

REPORT
North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council
Working Group 4

Manchester, 13th of March
14:00-16:00 h

1. Welcome

The Chairman Lorcan Ó Cinnéide welcomed all the attendees and asked for any comments or changes to be made to the draft agenda for this meeting. He proposed to move ahead the agenda item number 4, concerning the 5% by-catch rule for spurdog, to be discussed immediately after the advice on TAC & Quotas for the relevant species for the Irish Sea for 2008. No further proposals were made and the agenda was adopted with the above referred change.

The report from last WG4 meeting, held in Brussels the 30th of October 2007, was also approved and adopted without comment.

2. Review of EC Response to NWWRAC Advice on TAC & Quotas for 2008

The Chairman expressed his disappointment about how NWWRAC advice had not been taken on board by the Commission and the Council of Ministers on its December meeting. He concluded that limited consideration had been given to the proposals formulated by the NWWRAC.

A debate ensued on the necessity of a change of mindsets and an enhanced engagement between Commission and RACs beyond the ordinary formal consultation procedures and system of institutional advice and responses. It was felt that there is a certain lack of trust and confidence between the European Commission and the fishing industry and perhaps the RACs should try to find alternative ways or channels to improve the dialogue and mutual understanding on an informal basis with the EC (i.e. through informal meetings at interRAC level, annual trips EC-RACs...) and address specific issues to the relevant members of DG Fish in light of its forthcoming new organizational structure.

- Underutilised and data deficient stocks: Barrie Deas informed the meeting that this topic had been already dealt with in other Working Groups, particularly at the Focus Group on Data Collection held the previous day. In the latter there was a very constructive discussion about how to improve data and to explore a range of science-industry partnership initiatives.

→ ACTION: It is agreed that the Chairmen of the NWWRAC Working Groups and the NWWRAC Chairman might pull this initiative ahead and propose to the Executive Committee to discuss possible mechanisms of cooperation through informal meetings with the relevant Commission representatives, once identified the main areas of concern for the NWWRAC.

- Queen Scallop fisheries in the Isle of Manx: Tom Bryan-Brown gave updated information about the current status of this issue and reported that he has submitted an information package containing all the relevant supporting information about this fishery to the Commission but he has not received any formal response back yet. Indeed, he noted that Andy Revill from CEFAS is coordinating a survey observer program with scientists on board commercial vessels to show that the queenie scallop is a "clean fishery" and that vessels targeting this species do not fish cod (above 5% by-catches). Finally, Tom expressed his doubts about the formal procedure to follow for dealing with this issue in order to seek the derogation of days at sea regime for this fishery.

The Chairman of WG4 and the Chairman of the NWWRAC agreed to follow up this issue in future Working Groups.

→ ACTION: To submit CEFAS terms of reference proposal (if available to the Executive Committee) for endorsement and support and to submit to the European Commission a new request of exemption of the days at sea regime if there is any new information.

- Plaice: The members showed their general disagreement with the TAC fixed for this year by the Council.

- Sole: Some members were concerned about the possibility of setting up a recovery plan for sole at Irish Sea and think that an agreement must be achieved between the national administrations from UK, Ireland and Belgium in the assessment of the economic impact and the parameters that must be followed.

- Cod: The members agree that a general review and assessment of the box must be carried out at the Irish Sea after a period of 9 years of closure. They expressed disappointment at the high number of derogations which in practice make this closure ineffective and cause displacement of effort to other areas. The idea of a "cod audit" in relation to the Irish Sea was raised: this would require an impact regulatory assessment before adopting any new management tools and measures to be applied to this area.

The Irish Sea Data Enhancement and Discards Project should contribute to improve the quality of data via an increase of the levels of compliance from the industry and the development of sampling schemes and industry initiatives mainly in the area of discarding.

→ ACTIONS:

- To call for an immediate, comprehensive review of Cod stocks and management measures in the Irish Sea (including the spring closed area) which would compile all the available information together, in order to inform all stakeholders about how to proceed in future. The NWWRAC should formally request to the Commission that ICES would undertake this assessment through the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). This would ensure a priority treatment and funding for this issue.

3. The 5% by-catch rule for spurdog in the Irish Sea and its effect on the fishery

All the members agree that this is a horizontal issue of common concern for all the NWWRAC areas.

The Chairman and most present members from the fishing industry in WG4 shared the view that this rule is essentially equivalent to zero TAC catches and it will inevitably leads to high rates of discards, due to the variability and oscillation of the incidental catches and the impossibility of predicting the amount of spurdog that it is going to be caught on a "trip-by-trip" basis. Indeed, they reminded at the meeting that this species is already subjected to the TAC and quota regime and they think that this stringent rule does not recognize the specificities of how this particular fishery works. The impact on small scale inshore fisheries was particularly highlighted.

The industry representatives all sought that the fishery be managed by each country individually within their individual TAC.

Non-fishing interests in the WG expressed the value of spurdog as a recreational species, its vulnerability as part of the Shark family and had reservations about changing the 5% regime, although there was openness to look at whether the stock had to be managed on a 5% trip by trip basis or a longer time horizon across the wider fleets.

→ ACTIONS: Lorcan O’Cinnéide will prepare a summary paper different ideas and proposals suggested during the meeting (e.g. involvement of management of TAC through the MS, keep 5% of by-catches but with reference to the overall quota on a monthly / quarterly / yearly basis, etc.)

The members and observers will submit their individual views pursuant to a final summary paper. The paper will be circulated among all Executive Committee members prior to the Executive Committee meeting and a final position will be formulated depending on the outcome of discussions at that meeting

4. Review of Irish Sea Data Enhancement and Discards Project

The Chairman summarised the current situation and progress of this project. He indicated that the pace of the project has been slower than initially expected. He also noted that there is a small number of vessels participating to date. About personnel, he remarked that there are two people working full-time with Irish commercial vessels collecting data through samples.

The Chairman also expressed concern about ongoing funding for the project and the absolute necessity of not losing momentum in view of the importance of the project for Area VIIa and as a test case for other areas.

→ ACTION: The Chairman will monitor funding progress and if required, will ask the NWWRAC Chairman to write to the relevant national authorities to press for maintenance of funding.

→ The WG4 will submit a proposal to the Executive Committee asking for a request to EC and ICES to give explicit recognition of the work in progress and to ensure ongoing funding through 2008 into 2009.

5. Agreed proposals to put forward to the Executive Committee

- To discuss possible mechanisms of cooperation for improving dialogue and communication with the Commission, once identified the main areas of concern to be dealt with by the NWWRAC.

- To debate and re-issue the exemption of days at sea regime for queenie scallop fishery in Isle of Manx if new data or evidences are provided as a result of the CEFAS survey observer program.

- To request to the EC a comprehensive scientific review and assessment of Cod stocks and management in Area VIIa including the “Irish Sea box” according to the available data and existing knowledge. This review is expected to be carried out by CIEM upon a formal request made to the Commission on the basis of the MoU.

- To carry out a general recommendation of amendment of the 5% by-catch rule stated in TAC & Quota Regulation for spurdog in all the affected fisheries falling within the scope of the NWWRAC

- To seek explicit recognition of the achievements and preliminary results get from Irish Sea Enhancement and Discards Project for 2008.

There were no **AOB** for discussion.

The meeting is adjourned at 16 h.

Chairman: Lorcan O’Cinnéide
Rapporteur: Alexandre Rodríguez