CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES SEPTENTRIONALES | NORTH WESTERN WATERS ADVISORY COUNCIL | CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA LAS AGUAS NOROCCIDENTALES

DRAFT MINUTES

WORKING GROUP 3 (ENGLISH CHANNEL)

02 July 2025 - Vigo and online

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair Manu Kelberine welcomed all participants. Apologies were received from Gérald Hussenot (BlueFish). The agenda was adopted.

Action points from the last meeting (10 March 2025)

1	Secretariat to contact ICES to present the seabass benchmark results to the FG seabass and discussion on the implications for advice and future management of stocks. Response received 19/03: *"The English bass management group has been set up specifically to help deliver the goals in the England and Wales Bass FMP published in December 2023. It would not therefore be appropriate for the NWWAC to sit on what is essentially a domestic management group. We are though working with the EU Commission to manage our engagement on FMPs, so there should be opportunities to engage through that mechanism."* Phil McBryde , Team Leader NQS Finfish I Domestic Fisheries & Reform; Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
	Agenda item 3
2	Secretariat to organise the next meeting of the FG Scallop to discuss technical measures
	Meeting held on 12 May
3	Working Group to follow the Member States Group's discussions on lemon sole and red mullet
	Ongoing – please refer to the reports from the recent MSG meetings available in the Members Area on the NWWAC website
4	Working Group to follow the results of the Benchmark on flatfish in the Eastern Channel and the related advice
	Agenda item 3

2. ICES advice for the Channel – Joanne Morgan, ACOM Vice-Chair

Joanne Morgan presented the ICES advice released on 27 June.

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.

Brill in North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat, English Channel (4,3a, 7de)

Advice for 2026, MSY: Catch ≤ 2086 t advice +3.9%

- F below FMSY
- Stock size above MSY Btrigger
- Increase in Biomass
- some retro in stock size but without clear pattern

Cod North Sea W Scotland E Channel (4, 6a, 7d, 20)

- Advice delayed until autumn
- October likely
- Struggle with mixing implications for advice – will give time for ACOM to further discuss
- Team being set up to try and improve assessment

Lemon sole in North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat, E Channel (4, 3a 7d)

Advice for 2026, MSY: catch ≤ 1106 t (-24%)

- DLS method – chr
- F below FMSY proxy
- Stock sized indicator below trigger
- Advice lower – lower stock size and below trigger for HR reduced

Emiel Brouckaert referred to the stock category not being accurate leading to a precautionary approach. He wondered if it was an option for a stock that is not benchmarked to get multi-annual advice to avoid the precautionary approach on an annual basis.

Morgan responded that managers could request this depending on the method used for this stock. The chr for this stock could be applied every two years, however, the default for this stock is annual advice. This would need to be tested to see if such an approach was workable.

Plaice in the Eastern Channel (7d)

- Benchmarked 2025 – WKNSCS
- Discard rate and migration taken into account
- Examined
    - Input data
    - Revised maturity ogive – based on recent study
    - Discard rate – calculated each year
    - Discard survival – 0
    - Migration - catches originating from ple.27.420 and ple.27.7e stocks are assumed to be, respectively, 50% and 12.86% of the mature individuals caught in Division 7.d during the first quarter
- Accepted SAM - previously Aarts and Poos
- New reference points estimated

Advice for 2026, MSY: Catch ≤1 151t (-56%)

- Some catches Western Channel and North Sea stocks: advice all plaice in 7d **1384 t**
- F below Fmsy
- SSB below MSY $B_{trigger}$
- 7e below trigger and catch from 7e should be no more than 872 t
- Can not advise how to avoid 7e

Dominique Thomas wondered regarding the high amount of discards mentioned in view of the limited catches and ask if there was any further information available, for example which fleet the discards are stemming from.

Morgan responded that 72% of discards came from beam trawlers, 26% from otter trawlers,

and minor amounts from other gears. She mentioned that the advice sheet provides more detail regarding historic catch and landings, including a breakdown of landings and discards for the previous year.

Plaice in the western channel (7e)

- Benchmarked late 2024 – WKBPLAICE
- Previous assessment cat 3 – rfb
- Examined
    - Input data
    - Discard rate – 26% in 7e (updated as required here avarage 2012-2023)
    - Discard survival -50%
    - Migration – 15% of the mature population caught in quarter 1 in Division 7d is added to the ple.27.7e stock catches (revised to 12.86% after the 7d benchmark)
- Unable to produce Cat 1 assessment
- MSE to produce CHR (Cat 3) designed specifically for this stock
- Discard rate and survival and migration taken into account
- Produced new advice for 2026 (and 2027)

Advice for 20206 and 2027, MSY: catch ≤ 872 (-5.9% - 819 in 7e)

- F below FMSY proxy
- Stock size below Itrigger
- Change in assessment methos and below trigger
- Chr rule
- Since 2024 the TAC includes considerations of how much can be fished in each of the divisions 7e and 7d

Sea bass in divisions 4 b-c, 7a, and 7d-h

- Benchmark 2025 -WKBSEABASS
- With southern bss.27.8ab – northern and central Bay of Biscay
- Examined
    - All input data
    - Stick structure – move 29% Q3 and 41% Q4 catch to 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 5180 t (+98%)

- SSB above MSY Btrigger
- F below FMSY
- New assessment and reference points
- EU Multi Annual Plan not accepted by all parties

The Chair felt it was difficult to understand how recreational catches were so high especially in view of the measures that were adopted in previous years.

Morgan explained that this stock had quite restricted commercial fisheries in the recent years. She explained that the recreational data was based on national surveys and will provide more information under the benchmark overview.

Sole in eastern Channel (7d)

Advice for 2026, MSY: catch ≤ 1275t (+5.5%)

- F below FMSY
- SSB below Blim
- Higher recruitment than assumed in last forecast
- SSB increase close to Btrigger – higher target F than last year
- SAM assessment

Pauline Stephan commented that a project had been carried out on the stocks in 7d and that three sub stocks occur in this area. She felt that differences observed by Belgium and France are possibly due to these sub-stocks being genetically isolated in terms of migration.

Sole in the western Channel (7e)

Advice for 2026, MSY: catch ≤ 1213 t (+5.4%)

- F at FMSY
- SSB above MSY Btrigger
- SSB declining but advice higher -upward revision of SSB (retrospective) and STF has lower interim F and higher recruitment assumption than last year
- FLXSA assessment
- Multi Annual Plan
- UK 2021 – 2023 catch and sample data revised – minimal impact

Thomas commented that similar to last year the advice does not match reality for both sole in 7 d and 7e as sole is not being observed at sea and therefore the French quota is not being used.

Brouckaert added that the Belgian fisheries see the opposite from March onwards with large amounts of sole being observed and not sufficient quota available.

Morgan felt it was interesting to hear these different observations. She added that recently two good recruitments had been observed but there might be some spatial aspects to what is being observed. This could mean the need for stock ID work.

Franck Le Barzic explained that for his vessels, catches had been stable, however, he felt it was important to consider the decline in SSB. He wondered that maybe the poor water quality close to the coast is preventing higher numbers of sole as they might prefer the deeper water. This could be the reason why fewer soles are found in these areas, and not over-fishing.

Morgan felt that the survey data could be reviewed in light of this.

Morgan felt that was important in terms of assessment and management so as not to deplete a sub-stock as it often turns out these are important for genetic diversity.

Brouckaert commented that the situation for sole may be similar to the one for plaice and warrant a closer look, for example to establish if there was any migration between the North Sea, 7d and 7e. He hoped that though the advice for sole in the North Sea had been postponed until October, it might be positive as well.

Morgan felt that this would depend on available information, such as tagging or genetics.

Striped red mullet in North Sea, east Channel, Skagerrak and Kattegat (4, 7d, 3a)

Advice for 2026 and 2027, MSY: Catch ≤ 1932 t (-2.7%)

- DLS methos -chr
- F above Fishing pressure proxy
- Stock size above trigger
- Small decrease in indicator
- Limited sampling

Whiting in north Sea and eastern Channel (4 and 7d)

Advice for 2026, MSY catch ≤ 198.609t (-5.6%)

- 2025 advice revised autumn 2024
- F below FMSY
- SSB above MSY Btrigger
- Increase stock size
- SAM

Witch in North Sea, Skagerrak and Kattegat, easter Channel (SA4, 3a, 7d)

Advice for 2026, MSY: catch 2187t (+11%)

- F at FMSY
- SSB above MSY Btrigger
- Increase in stock size
- SAM

The Chair thanked Morgan for her presentation.

3. ICES presentation of the latest benchmark results – Joanne Morgan, ACOM Vice-Chair

a. ICES Seabass benchmark results

Morgan provided an overview of the ICES benchmark approach which is considered critical to ICES' work. These are carried out as needed with the aim to update the science. ICES decides which stocks to prioritise.

WKBSEABASS

- Including stock ID workshop spanned from 2022 to early 2025
- Two stocks
- Both approved SS3 assessments

Stock ID

- Tagging, genetic, particle tracking, and isotope data highlighted substantial biological exchange between current ICES stock units.
- Tagging data revealed mixing among Celtic Sea (divisions 7.f-h), English Channel (7.d-e) and Bay of Biscay (8a) sea bass.
- Also indicated that there was a seasonal component regarding the level of connectivity - more during summer feeding
- Less evidence of connectivity among Irish Sea (7.a) North Sea (4.b-c) and southern Bay of Biscay (8.b) sea bass.
- Developed 3 hypothesis about stock structure
    - Did not have enough information to choose between or rank in likelihood
- Put forward 2 scenarios for the benchmark to consider
    - Scenario A: Continue to assess the 'southern' (ICES divisions 8a-b) and 'northern' (ICES divisions 4.b-c, 7.a and 7.d-h) stocks separately but incorporate mixing between stocks.
    - Scenario B: Single meta-population between northern and southern stocks.
- At modeling workshop complexity of full mixing model, including resolution of data, discussed (B) and it was decided to work only with A. Mixing incorporated by moving catch from north to south.

Recreational catch

- Recreational catch a large part of the removals so it is important to get a good estimate
- Used national surveys of recreational catch
    - Belgium, Denmark, France (north), France (Biscay), Ireland, Netherlands, UK
    - Retained and released separately
        - Tonnage, number, length frequencies
    - Time series – available years varied by country
- 3 workshops, extensive modelling and sensitivity analyses to determine the best way to construct a time series of recreational catch
- Only year with data for all countries was 2022
- Used that year to 'fill in' for other years
- For northern stock time series starts in 2010 but 2011, 2013, 2015 could not be reconstructed
- 95% post release survival

Assessment

- Both stocks stock synthesis
- For northern stock 9 different model formulations tested (base model taken forward)
- Detailed diagnostics conducted on final formulation
- New assessment has rescaled the SSB but trends remain the same

Sea bass allocation tool

- Designed to allow managers and stakeholders to test multiple catch allocation scenarios by gear and different regulations for recreational catches
- Have been discussions with requesters
- No request to develop a new tool yet
- The new tool will take some time to develop (increased complexity due to reallocation of catches from north to south)
- At least a year once requested
- Will not be ready for 2026 fishing season

The Chair thanked Morgan for this overview and opened the floor for questions.

Le Barzic wondered regarding the recreational catches which are based on national survey which were aggregated and included in the model. He recalled that a few years back it was felt that recreational fishing had a significant impact which was underestimated when compared to reality. He felt that now this seems to be overestimated. He wondered if the surveys take into account the legal constraints that had been in place on the past years. He also wondered if there is an overview of the different survey methods used in each country

The Chair added a query about the increased advice for recreational catches as over the past three years it can be seen that catches have remained roughly the same.

Llibori Martinez agreed with this question but wondered regarding the national surveys on recreational catches. He felt that for many countries an active licensing method was missing,

and errors could be made.

Morgan stated that she was not an expert on estimating recreational removals and that there was a very large amount of work reported on by the ICES working group on recreational fisheries. She believed that the group did try to take into account changes in bag limits that occurred over time and also carried out sensitivity analyses. She agreed that there are still uncertainties that remain which have been identified in the benchmark report.

Martinez commented that the definition of recreational fishing is different in different Member States and certain methods might be included in one country which are not include in other countries for example nets. He added that in his opinion the allocation tool was still valid and found it difficult to understand why it could not be used at the moment.

The Chair believed that the use of fixed nets in recreational fisheries was forbidden. Referring to the allocation tool he recalled the NWWAC advice on this tool and felt that it was still valid to say that the tool was still not quite appropriate.

Morgan stated the representatives from various Member States were involved in the work on the benchmark and that this should mean a wide understanding of what constituted recreational fisheries in each member state. She pointed out that the advice sheet contained a large overview of detail regarding catches.

Le Barzic felt that commercial and recreational figures are not exactly comparable as recreational fishing may remove more fish but release them back with a 95% survival rate. He added that when discussing catches, discards should also be included as these are quite significant in commercial fishing due to restrictive regulations.

Morgan agreed that recreational removals are estimated separately and are quite substantial. Discards are also included in the advice making the catch scenario table very complicated.

Thomas felt that discards are underestimated for commercial fisheries. With the authorisation for higher landings this would hopefully lead to fewer discards. “The aim is really to avoid this waste of discards.” Rules need to be adaptable for this stock.

Pauline Stephan commented that the French administration had advised that both EU and UK would utilise the Seabass tool this year. This had been discussed in the Specialised Committee on Fisheries in May.

Morgan stated that if this was the case it is not based on ICES advice as the tool has not been updated with the most recent assessment data, and this would lead to a mismatch.

The Chair questioned whether, in light of the 98% increase in the advice, the SSB now being above Btrigger, and F below FMSY, the previous decision to allow fishing above the moratorium threshold (originally made when the stock was in poorer condition) remains valid and appropriate given the current improved stock status.

Morgan stated that what the managers might do about a moratorium is not for her to say. But his is also not what ICES is advising. ICES advice is for total removals of 5180 t, so this would not be in line with the advice unless it was decided to give the entire amount to recreational fisheries.

ACTION: Secretariat to initiate restart of the FG seabass to develop advice on the ICES advice for 2026.

Written query on the seabass advice

- Will ICES seek to agree detailed project management with the fishery managers: timetable and milestones?

It is unclear what is being referred to here as 'project management'. ICES provides advice based on requests. It does not manage stocks or decide on management measures.

- What is BMSY in tonnes and when does the model say BMSY will be reached if we follow the ICES MSY Approach?

BMSY is not reported in the benchmark report. Simulations have not been reported that look at the timeline for reaching BMSY. The ICES approach focusses more on attaining the maximum sustainable yield in the long term. The MSY approach does not use a BMSY estimate. BMSY is a notional value around which stock size fluctuates when fishing at FMSY. BMSY strongly depends on the interactions between the fish stock and the environment it lives in, including biological interactions between different species. Historical stock size trends may not be informative about BMSY (e.g. when F has exceeded FMSY for many years or when current ecosystem conditions and spatial stock structure are, or could be, substantially different from those in the past). Estimates of BMSY are very sensitive to the assumption that all future factors that influence fisheries productivity remain unchanged in the future.

Determination of MSY Btrigger requires data that identify the normal range of fluctuations in biomass when stocks are fished at FMSY. If the observation on fluctuation in biomass is insufficient to estimate MSY Btrigger, the reference point is normally set at Bpa (if this reference point is available). If sufficient observations of SSB fluctuations associated with fishing around FMSY are available, the MSY Btrigger should be re-estimated to correspond to the fifth percentile of BMSY when fishing at FMSY.

- Are we still trying to rebuild the stock to BMSY and if so how does headline advice to shrink the stock by 8% in 2026 line up with the MAP requirement to rapidly rebuild the stock to a level that can deliver MSY?

The ICES advice rule is designed to work in the long term. Short term changes are not as important so long as the stock remains above Blim. The AR should in the long term prevent the stock from falling below Blim. If it falls below MSY Btrigger the advised F is decreased. Further the MAP is not agreed by all parties and is not the basis of the advice.

- What caused the massive upward revision of sea bass recruitment?

The last recruitment estimate from the assessment models before and after the benchmark is for 2021. The post benchmark estimate is larger (41999 vs 12241). These are not directly comparable however because of the updated assessment.

Pre benchmark

Assessment type	Age- and length-based analytical assessment (Stock Synthesis 3; NOAA Toolbox; ICES, 2024)
Input data	Commercial landings (international landings, ages, and length frequencies from catch sampling); commercial discards (UK bottom otter trawl and nets and combined French fleet, length frequencies from catch sampling); one recruit survey (UK Solent autumn survey [G9863], 1986–present, excluding 2010 and 2012); one bottom trawl survey (Channel Groundfish Survey [G3425], 1988–2014); one commercial tuning fleet (2001–present); growth and maturity data from sampling of commercial catches and surveys; natural mortality (inferred from life-history parameters and maximum observed ages)
Discards and bycatch	Discards included in the model and forecast for some of the fleets
Recreational	Used in the model and in the forecast

Post benchmark

Assessment type	Age- and length-based analytical assessment (Stock Synthesis 3; NOAA Toolbox; ICES, 2025b)
Input data	Commercial landings (international landings, ages, and length frequencies from catch sampling); commercial discards (bottom trawls and seines); recreational removals; four recruit surveys (UK Solent autumn survey [G9863], 1986–present, excluding 2010 and 2012; Fal and Hel [N6638], 2006-2024; Nourdem Seine [G2035], 2017-2024; Nourdem Douarnenez [G9735], 2018 and 2021-2024); one bottom trawl survey split in two periods (Channel Groundfish Survey [G3425], 1988–2014 and 2015-2024); one commercial tuning fleet (2001–present, excluding 2008); growth and maturity data from sampling of commercial catches and surveys; natural mortality (inferred from Bay of Biscay Lorenzen estimates for ages 0-4 then fixed at 0.24)
Discards and bycatch	Discards included in the model and forecast for some of the fleets
Recreational	Used in the model and in the forecast

The model has been updated. Data now include 4 recruit surveys as opposed to one, a different treatment of the bottom trawl survey, updated natural mortality and much more data on recreational fisheries

- Can you please explain why the headline advice uses FMSY rather than FMSY lower in the formula “SSB/MSY Btrigger x FMSY”.

There is no agreed management plan for this stock. ICES therefore applies its own advice rule which does not include FMSY lower.

- What is the tonnage value of BMSY (it seems this must have been calculated, since the 5th percentile of BMSY was calculated).

MSY Btrigger should be selected to safeguard against an undesirable or unexpected low SSB when fishing at FMSY. If sufficient observations of SSB fluctuations associated with fishing around F_{MSY} are available, the MSY $B_{trigger}$ should be re-estimated to correspond to the fifth percentile of B_{MSY} when fishing at F_{MSY}. For most stocks that lack data on fishing at FMSY, MSY Btrigger is set at Bpa. However, as a stock starts to be fished consistently with FMSY, it is possible to move towards implementation of a value for MSY Btrigger that reflects the 5th percentile definition of MSY Btrigger (BMSY5pc). This stock has not had a long period of fishing at Fmsy in recent history (or in any of its history) and so this metric is not appropriate. It was calculated and presented in the benchmark report but was not chosen as MSY Btrigger rather it is Bpa which is Blim × exp(1.645 × σ) with σ ≈ 0.128

- Is it possible to say when MSY is estimated to be achieved, if the MSY Approach is followed?

Long term simulations could be conducted to address this question. They would be heavily

dependent on assumptions.

- What is B0, the unfished stock size? (It is stated that Blim =30% of B0, implying B0 is 52,223 tonnes)

Blim for this stock is based on the stock recruit relationship being the average of the lowest three values of SSB in the time series that have above median recruitment. Blim is generally between 20-40% of BMSY (not B0) when using a production model but this depends on the shape of the production curve and would not necessarily be the same for a Blim derived from a stock/recruit.

- I believe there are three risks tested when calculating FMSY in eqsim – can you please explain these?

FMSY is the F which gives MSY in the long term. ICES also defines $F_{p0.5}$ (=F_{pa}), which is the fishing mortality that results in no more than 5% probability of bringing the spawning stock to below B_{lim} in the long term. FMSY is evaluated to ensure that it is above Fp0.5.

ICES has provided advice on plausible values around F_{MSY} (F_{MSY} range) for a number of stocks in response to a request by the EU. The F_{MSY} ranges [$F_{MSY\ lower}$, $F_{MSY\ upper}$] are derived to deliver no more than a 5% reduction in long-term yield, compared with the MSY obtained by fishing at F_{MSY} in the long term. To be consistent with ICES precautionary approach, F_{MSY} or $F_{MSY\ upper}$ is capped so that the probability of SSB < B_{lim} is no more than 5% in any single year.

- Is FMSY calculated such that each year there at most a 5% probability of the stock being below Blim? Or is it only ensured that the probability of a long-term equilibrium being above Blim is 95% or more?

It is the latter.

- It is concerning that following the ICES MSY Approach headline advice would result in the stock shrinking in 2026 when it is so close to Blim – is this sustainable?

The ICES advice rule is designed to work in the long term. Short term changes are not as important so long as the stock remains above Blim. The AR should in the long term keep the stock above Blim.

- Are there any ICES guardrails to prevent the stock falling below Btrigger again?

Fishing at FMSY (the AR while the stock is above MSY Btrigger) should keep the stock above MSY Btrigger. If the stock fall below MSY Btrigger the advised F will be reduced in an effort to allow the stock to increase to above MSY Btrigger.

- What is the status of the headline advice – is it a recommendation by ICES to fishery managers? Why is the MSY Approach singled out in preference to other scenarios?

ICES uses its MSY approach as the basis of advice when there is no agreed management plan that has been tested by ICES and found to be precautionary. The headline advice is a response by ICES to requests to provide advice of fishing opportunities, in this case in line with the ICES framework as there is no agreed management plan.

b. ICES Report on Plaice Stocks

Morgan explained that the benchmarks WKBPLAICE and WKNSCS included plaice with two stocks of importance to the NWWAC, 7d eastern Channel and 7e western Channel.

Plaice 7d

- Stock ID
    - Discussed the migration issue but no new studies
    - No change
    - Remove 65% of mature individuals caught in Q1 in 7d
        - 50% are from ple.27.420
        - 12.86% from ple.27.7e (revised after benchmark)
    - Recommend more work on the migration issue
- Catch
    - No discard data prior to 2006
    - Used data from 2006-2010 (a period of stable ratio b/w landings and discards) to reconstruct the time period prior to 2006
- Indices of abundance
    - Updated the indices (UK BTS from Q3 [B2453] and FR GFS from Q4 [G3425])
    - Explored a recruitment index (French NOURSEINE) but many missing years and will not run for at least next 2 years – tested but not included in final model
- Biological parameters
    - New study – new maturity ogive – earlier maturation
    - Natural mortality explored but decided on constant at age
- Assessment model
    - 8 different model configurations tested
    - Final model subjected to suite of diagnostics – SAM (previously Aarts and Poos)

Plaice 7e

- WKBPLAICE: With plaice subdiv 21-23 and subdiv 24-32 (benchmark combined into one stock)
- Stock ID
    - Discussed the migration issue but no new data
    - No change
    - 12.86 % of catch in 7d are from 7e (revised after benchmark)
- Catch
    - Catch data reviewed
    - Discards available since 2002 – about 20% - updated annually
    - Discard survival 50%

- Indices of abundance
    - Reviewed 2 indices - UK-FSP and Q1SWBeam
    - UK-FSP was retained as index
- Biological parameters
    - Catch weights no longer smoothed – used raw values
    - Previously 'borrowed' ogive – maturities now calculated from survey
    - Several natural mortality assumptions tested
- Assessment model
    - Attempted category 1 – too much uncertainty
    - Used MSE to develop CHR method for specific stock
    - Developed 14 operating models and tested 10 different HCRs across them
    - OMs varied in natural mortality assumptions, recruitment level, discarding, migration, catch relative to TAC, uncertainty in indices
    - HCR varied in which index used, annual or biennial advice, what was tuned (only HR multiplier or also multiplier defining Itrigger)
    - Performance against risk less than Blim, Catch/MSY, SSB/BMSY
    - Selected HCR
    - Highest long-term catch, highest long term SSB
    - Advice every 2 years using the UK-FSP survey, robust even to recruitment failure

Morgan concluded that ICES is likely to have carried out the same amount of work on both the Cat 1 and Cat 3 stock benchmarks in order to come up with a management strategy.

The Chair thanked Morgan for her presentation and agreed that a lot of work had been done on this complex issue. He opened the floor to questions.

Le Barzic commented on the 85 link with the 7D in the first quarter based on tagging studies and wanted to know when compared to the other adjacent stocks in the Celtic Sea (7d and 7h) is there ultimately no link with these stocks, or is it that there was no new data that could be adapted to do more or less the same thing as with the 7D on the Western Channel stock?

Morgan commented that the 7d stock has two areas that the fish are coming in from, one is 7e and the other is 4. Stocks have some small connections, at least, with their adjacent ones. Both benchmark reports said they had no new information. But then something happened after to change the 15% to the 12.86%, possibly a special request.

On the 7e benchmark Brouckaert remarked that the objective of reaching Cat 1 has not been reached and wondered what the next phase might be now. "Are there any new plans that are coming along, or is it just paused at the fact that there is still not sufficient data to arrive at Cat 1?"

Morgan commented that for the time being the constant harvest rate will be used until more information becomes available. She added that 14 different operating models were used as there was such a big range of uncertainties. While the objective of the benchmark had been to arrive at Cat. 1, during the assessment it became apparent that there are still too many unknowns.

Stephan pointed out that the CNPMEM had not been made aware that the survey had been interrupted. If this had been made known, alternative financing needs could have possibly been obtained. The lack of new data is likely to affect other projects and studies, and she asked if Morgan could inform ICES that private sources for funding could be available which could be worked out with the relevant research institute involved in this work.

Morgan reiterated that ICES thought the survey had promise. Having a good recruitment time series is valuable, because recruitment is often one of the things with the least information available. Unfortunately, due to the patchiness in the time series it could not be included in thw assessment.

4. Proposal to re-open the FG Whelk – Pauline Stephan, CNPMEM

Speaking on behalf of CRPMEM Normandie, Stephan recalled that in 2021 the NWWAC established a Focus Group on whelk. The president of CRPMEM Normandie Xavier Tetard participated in the work which developed advice to the Commission proposing basic management measures for implementation on the European side that will be used in discussions with the United Kingdom. There was a response from the European Commission, which said that there was not enough science on the whelk to implement management measures. This would need to be improved upon before proposing to move forward. Currently things are progressing in Normandy. An intern is currently working on selectivity, and above all, a thesis is about to start focussing on climate change and the impacts on whelk, as well as management measures and socio-economic health of the whelk sector in Normandy. After the summer, they will be working specifically on whelk, in partnership with Ifremer.

Xavier Tetard is proposing is to relaunch the Focus Group Whelk and to resume some of the work from 2021, but with new scientific results that would provide arguments for the opinion produced for the Commission with a view to shared management with the UK.

Thomas added her concern regarding the whelk and agreed with the reestablishment of the Focus Group. She added that with global warming, biomass can be seen to be shrinking. Vessels that previously fished for sole have diversified and even completely converted to whelk. So, there has been an additional fishing effort on this species, and the increased fishing effort, plus global warming, means that the whelk is now in a somewhat critical situation. She felt that now is the time to implement joint management measures with the UK and that the AC absolutely must make a proposal to the Commission.

ACTION: Secretariat to initiate the reestablishment of the FG Whelk.

5. AOB

The Chair mentioned that the HWG would address the UK MPA consultation which he felt was also very important to this group. He felt that it was important for the AC to provide a response. He added that on the British side there would not be much pace left for EU vessels when he areas for MPAs and ORE are overlayed.

Le Barzic expressed his concerns regarding the proposed closures in the UK MPAs. He added

that drafting a document at AC level would need to take into account that banning of all fisheries is proposed for MPAs which would greatly impact EU vessels.

Thomas confirmed that the proposed closures would have impact on all fisheries, not just those fishing with bottom contacting gears.

6. Summary of actions agreed, and decisions adopted by the Chair

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 to the Secretariat.
3	Secretariat to initiate restart of the FG sea bass to develop advice on the ICES advice for 2026.
4	Secretariat to initiate the reestablishment of the FG Whelk.
5	WG to follow up on MSG work on lemon sole and red mullet.

NWWAC members		
Emiel	Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Manu	Kelberine	CRPMEM de Bretagne
Franck	Le Barzic	OP COBRENORD
John	Lynch	Irish South & East Fish Producers Organisation Ltd
Llibori	Martinez Latorre	IFSUA
Geert	Meun	VisNed
Patrick	Murphy	
Aodh	O'Donnell	Irish Fish Producers Organisation (IFPO)
Corentine	Piton	France Pêche Durable et Responsable
Erwan	Quemeneur	CDPMEM 29
Dominic	Rihan	Killybegs Fishermens Organisation
Pauline	Stephan	CNPMEM
Dominique	Thomas	OP CME MMN
Arthur	Yon	FROM Nord
Experts & Observers		
Tetiana	Albers	DG AMPA
Anna	Benedict	
David	Curtis	EAA
Olivier	Leprete	CRPMEM HDF
Quentin	Llavori	CRPMEM
Joanne	Morgan	ACOM Vice-Chair – ICES
Alexandra	Philippe	EBCD
Jean-Marie	Robert	Pecheurs de bretagne
Dirk	Van Guyze	Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
NWWAC Secretariat		
Ilaria	Bellomo	
Mo	Mathies	