



▶ Pelagic AC

6a Herring Focus Group
7 February 2018
10:00 – 13:00 hrs
World Trade Center Schiphol
Room G3.02
The Netherlands

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Participants

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| 1 | Sean O'Donoghue chair | Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation |
| 2 | Alexander Wiseman | Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association |
| 3 | Andrew Campbell | Marine Institute Ireland |
| 4 | Benoit Berges | Wageningen Marine Research |
| 5 | Edward Farrell | University College Dublin |
| 6 | Gerard van Balsfoort | Pelagic Freezer-Trawler Association |
| 7 | Martin Pastoors | Pelagic Freezer-Trawler Association |
| 8 | Patrick Murphy | Irish South West PO |
| 9 | Steven Mackinson (by WebEx) | Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association |
| 10 | Susan Lusseau (by WebEx) | Marine Scotland |
| 11 | Verena Ohms | Pelagic AC |

1. Opening of the meeting by the chairman, Sean O'Donoghue

The chairman opened the meeting at 10:10 hrs and welcomed the participants. The agenda was approved without amendments.

2. Follow-up on action items

The first action item was to arrange another focus group meeting. Initially this meeting had been planned for the autumn, but instead had to be postponed until today.

In terms of including genetic sampling in the Data Collection Framework (DCF) the chairman said that an amendment to the regulation would be required. Given that both the Council and the Parliament would have to approve the amendment he doubted that it would be possible in the short term. Come April the Parliament will not accept any new proposals until after a new Parliament has been elected. He was not sure whether the Commission could include genetic sampling through a delegated act.

Edward Farrell pointed out that as part of the EASME project he has to write down a sampling protocol that specifies exactly what to do, both in general but also specifically for herring.



The chairman thought that there might be a Commission implementing regulation in relation to the DCF. Once a sampling protocol is available he thought that it might be included through the implementing regulation. He decided to follow up on this at the next WG II meeting.

The next action item was to present the rebuilding plan at the WG II meeting last April which has been completed.

It has also been discussed how to share the monitoring TAC and it was decided when and where the surveys should take place.

The follow-up on the morphometric analysis was in relation to an Irish funding issue within the Marine Institute. Edward Farrell explained that this has been resolved through the EASME project which has resources available to hire a morphometric analyst for the Marine Institute.

Edward Farrell has also presented the genetics project at WKSPLIT and it was well received. People now see the value of the application and how it can be used. The meeting report has recently been finalized and Martin Pastoors promised to circulate it.

Martin Pastoors explained that at the moment the splitting is still based on otolith analysis, but people try to match both methods so that in the future the genetic analysis can be used.

The next action item was in relation to providing a cost overview of the surveys. However, this was mainly a Scottish issue that has been resolved and can be taken off the list.

Susan Lusseau has ensured that the trawl survey set aside samples and the letter to ICES in regard to data collection has been sent as well.

The transfers from North to South and from The Netherlands to Ireland have been sorted out too.

Developing a sampling protocol is underway and a genetics workshop with ICES took place in Galway. It was therefore concluded to take this item off the list.

It finally was possible to arrange a meeting with DG Research to discuss the merits of genetic analysis and future funding in a broader pelagic context. This meeting has been scheduled for 28 February 2018.

All other action items are ongoing and depend on the continuation of the various research efforts.

3. Revised 6a herring recovery plan

The chairman invited Steven Mackinson to lead people through the revisions he has made to the recovery plan.

Steven Mackinson recalled that the advice ICES gave on the monitoring TAC also included the recommendation to develop a rebuilding plan. The focus group subsequently developed and submitted such a plan which was addressed by HAWG and which highlighted some weaknesses in the submitted rebuilding plan together with how they could be addressed. All issues raised by ICES have been addressed in the revised rebuilding plan to make it fully precautionary. Steven Mackinson expected that the plan would now go through the review without any further hiccups.

The chairman suggested going through the changes one by one. He also said that the 2018 TAC and quota regulation needed to be included in the references and in the background section.

The first change was to delete paragraph 9 under article 3 which was accepted by everyone.

There have also been some clarifications under article 4 relating to reference points.



Andrew Campbell noticed that the text in article 4.2 should read that “a monitoring TAC will be allocated” instead of “may be allocated” since otherwise the text would not be clear enough for ICES to evaluate it. After some discussion the meeting agreed to the change considering that it was clear in the plan that the monitoring TAC could also be zero.

Another suggestion was to consistently use “spawning stock biomass” instead of various other wordings such as “stock biomass”. It was agreed that Steven Mackinson would change the wording to ensure consistency throughout the plan.

A new article 5 has been included that detailed the end of the rebuilding plan.

Edward Farrell wanted to know what will happen when it becomes possible to split the stocks. At the moment it seems that the stock in 6a North is very close to or even the same as the North Sea stock.

The chairman wanted to address this issue at the end. He said that if people manage to split the stocks, then this rebuilding plan will automatically cease to apply. However, he thought it would be a good idea to include a clause on this at the end of the plan.

Steven Mackinson suggested to include this as another condition under article 5. The meeting agreed.

Regarding article 6.1 Andrew Campbell said that the word “maximum” before F could be removed since there is only one F. The meeting agreed.

The chairman said that paragraph 5 of article 7 seemed unusual to him since it suggested that previously collected samples were biased.

Steven Mackinson clarified that this paragraph has been specifically requested by ICES. However, he thought that it would be possible to remove the word “unbiased” and still have the correct intention.

Benoit Berges suggested to use the word “consistent” instead of “unbiased” which was accepted.

The chairman said that there have been two new studies on seal predation in relation to white fish. He suggested looking at those studies although he was not sure whether they also addressed herring. He promised to circulate the studies and asked the attending scientists to provide feedback on their relevance. According to those studies it will not be possible to rebuild cod and whiting and maybe haddock unless the seal predation issue is addressed. The reason he brought this up was the possibility of external factors preventing rebuilding of a stock.

Steven Mackinson said that this kind of information feeds into HAWG. He said it can be included for one of two reasons, either to purely share the information or to suggest some sort of action, e.g. reducing the seal population. He proposed including the information in the background section and volunteered to do so.

Edward Farrell wanted to know whether it might be necessary to make provisions for the geographical areas and how they are defined given that stocks seem to be shifting.

Susan Lusseau agreed that there should be some safeguard for when ICES decides to change the stock definition. She suggested including in article 5 that the plan is only valid as long as ICES treats these stocks as one and assesses them as one. It was agreed to include the sentence: “Should the definition of the stocks change as used in this plan, then this plan will no longer be deemed applicable.”

It was agreed that Steven Mackinson would implement the discussed changes using track changes so that everyone could check the wording.

It was furthermore agreed that the revised rebuilding plan will be sent to Working Group II as soon as possible and to request approval from the Working Group within two weeks and subsequently from the Executive Committee within one week. Furthermore, both ICES and the Commission will be notified that they will likely receive this plan for evaluation in early March.



4. Update on genetics project

The chairman invited Edward Farrell to provide an update on the genetics project.

Edward Farrell explained that the 2017 analyses are still ongoing. He was currently trying to optimize the automatic SNP analyses and to choose the most informative markers. He said that the data show a very nice separation between 6a North and 6a South and that there is good temporal stability. The markers look pretty stable and he needed to settle on a final marker panel before screening the Malin Shelf survey samples. Initially he used 60 SNPs and 60 microsatellites, but a small number of markers is standing out that are very different between the populations and narrowing down the panel of markers will lead to a much quicker analysis. The genome sequencing has also been completed and there will be a meeting at DTU Aqua on 15 and 16 March to discuss the results of the full sequencing.

The general aim of the project is to get a mixed sample of non-spawning fish and be able to allocate it to the spawning populations. For the stock assessment model, it will probably be necessary to do individual assignments which will be more difficult. However, the first results look promising.

The EASME project officially started on the 8th of December 2017 and will end on the 8th of December 2020. The morphometrics became a much bigger part of the project than anticipated. The idea is to establish a morphometric baseline and to split the samples accordingly. Subsequently the results will be compared to the genetic analysis and if there is agreement between both methods, it will be possible to retrospectively split past samples. Ultimately the aim is to drop the morphometric analysis, because it is very labor intensive and not a great method, but for retrospective analysis it could be useful. The Marine Institute and Marine Scotland Science are in the process of finalizing hires for the analysis.

In terms of samples a very good baseline has been established. Within area 6a South most fish came from Donegal Bay, but in 2017 it was possible to also collect some samples from Lough Swilly, Lough Foyle, Bruckless Bay and Inver Bay. This means that it will be possible to detect variation within area 6a South. MSHAS samples are available from 2014 to 2017 with the best coverage in 2015. Therefore, these samples will be analyzed first.

Edward Farrell also pointed out that there is no general consensus on what an autumn, winter or spring spawner is, since the months are not clearly defined and vary between countries. He has been trying to find out when which definitions were put in place for the stocks of interest. He has been looking at ICES records, some of which go back 100 years, and tried to document in one place where the definitions come from. He will also try to map the timing and location of spawning grounds from historical and survey data.

Martin Pastoors said that the ICES secretariat is quite active in archiving the historical documents and he suggested to get in touch with them.

The chairman was pleased that the EASME project has finally started. It was agreed that Edward Farrell will provide another update at the July meeting of Working Group II.

5. Update on acoustic surveys

Steven Mackinson said that the analyses of the acoustic surveys was being finalized at the moment and he hoped that the results will go into the ICES report. There were not too many issues and the estimates seemed reasonable. It also seemed that the distribution in 6a North has changed. The survey design was a little different in 2017 which was based on what had been observed in 2016 and on conversations with the skippers. People had high hopes for the area around Cape Wrath, but the survey mostly found sprat and very little other stuff. It was possible that the timing was too early and that the



survey in this area will therefore be later this year. In general, however, the timing was appropriate. Steven Mackinson also pointed out that there was a lot of sprat in other areas and even an Icelandic herring survey detected sprat in high concentration up North for the first time.

The chairman noticed from the slides that the survey has been expanded and was further North in 2017 compared to 2016.

Steven Mackinson confirmed that this was correct. The idea was to have a finer resolution.

The chairman wanted to know whether there were any other proposed changes to the survey design apart from having it a little later.

Steven Mackinson replied that that was not the case at the moment. Operationally, the design had been difficult to implement, but that was rather due to a communications issue than anything else. The key thing will be the number of samples to work up the acoustic data. Last year there were insufficient samples which made the analysis difficult for Susan Lusseau. There will be a planning meeting on 27 and 28 June and all the skippers involved in the survey will be required to be at that meeting.

The chairman assumed that the survey results will be submitted to HAWG which was confirmed.

Edward Farrell wanted to know whether the fish west of the Hebrides were spawners.

Steven Mackinson said that there were little spawners, maybe around 3%. He had received reports that there were some herring in the area which disappeared raising the possibility of a local inshore population.

Alexander Wiseman wanted to know whether a sample had been collected inside the Hebrides, but Steven Mackinson said that despite trying this was not possible.

Alexander Wiseman subsequently wanted to know whether it would be useful to get samples outside the spawning area if not much fish was inside the spawning area.

Steven Mackinson agreed that there might be merit in doing that. He believed that the survey took place in the right place and he wanted to make sure not to miss anything in that area. However, another vessel not involved in survey could take some samples outside the spawning area.

It was agreed to discuss this and the issue of timing at the planning meeting in June.

Martin Pastoors suggested having repeat surveys over the whole area instead of in one area, so there would be much more expanded survey effort. It was agreed to discuss this idea as well at the planning meeting.

Steven Mackinson explained that there have also been some adaptations in 6a South to get into the inshore areas more tightly, but this still proved very difficult and people thought that they missed a lot of fish that was too close to the shore. The survey has also been expanded further offshore and started earlier to detect the fish while it is moving from offshore to inshore.

The chairman concluded that the timing has been slightly better compared to 2016, but it was still not good enough. A planning meeting will probably take place in September or earlier when the timing will be discussed in more detail. He wanted to know whether the expansion of the survey was successful to get a better coverage.

As far as Steven Mackinson was aware the expansion was less successful than the Marine Institute had hoped for. Nevertheless, the estimates between the years are not too far off and this consistency provided some confidence in the accuracy of the surveys.

The meeting concluded that the surveys should continue in the long term.



6. List of agreed action items

The chairman said he wanted to circulate the revised recovery plan on the following day to all Working Group II members to give them sufficient time to respond even though he did not expect many comments. After that the plan will be sent to ExCom for approval and subsequently to the Commission. It was also agreed to pre-notify the Commission and ICES about the plan. He hoped that a request can be sent to HAWG in time. It was also agreed to have another focus group meeting back to back with the Pelagic AC meeting in October.

7. AOB

There was no other business.

8. End of meeting

The chairman closed the meeting at 13:00 hrs.

Action items

- Check whether genetic sampling can be included under the DCF through a Commission implementing regulation (chairman)
- Circulate WKSPLIT report (Martin Pastoors)
- Peer-review herring genetics project (Ken Whelan, AST)
- Continue genetic, acoustic and morphometric research (ALL)
- Implement discussed changes in the revised rebuilding plan (Steven Mackinson)
- Pre-notify ICES and the Commission of the revised rebuilding plan (chairman, secretariat)
- Provide update on the genetics project at the Working Group II meeting in July (Edward Farrell)
- Discuss survey design and timing at the survey planning meetings (chairman, Gerard van Balsfoort, Martin Pastoors, Steven Mackinson, Alexander Wiseman)
- Circulate revised rebuilding plan to Working Group II and subsequently to ExCom (chairman, secretariat)

