

North West Waters Advisory Council

Optimising the prospects for producing high quality advice

Recommendations for structural change

Barrie Deas

Background

1. At the meeting of the NWWAC Executive Committee, held in Edinburgh on 9th July 2015, concern was expressed that the AC was performing sub-optimally in terms of its central purpose, the production of high quality advice for the European institutions and regional member states.
2. In discussions within the Executive Committee, a number of problems were identified. The AC has proved itself capable of generating high quality advice, most recently in relation to Eastern Channel Sole and the Joint Recommendations on implementation of the EU landings obligation in Western Waters. Nevertheless, the way the AC has organised itself now appears to be an impediment to the regular and systematic production of quality advice. Specifically:
 - there is great deal of duplication in the agendas and therefore the work of the area working groups (West of Scotland, Irish Sea, Celtic Sea and Channel)
 - Although important and valid points are being made within the working groups, these are not being captured and encapsulated in coherent, well thought-through advice
 - The bulk of the time spent in working groups is spent talking about issues rather than developing draft advice
 - Draft advice that is then discussed and modified in an iterative process is a proven method for generating advice which is scientifically informed, politically astute, and as far as possible consensus based; however, there are no systematic arrangements in place for the preparation of draft advice in this way
3. It is accepted that structural arrangements are only part of the problem facing the NWWAC in generating high quality consensus advice. Quality advice requires a commitment on all parties to abandon fixed, rigid,

positions and a willingness to build consensus at the highest possible level.

4. It is accepted that in an AC that covers such a wide geographic area and contains such diverse fisheries, it is inevitable that sub-regional considerations will inevitably continue to be a very significant aspect in the preparation of AC advice. The question is how best to incorporate that regional dimension into the AC's advice.
5. Experience has repeatedly demonstrated that focus groups and drafting groups comprised of limited numbers of members with requisite knowledge and experience, undertaking preparatory work on draft advice, is a proven method of delivery; once initial drafts had been produced, they should be exposed to scrutiny and comment by the wider AC membership; the result is an arrangement capable of producing coherent well thought-through advice
6. Fundamentally, the issue come down to managing the limited time available to AC members to best effect
7. The work of focus/drafting groups is generally greatly enhanced by the involvement of appropriately qualified and experienced scientists and fisheries administrators; a more systematic approach to engaging with scientists and administrators *during the advice drafting process* would be of great benefit
7. The work of the AC, below Executive Committee level, should be rebalanced in favour of focus/drafting groups, with a more limited role and time allocated to working groups; the work of sub-regional working groups should be restricted to genuinely sub-regional aspects

Recommendations

Against this background, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Executive Committee should from time to time identify and authorise the establishment of focus/drafting groups with clear terms of reference, timeframes and should allocate meeting resources accordingly.
2. The role of focus/drafting groups should be to prepare draft advice for consideration directly by the Executive Committee
3. The role of sub-regional working groups should be reduced. This could be done in either of two ways

- a) The tier of sub-regional working groups could be abolished. This would require a change to the AC's statutes that would require approval by the General Assembly
 - b) The sub-regional working groups could be retained but their role (and the time allowed for meetings) could be reduced and their role would be restricted to dealing with issues of direct significance to those sub-areas that could not be dealt with adequately in the focus/drafting groups
4. The time and resources allocated by the AC to preparatory work should be rebalanced to reflect the more significant role of the focus groups and diminished role of the working groups
5. If the sub-regional working group tier was removed altogether, focus groups could, where relevant, incorporate regional deliberations and advice into their work through the break-out formulae (this approach was already used in the preparation of AC advice on the landings obligation)
5. Chairs of the focus groups should be appointed by the Executive Committee
6. Chairs of working groups (if the option to retain sub-regional working groups is taken) could be eligible to also be chairs of focus groups
7. Focus groups will usually be time-limited to the completion of the tasks set by the terms of reference
8. Consideration should also be given to the appointment of an appropriately qualified rapporteur whose, roles would include preparation of draft advice either leading up to or following focus group meetings, or both. Options for funding this post should be explored
9. Arrangements should be put in place to secure the involvement of appropriately qualified scientists and where appropriate fisheries administrators in every focus group meeting

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