

REPORT

North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council

Working Group 4 The Irish Sea (ICES VIIa)

Tuesday the 16th of May 2006
2.00pm-5.00pm

Chair: Lorcan O’Cinnede (Ireland)

Vice-Chair Rapporteur Alan McCulla (UK)

1. Agenda

The agenda was adopted by group members.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the 2nd meeting of the ISWG (Irish Sea Working Group), held in The Hague, Netherlands on Wednesday, 1st March 2006 were tabled and approved by group members.

3. Matters Arising

A paper was tabled by Luc Mallaerts (Belgium) detailing discard data from the Belgian beam trawl fleet operating in the Irish Sea. It was agreed to circulate this paper to group members.

4. Review of Cod Recovery

The Chairman invited Barrie Deas (UK) to present a paper he had drafted for the North Sea RAC regarding the forthcoming review of the EC’s Cod Recovery Programme.

Barrie explained that the paper argued for a broad review of cod recovery and tabled a number of important questions about the process, which should not be the normal ICES based approach. He raised the issue whether the specificities of the Irish Sea should be taken into account in a separate paper. The Chair welcomed the paper, but agreed that an appendix should be produced detailing the specific characteristics of the Irish Sea in terms of stock size and fleet activity.

Alan McCulla (UK) pointed out that that in parallel with this meeting, ICES’ Northern Shelf Working Group was meeting and the news for cod in all areas was not expected to be good. Joe Maddock (Ireland) summarised that history of the cod recovery programme in the Irish Sea, detailing some of the measures that had been applied since 2000.

John Hermse (UK) reminded the group that the apparent failure of the various measures to reverse the perceived decline of the NE Atlantic cod stock meant that the

EC were focusing on effort reductions in other fleets, including Nephrop vessels. This was regarded by the group as a dangerous and some felt unnecessary move, but that fishermen had to react in a positive fashion to the charges being levelled at them. Michael Walsh (Ireland) made mention of gear trials that were being conducted with the aim of identifying the actual level of discards in the Nephrop fishery (which in some fleets was never a problem) and ways of reducing it.

There were various comments (Jonny Woodcock, Sean O'Donoghue) on the effectiveness of closed areas to stock recovery, (with some members opposed to them and some in favour) and the way forward. In concluding this discussion the Chair stated that the North Sea RAC paper was a good way forward and agreed to produce a short paper detailing the specificities of the Irish Sea.

5. ANIFPO Paper

Since the last meeting one written comment from the Irish Seal Sanctuary had been received regarding the paper.

Alan McCulla reiterated that he welcomed criticisms of the paper. He advised the group that as part of a UK delegation (and after discussion with the Working Group Chair) he had discussed its content with the EC on 22 March 2006. The EC had been generally supportive of the concept, which was similar to the approach being made for the Kattegat, but emphasised that any proposal would have to come through the RAC.

Several members (Joe Maddock, Michael Walsh, Luc Coribisier (Belgium), Barrie Deas, Sean O'Donoghue, Tom Bryan-Brown (UK) sought clarification on the content of the paper and there was general agreement that the paper needed to be "fleshed out" urgently for the June Executive Committee.

The group was advised that a recent meeting of all interested parties in Ireland had expressed reservations about the approach advocated by the paper. This had led to contact at official level between the UK and Ireland in an attempt to address the concerns and move the process forward.

John Daly (Ireland) made an impassioned intervention regarding his experiences as a fisherman in the Irish Sea and stressed the importance of getting proper conservation measures in place.

The deliberations on the subject concluded with agreement that the paper represented a positive way forward. A meeting involving UK, Irish and Belgian scientists would be convened in the next few weeks to clarify the goals of the proposal and this would hopefully be followed by a meeting involving officials, scientists and RAC members from the three member states concerned. The aim would be to produce a firm proposal by the end of June.

6. Marine Spatial Management

The Chair introduced a paper by the Welsh Fishermen's Association. Mike Parry (UK), the author explained that the Welsh fishing industry was mainly an inshore one targeting shellfish. Its very nature had meant that it had been severely affected by the

application of various EU Directives, which in effect had impinged upon 70% of Welsh waters. He suggested that while the issue was particularly prevalent in Wales, it was one that would impact upon the fishing industries in other member states.

However, Claire Eno (UK) from the Countryside Council for Wales voiced a number of reservations about the paper and stated that her organisation wished to approach such matters in partnership with the industry. Mike Parry reiterated that in some Welsh waters fishing had been stopped.

Several members made interventions on the subject. A common trend amongst these was the different approaches to the issue being adopted by different member states. There was confusion over which Department had jurisdiction over the matter in some member states. Sean O'Donoghue suggested that a specialist in the subject should be invited to a future meeting of the group to clarify many of the issues that had been raised. John Crudden (Ireland) advised the meeting that there were probably many similar restrictions in the pipeline.

Barrie Deas advised that the North Sea RAC had undertaken a specific project regarding marine spatial planning. He believed it was vital for the RACs to make a positive contribution to the debate.

The Chair concluded this discussion by agreeing that this was a very important issue and a suggestion should be sent to the NWWRAC Executive Committee requesting that they examine the topic.

7. Ecosystem Approach

The secretariat advised the ISWG about a recent meeting in Liverpool, which centred upon an extensive project involving a number of research groups regarding ecosystem based management of the Irish Sea. This project could have implications for the industry and it was felt that the ISWG should be engaged with the process in terms of the evolution of the work and where appropriate making input

8. AOB

Alan McCulla advised the group that one of the positive news stories from the Irish Sea was the positive science on the Nephrop stock. With this in mind attempts were being made to re-align the Area 7 TAC for the stock, as had been done for the North Sea and West of Scotland Nephrop TACs for 2006. This work received support from the ISWG