



## DRAFT MINUTES

### WORKING GROUP 1 (Irish Sea)

02 July 2025 - Vigo and online

#### 1 Welcome and introductions

The Chair John Lynch welcomed all participants to the meeting. Apologies were received from Dominic Rihan (KFO). The agenda was adopted.

**Action points** from the last meeting (10 March 2025)

1	Follow up with BIM to keep the AC informed on the upcoming gear trials which will take place during spring/ summer this year.
	<a href="#">Agenda item 3</a>
2	WG to develop query to the Commission regarding the monetisation of carbon credits for the fishing industry.
	<a href="#">Discuss this point in the AOB to decide the way forward</a>

#### 2 ICES advice for the Irish Sea – Joanne Morgan (ACOM Vice-Chair)

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

List of acronyms

DLS	data limited stocks
CHR	constant harvest rate
Rfb	Equation: $r$ = biomass ratio (survey trend), $f$ = fishing proxy (length data, target), $b$ = biomass safeguard
CAA	catch at age
SAA	survey at age
SR	Stock recruit
B	biomass
BMSY	biomass at maximum sustainable yield
XSA	Extended survivor analysis
SAM	Stock assessment model
SCAA	statistical catch at age
SPiCT	Surplus production in continuous time
SS	stock synthesis
SSB	spawning stock biomass



Blim	Limit reference point for spawning stock biomass (SSB)
Btrigger	Value of spawning stock biomass (SSB) that triggers a specific management action
F	Instantaneous Rate of Fishing Mortality
AAP	Aarts and Poos assessment
ogive	typically refers to a maturity ogive: a curve or function that shows the proportion of mature individuals at each age or size in a fish population. It is used to estimate at what age or size fish become sexually mature.

Joanne Morgan explained that the ICES advice was released on Friday 27 June.

Cod 7a: Advice for 2026, MSY and PA: Catch 0 t (no change)

- F below FMSY
- SSB below Blim
- SSB will remain below Blim under all scenarios
- UK data revised 2021-2023
- 3 incomplete surveys
- Assessment retro resales historic stock size
- The assessment is highly sensitive to recruitment index and that survey is incomplete

Haddock 7a: Advice for 2026, MSY: catch  $\leq 1\,331\text{t}$  advice (-30%)

- SSB declining but above MSY Btrigger
- F below FMSY
- Declining stock size, SSB revised downwards, low recent recruitment
- 3 incomplete surveys (minimal impact)
- Revised UK 2021-2023 data (minimal impact)
- Retro – downscales SSB and upscales F

Sole 7a: Advice for 2026, MSY: Catch  $\leq 545\text{ t}$  (-10.5%)

- F below FMSY
- SSB below MSY Btrigger
- Downward revision of recruitment estimates in recent years (retro)
- Revised catch
- Survey incomplete
- Both minimal impact

Emiel **Brouckaert** commented that looking at the tables and considering reference points, FMSY and MSY Btrigger, even in an ideal situation the model would give a reduction for the advice. He felt that this simply indicates that fishers can stick to the quota, the FMSY or MSY Btrigger targets, a revision will happen. He acknowledged that recruitment had been



retrospectively adapted but wondered if it would ever be possible to arrive at positive advice, i.e. an increase.

**Morgan** commented that the cause for retrospective patterns differ from stock to stock. Sometimes a stock may show a pulse in recruitment that is estimated initially to be high, however with additional information the model actually recognizes that this was not the case. In addition, catch may also not have been accurately reported which can cause a retrospective pattern. Finally, weights might not be tracked as quickly as they are changing which results in changes to biomass. The only way to improve on this is to improve the assessment, either through better sampling or better knowledge of the fishery.

Plaice 7a: Advice for 2026, MSY: Catch  $\leq$  614 t (-59%)

- SSB below MSY Btrigger
- Downward revision SSB (retrospective) and SSB below trigger so target F reduced
- 3 missing surveys (minimal impact)
- UK 2021-2023 data revised (minimal impact)
- SAM assessment

Seabass 7a: Advice for 2026, MSY: Total removals  $\leq$  5 180 t (+98%)

- Benchmark 2025 – WKSEABASS
- With Southern bss.27.8ab – northern and central Bay of Biscay
- Examined
  - All input data
  - Stock structure – move 29% Q3 and 41% catch t south
  - Recreational data – new time series 95% post release survival
  - New natural mortality
  - 3 new recruitment surveys
- New SS3 model accepted

Advice for 2026, MSY: Total removals  $\leq$  5.180 t (+98%)

- SSB above MSY Btrigger
- F below FMSY
- New assessment and reference points
- SS3

Whiting 7a:

- Benchmarked 2025 - WKNSCS
- Examined
  - Input data – recreational data included for full time series survival releases 65%
  - New natural mortality estimates
  - Revised survey index – 3 surveys modelled with VAST
  - Revised time varying maturity ogive



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- Discard rate – calculated each year
- Discard survival – 0
- Accepted SAM – previously ASAP
- New reference points estimated – shortened time series starting 1992 – evidence of regime shift

Advice for 2026, MSY: Catch  $\leq$  200 t NA – previous 0

- SSB below Blim
- F above FMSY
- Change in assessment and reference points
- 1 missing survey (minimal impact)
- Revised UK 021-2023 data (minimal impact)

New advice release in autumn: Nephrops (FUs 14-15-19)

Management should be at FU level

FU	Advice 2025	Change	Basis
14 – Irish Sea, East	$\leq$ 297 t	+34%	MSY
15 – Irish Sea, West	$\leq$ 10062 t	-16%	MSY
19 – Irish Sea, Celtic Sea, eastern part of southwest Ireland	385-433 t	+75%	MAP

The Chair thanked Morgan for her presentation and opened the floor to questions.

Patrick **Murphy** commented on the effects of environmental changes in relation to fish stocks. He felt that fishermen at sea are seeing for example smaller fish in the population, but the model is not showing the recruitment coming through which is in turn affecting the assessment. He wondered if ICES has any data on potential changes happening within the stocks and if they are required to prioritise certain stocks.

**Morgan** responded that it seems something is happening in the Irish Sea, for example when looking at Feco is being used as an indicator for Irish Sea cod. In the last two years the temperature has been higher than those used for Feco. She referred to studies that have identified recruitment failure or spawning time with rising temperature. “The changes in the environment are extremely important.” ICES does try to incorporate these in the assessment as well as forecasting. Determining the tradeoffs fish are making to changing environmental conditions is very complex and difficult. ICES held a workshop three years ago to determine how to include climate changes into the assessments. Unfortunately, overall progress on this is slow.



The **Chair** asked how recruitment is related to stock size and spawning stock biomass and how these were reflected in the associated graph.

**Morgan** explained that in most cases the model estimates the recruitment for the stocks with some having stock recruitment relationships estimated within the model. For most models however, “you essentially add up all the deaths to figure out how many fish there used to be.” This may then be considered later, for example by using a shorter recruitment period to arrive at the short-term forecast.

The **Chair** concluded that if the model only adds available numbers to arrive at a conclusion, then it would not be taking into account outside factors such as climate change affecting the recruitment, so this would not be reflected in the graphs for a number of years.

**Morgan** agreed that this was potentially the case. If variables are not fed directly into the model, it may take some time before it is recognised that the decline has been underestimated. Occasionally a survey point during one year may show a spike, and the following year a different survey point might show a decline, so the assessors keep revising. Usually, with data availability over a few years for a particular cohort, the numbers stabilise.

Adam **Holland** commented that earlier this year data showed shifts in terms of dominant *Calanus* species in the Irish Sea. This can be seen over the past 10-20 years particularly for those that support gadoid species such as cod, whiting and haddock shifting to *Calanus* that support pelagic species such as herring and sprat.

**Morgan** stated that species shifts can be observed in many places, as well as the type of zooplankton available, which can become problematic depending on the need of larval species. She referenced the ICES ecosystem overviews which contain a lot of useful information.

**Murphy** felt that it was necessary to develop an action item on this topic and wondered what exactly was needed for a request and from whom the request should come. He felt that it is clear something is not working in the assessments and was wondering what and how this could be prioritized. He added that simply controlling fishing effort is not having the desired effect on fish stocks any longer. Fishermen are following the advice, yet stocks are still declining. The reason given for this is the retrospective, i.e. the year classes of the recruitment have been revised downward.

**Morgan** commented that ICES has an extensive grant agreement with DG ENV and DG MARE and explained that for DG MARE the bulk of requests relates to catch option tables and various scenarios. She felt that while a request could not hurt, some kind of targeted special request might be better. She suggested that this could be discussed with DG MARE prior to submission.

The **Chair** wondered even if this was included, would it change the result.

**Morgan** felt it could make the understanding of the changes in stock size and catch advice more understandable.



Ilaria **Bellomo** explained that the NWWAC Secretariat recently attended an ICES meeting on the ICES ecosystem overviews and felt that increased consideration of climate change might lead to fewer TACs as well as the narrative of the overviews, such as the assessments in the Celtic Sea, where fisheries are still seen as the main impact on the ecosystem.

### 3 Update on current trials - Matthew McHugh, BIM

The Chair welcomed Matthew McHugh who started by presenting on “enlarged mesh in trawl top sheets” and recalled that he presented on trial 1 in March. Trial 2 only concluded two weeks ago. He continued by providing background information and detailed description of the nets.

- Significant 39% reduction in undersize whiting
- No loss in *Nephrops* catches
- Approx. 10-13% reduction in fuel

These results led to a reevaluation and slight changes to trawls and nets for trial 2.

- Reductions in undersized whiting and haddock
- Some loss of smaller *Nephrops*
  - Tailed grade, -30%
  - Larger grade, similar

As these results are only two weeks old, they need further evaluation and discussion over the next weeks. It was felt that the smaller fish seem to be more active in escaping through the mesh instead of passively being washed out.

#### Summary of BIM trials post 2017

Trial	Whiting < 20 cm	Whiting < 27 cm	Nephrops ≥ 25 mm
90 mm codend	-60	-47	-31
Reduced circumference 80 mm codend (80 meshes round)	-15	-6	-12
90 mm codend sensu stricto	-68	-45	-34
90 mm SELTRA 300	-78	-75	-19



### Summary of enlarged mesh in *Nephrops* top sheets

- 160 v 300
  - Reduced catches of < 20 cm whiting
  - No loss of prawns
- 80 v 160
  - Reduced catches of < 20 cm whiting and haddock
  - some loss of prawns (mostly smaller tailed grade)
  - Low economic loss
- Boats using 160 or 300 mm (10 -13% less fuel)

### Smaller door models with reduced twine trawl

- Typically 66 or 72” Thyboron doors – 2.21 or 2.59m<sup>2</sup>
- Tested 66 v 63” Thyboron doors – 1.92 m<sup>2</sup>
  - 300 mm top sheets (30% reduction in twine area compared to 80mm)

Provisional results: potentially use smaller doors

### Future work

- Smaller trial doors
  - 63 vs 72” Thyboron
- Reduced drag ground gear *Nephrops* trawls
- Flume tank workshop for fishermen though no date set yet

The Chair thanked McHugh for his presentation. He felt that fuel reduction was beneficial to all fishermen, but the benefit to reducing catches in whiting earlier would have advantages.

Murphy wondered if this work would be continued in the future.

McHugh responded that the work is depending on feedback from the industry who had requested this work to be carried out originally.

The Chair felt that the most interesting part of the trial was the step going back to 80 mm top sheet to show how the improvements are working.

## **4      Insights into the current MPA stage 3 consultation** - Adam Holland, NIFF

The Chair welcomed Adam Holland who explained that he could only provide an industry perspective on this topic. A meeting is scheduled for UK stakeholders tomorrow with another meeting for non-UK stakeholders planned for 15 July.



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The deadline for this consultation is 01 September.

Holland felt that the UK government is under pressure from eNGOs regarding the banning of bottom trawling. The proposed MPA measures have been developed over the past five years with various assessments included. The UK industry feels that the assessments have been quite comprehensive. The industry's main concern is the lack of socio-economic data and the unintended consequences which are not included in the consultation. However, benefit impact assessments were carried out for example. The consultation is in place to move towards proposing new byelaws for all 43 MPAs and amalgamating the existing ones into four new ones. Measures are proposed to include the banning of towed gear in over 30,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The estimated impact on UK landings is approx. £3.5 million, whereas the estimated impact on non-UK landings is considerably higher at £15.7 million. Cost of benefits for UK businesses were analysed for the next 20 years, but not for EU businesses. Benefits are estimated at £3.1 billion over 20 years. These non-monetised benefits from ecosystem services, for example increases in stock size, may or may not come to fruition. The costs to fishing and the wider supply chain have not been sought by the MMO who have stated they could not collect the data. However, they were able to collect data on non-monetised benefits over the past 5 years using established methodologies which favour the proposed measures. UK industry felt that even if they could provide socio-economic data as part of the consultation, this would not affect the outcome unless the industry can prove that fishing does not have a significant impact on the designated features. He added that it was impossible to provide proof within the two months' consultation period. Quoting from the [consultation paper](#) he added "the draft assessments could not conclude no significant risk of hindering the achievement of site conservation objectives/no adverse effect on site integrity from the ongoing use of bottom towed gears on most or all designated seabed features. MMO is therefore proposing a prohibition of fishing using bottom towed gears across most of these MPAs."

He felt that this showed a lack of confidence in some of the assessments and the precautionary approach simply being applied. Holland concluded that consultations currently do not include the Northern Irish MPAs but that these will likely become subject of a separate consultation later this year.

The **Chair** thanked Holland for this overview. He commented that in the Stage 1 consultation, Irish stakeholders attended meetings and features identified were within the bigger zones and to be avoided by bottom contacting gears. He felt that in this Stage 3 consultation, the whole zone will be excluded from bottom contacting gear.

**Holland** agreed that this seems to be the case. While some surveys have shown specific locations of sensitive features, it seems that the avoidance of bottom contacting gear is extended across the entire zone based on the precautionary approach.

Aodh **O'Donnell** felt that any submission from industry seems futile and that measures would have a significant impact on *Nephrops* in the Irish Sea. He wondered if a coordinated approach might be useful.

**Holland** confirmed that this was the industry's feeling in the UK and agreed coordination could be beneficial.



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**Murphy** asked if Holland was aware of the assessment criteria used regarding the cost to non-UK fisheries as he was concerned regarding landings from the Jones's bank which on their own are worth more than the number mentioned. He wondered if only UK landings by non-UK vessels were taken into account which would mean that the assessment might be skewed.

**Holland** commented that value of landings of non-UK vessels was used.

The Chair thanked Holland and felt that some Irish POs would be directly in contact with Holland in the near future.

## 5 AOB & Summary of actions agreed and decisions adopted by the Chair

- Potential for carbon credits

**Murphy** explained that work is underway in BIM on this topic as well as with another expert. He explained that it seems that carbon has to be sequestered for five years before it can be evaluated. He commented that the Marine Institute has also carried out work and that he sent the information to the Secretariat. He added that he would follow up this work and update the group again.

### ACTIONS

1	Members to send written queries for Joanne Morgan following her presentation to the Secretariat
2	Members to send feedback on the fishing opportunities advice as well as the climate change impacts to the Secretariat.
3	Working Group to follow up on BIM trials at October meeting.

Mo **Mathies** commented that requests have been made to the Commission previously on including climate impact aspects in assessments. She felt that this had been included in previous years' advice on Fishing Opportunities.

**Murphy** felt because an ICES representative had commented on this it would add weight to any request made by the AC.

Emiel **Brouckaert** commented that in previous years each WG is asked to provide comments to the FG Landing Obligation for inclusion in the years' advice on Fishing Opportunities and suggested that this point could also be made in this year's advice.

The **Chair** agreed with this approach, thanked all participants and closed the meeting.



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## Participants

NWWAC members		
Emiel	Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
John	Lynch	Irish South & East Fish Producers Organisation Ltd
Patrick	Murphy	Irish South & West Fish Producers Organisation
Aodh	O'Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisation (IFPO)
Dominic	Rihan	KFO
Experts & Observers		
Guillermo	Bravo Téllez	NWW MS TG - Spanish Representative
Daragh	Browne	BIM
Noelia	Cuervo Álvarez	NWW MS TG - Spanish Representative
Adam	Holland	Northern Ireland Fishermen's Federation
Manu	Kelberine	Crpm de Bretagne
Matthew	McHugh	BIM
Joanne	Morgan	ACOM Vice-Chair – ICES
Alexandra	Philippe	EBCD
Dirk	Van Guyze	Departement LV ABCO dienst zeevisserij
Helder	Wouters	Flemish department of fisheries in Belgium
NWWAC Secretariat		
Ilaria	Bellomo	
Mo	Mathies	