage skates and rays under individual TACs, which could complicate things. He indicated that there would be a meeting of the Focus Group on skates and rays soon, where Joanne Morgan would present the latest ICES advice.

Johnny Woodlock highlighted the importance of mackerel for both commercial and recreational fisheries. He expressed concern over stock decline and deals made between non-EU countries, such as Norway and the UK, which may be contributing to this issue. He suggested that recreational anglers, who rely on mackerel as a key species, should also be included in discussions.

The Chair agreed, stressing the importance of managing mackerel sustainably, particularly for Ireland.

Patrick Murphy felt that the choke advice should take into account that boarfish is becoming more prevalent all over the Irish coastline. Regarding pollock, he mentioned that Ireland's quota is very small and could cause severe choke issues if there are no swaps available.

ACTION: The Secretariat will share the updated choke spreadsheet and invite members to send their comments. The input received will feed the preparation of advice by the Focus Group Landing Obligation.

3. Management measures in the Irish Sea – need for review?

The Chair referred to one of the action points from WG1 in July – a proposal to elaborate a request to DG MARE to enable the possibility to expand ICES advice beyond catch advice and consider management measures where needed. In his view, the identification of impacts on stocks other than fishing is an important issue and requires further assessment if new or alternative management measures in the Irish Sea are to be considered. There has been a closure in place in the North Irish Sea since 2000 to enhance the opportunity for spawning cod. He emphasized that despite the intention, these measures have made no significant impact with declining cod stocks. In fact, the cod stocks are now at a historic low and alternative management options should be considered.

Patrick Murphy commented that real-time closures based on stock conditions (e.g., juvenile sightings) could be more effective than permanent closures. He noted that fishers are often quick to stop fishing when they encounter small fish, and this approach could be better formalized. He expressed concern that current approaches to managing fish stocks, specifically the F range are not working as stocks are still declining. Other factors, such as predators like bluefin tuna, are affecting the stocks. In his view, expanding management efforts, including addressing predator control and recognizing changes in fish migration, is necessary. Murphy's main point is the need for a broader and more expansive approach to fisheries management, incorporating additional data streams and considerations to better address the ongoing depletion of stocks.

The Chair replied that the Irish Sea cod closure was directed at target fisheries for cod but did affect other mixed fisheries at the same time. It actually ended up being only open to *Nephrops* fishing with particular devices to allow for fish to escape. The closure did not have an impact on the decline of the stock. He proposed to look at this issue from a different angle, focusing on technical measures available to reduce discards so that ultimately no closures are needed.

The Chair noted that BIM is currently trialling new gear in the *Nephrops* fishery to reduce bycatch of whiting. Early results from trials with four-panel nets appear promising. These nets not only reduced

whiting bycatch but also helped to lower fuel consumption. He suggested that BIM could be invited to present on the results of these trials at the next meeting.

ACTION: BIM will be invited to present on their recent trials on new gears in the Irish Sea at the next meeting of Working Group 1.

4. AOB

Brouckaert noted that there had been little information coming from the UK regarding fisheries management in the Irish Sea. He suggested that the group monitor developments on the UK side more closely.

The Chair agreed, mentioning that the UK is developing a fisheries management plan for the Irish Sea, which would be relevant to members. He also raised concerns about differing technical measures between the UK and EU, which could complicate cross-border fisheries management.

Woodlock highlighted the challenges posed by the EU's goal of designating 30% of marine areas as protected by 2030. He noted that the displacement of fishing effort due to ORE projects and MPAs could have a significant impact on fisheries in the Irish Sea. He stressed the need for consultation with the fishing industry during this process.

Members agreed that these topics will be looked at to feed the agenda of the next WG meeting.

ACTION: The following topics should be looked at to feed the agenda of the next WG meeting: implications of EU-UK management in the Irish sea and fisheries displacement due to marine protected areas and ORE.

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

- 1) The Secretariat will share the updated choke spreadsheet and invite members to send their comments. The input received will feed the preparation of advice by the Focus Group Landing Obligation.
- 2) BIM will be invited to present on their recent trials on new gears in the Irish Sea at the next meeting of Working Group 1.
- 3) The following topics should be looked at to feed the agenda of the next WG meeting: implications of EU-UK management in the Irish sea and fisheries displacement due to marine protected areas and ORE.

6. Participants list

Members



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN
WATERS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA
LAS AGUAS
NOROCCIDENTALES

Name	Organisation
Emiel Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
John Lynch	ISEFPO
Patrick Murphy	ISWPO
Aodh O'Donnell	IFPO
Dominic Rihan	KFO

Observers

Name	Organisation
Johnny Woodlock	Irish Seal Sanctuary

Secretariat

Name	Role
Matilde Vallerani	Deputy Executive Secretary