



▶ Pelagic AC

Executive Committee meeting

6 October 2016

09:00 – 11:15 hrs

Parkhotel

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The Netherlands

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Participants

1	Ian Gatt, chairman	Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association
2	Anne-Mette Baek Jespersen	EU Fishmeal
3	Aukje Coers	Cornelis Vrolijk
4	Bauke de Vries	Pelagic AC
5	Bent Pallisgaard	Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries Denmark
6	Björn Åsgård	Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation Sweden
7	Carl Jesper Hermansen	Danish Fishermen Organisation
8	Claus Reedtz Sparrevohn	Danish Pelagic Producer Organisation
9	Craig Loveridge	South Pacific RFMO
10	Emil Remisz	North Atlantic Producers Organisation
11	Eric Roeleveld	Jaczon
12	Esben Sverdrup-Jensen	Danish Pelagic Producers Organisation
13	Evangelia Georgitsi	DG MARE
14	Fredrik Lindberg	Swedish Fishermen's Federation
15	Gerard van Balsfoort	Pelagic Freezer Trawler Association
16	Goncalo Carvalho	Pew Charitable Trusts
17	Jerome Nous	Union des armateurs a la pêche de France
18	Jesper Juul Larsen	Danish Fishermen Organisation
19	Jesper Raakjær	AIPCE
20	Johan Williams	NEAFC
21	John Ward	Irish Fish PO
22	José Beltran	OPLUGO
23	Justyna Zajchowska	The Pew Charitable Trusts
24	Ken Whelan	Atlantic Salmon Trust
25	Konstantinos Kokosis	EBCD
26	Lesley Duthie	North Sea Women's Network
27	Lotte Huisman	Seas at Risk
28	Ludmilla van der Meer	Pelagic AC
29	Maria Aira Martin	Shetland Fishermen's Association
30	Martin Pastoors	Pelagic Freezer-Trawler Association
31	Matthew Cox	National Federation of Fishermen's Organisation
32	Patrick Murphy	Irish South & West PO
33	Reine Johansson	Swedish Fishermen's Federation
34	Robert Griffin	European Commission DG MARE



35	Sean O'Donoghue	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
36	Stella Nemecky	WWF
37	Steve Mackinson	Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association
38	Verena Ohms	Pelagic AC
39	Wietze Kampen	European Transport Worker's Federation

1. Opening of the meeting by the chairman, Ian Gatt

The chairman opened the meeting at 09:10 hrs and announced that today's guest speaker was running a little late which means that the agenda might have to be re-arranged. A tour de table followed.

2. Adoption of the agenda

Given the time limitations on the previous day the update on the ecosystem focus group which had been scheduled for Working Group I was moved to the Executive Committee meeting. Other than that the agenda was adopted.

3. Follow-up on action items

The first action item was to include the tonnage recommendation submitted by Jerome Nouis in the focus group on implementation and control of the landing obligation.

Sean O'Donoghue remarked that due to time constraints a presentation by EFCA on gramme sizes could not be dealt with during the Working Group II meeting on the previous day. Instead, this presentation will be dealt with in the follow-up workshop on the landing obligation on 3 November in Brussels that the Commission kindly agreed to host. At this workshop the tonnage recommendation will be included as well.

The color code for Executive Committee members has been implemented and the official report on the quota swapping workshop has been circulated.

The next workshop on the landing obligation is in its planning stage and will be held on 3 November in Brussels as alluded to by Sean O'Donoghue.

There was no time yesterday to discuss specific problems and solutions to the landing obligation and therefore this will be taken forward through the focus group on implementation and control of the landing obligation.

The election of a new chairman was going to be dealt with at the subsequent General Assembly meeting.

The comment regarding the acknowledgement of the role ACs play in the policy paper has been passed on to the Commission and the Pelagic AC has recently been informed that Joost Paardekooper has replaced John Spencer.

The last two action items were interlinked and related to the disappointment expressed at the July meeting about the reluctance of the regional groups to follow the Pelagic AC's recommendations and the request for a regional subgroup dealing exclusively with widely distributed stocks. Instead of writing yet another letter to the regional groups the Management Team decided to take these issues forward in a face-to-face meeting and asked the Commission to act as facilitator in such a meeting.

Finally, the chairman announced that the next landing obligation workshop would take place in Brussels on 3 November from 09:00 until 13:00 hrs. He said that the room was big enough to host 30 participants and that it was of the utmost importance to sign up as quickly as possible to ensure smooth entrance to Commission premises.

Sean O'Donoghue remarked that there had been a good turnout at the previous workshop, but he advocated that more NGO participants should participate this time.

4. Update on the ecosystem focus group

Bauke de Vries introduced himself as student intern at the Pelagic AC. He is a fourth year student of Coastal and Marine Management at the University of Applied Sciences van Hall Larenstein in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands. If everything goes to plan he will graduate in August 2017. During his studies he specialized in two topics: marine policy and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture. He started his internship with the ecosystem focus group on the 1st of September and has since then focused on reviewing the terms of reference. After that he will focus on climate change and how that might affect pelagic stocks.

The main goal of the ecosystem focus group is to develop a strategic approach to ecosystem mapping initially focusing on pelagic stocks and their interactions in the North Sea and Northeast Atlantic regions. The group will produce a roadmap for the future with goals, topics or tasks that need to be addressed when implementing an ecosystem approach to fisheries management (EAFM). By excluding time it will be a guidebook for the future. By using this document, it is easier to complete the main goal, because the path to this goal is clearer.

The focus group identified three main questions and in addition, two process-related questions. The first main question, or focus point, is climate change and how this will affect pelagic stocks. At the moment it is unclear how and to what extent pelagic stocks will be affected by climate change. However, changes in seawater temperature and salinity clearly impact the pelagic environment. A literature study on the effects of climate change on pelagic stocks will be carried out. The main question of this study is: to what extent are the fish stocks under the remit of the Pelagic AC affected by the consequences of climate change? As part of his internship he has already started looking into the issue.

The second focus point is the impact of density dependent and habitat-related processes of big pelagic stocks on growth and reproduction. This focus point will address two questions. First, how do density dependent processes affect pelagic stocks? To implement an EAFM it is important to understand food webs and interactions between stocks. Density dependency for example can affect the status of fish stocks through two different mechanisms. On the one hand high biomass levels can lead to cannibalism. On the other hand it can have an effect on food availability and thereby growth and reproduction. The second question is how and to what extent are pelagic stocks vulnerable to deterioration of essential habitats? We know that herring is affected by bottom impacting activities such as dredging. These activities have a negative effect on the reproductive success of the stock. There might be other stocks for which similar issues play a role. Therefore it is necessary to look into the vulnerability of pelagic stocks to deterioration of their essential habitats.

The third focus point is the role of pelagic stocks in overall ecosystem functioning. The interactions between pelagic stocks and the overall ecosystem are important to map, because they may have an important effect on natural mortality, but also on growth. Although this clearly has links with density dependent processes, it is important to consider the ecosystem functioning as a whole. A conceptual model showing the impacts of human activities can be a helpful tool to do so. Bauke de Vries made

such a model for actions of dredging nearby a coral reef in a case study on the coal port expansion at Abbot Point, Queensland, Australia. Something similar could be done for the pelagic system.

The final two focus points relate to looking at best practices for implementing an EAFM outside the EU and the impacts of an EAFM on GES, reference points and management targets.

Bauke de Vries thanked the audience for its attention and invited comments and questions.

Patrick Murphy wanted to know whether the focus group will look into any studies done on discards.

Esben Sverdrup-Jensen said that the work in the ecosystem focus group is ongoing and that for the moment the group decided to focus on the most important issues only. Discards have not been raised within the focus group, but if there was a strong wish from members to look into that the group could do it. He asked whether anybody had more information on relevant studies in this regard.

Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn said that in regards to the landing obligation an argument recently raised is that the landing obligation will not have a big effect on the ecosystem, because discards have already gone down a lot in recent years. He was not sure if this was a valid argument.

There were no further comments.

5. Presentation by Johan Williams, President of NEAFC, on Coastal States and joint management of pelagic stocks

The chairman welcomed Johan Williams who is president of NEAFC and was willing to give a presentation on Coastal States and joint management of pelagic stocks.

Johan Williams pointed out that throughout his presentation there are a lot of pictures with deeper meaning requiring that the audience pay close attention. He presented a brief overview of his career which included positions at the Norwegian Ministry of Fisheries, the Nordic Council of Ministers and FAO. From 1997 until 2011 he was chief negotiator and head of the Norwegian delegation to NEAFC. Since 2010 he has been the president of NEAFC. He presented a map indicating the distribution area of the relevant pelagic stocks whose value ranges from 3 to 3.5 billion euro per year. The countries involved include Norway, the EU, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Russia. In 2015 there have been 19 NEAFC meetings which approximately costs half a million euro. He subsequently showed a slide that illustrated the ICES advice, TAC and reported catch for blue whiting from 2003 until 2016 and used this as an example for why Coastal States reach an agreement or not. In simple terms if there is no allocation, there is no management. The objective of the NEAFC convention is to ensure the long-term conservation and optimum utilization of the fishery resources in the convention area, providing sustainable economic, environmental and social benefits. NEAFC gets its mandate from the contracting parties, but has no independent power and no super-national decision rights. The Coastal States agreements and national regulations are conditional for NEAFC regulations. This means that if there is no Coastal States agreement, then there will be no NEAFC regulation and the regulatory area is open to all. Luckily the fishery is so far north and so specialized that there are no vessels from all over the world coming to fish in the NEAFC area as is the case in some other fisheries. Regarding mackerel there has been peace until sometime in the 2000s, but when the stock expanded newcomers and expansionists entered the scene. Johan Williams considered it fairly understandable what the Faroese did, but their behavior did not help with the management nor the agreements. From the data it is very clear that the expansion of newcomers is paid by the EU, because the EU has the biggest share and it is always the biggest player who ends up paying, because the biggest player has most to lose and if there is no agreement, then there will be no sustainable management. Norway still remembers the herring crash 30 years ago and is therefore very worried.

Just like the EU took the burden on mackerel, Norway took the burden on herring. However, after a few years developments in herring have been relatively flat and the situation is stable. In 2006 a blue whiting agreement was reached after many years of negotiation, but suddenly blue whiting disappeared from Icelandic waters and now there is no agreement on blue whiting either. Special about blue whiting is that both Norway and Russia buy excess quota from the EU and the Faroe Islands pay with cod quota. Johan Williams then showed a figure of aggregated pelagic catches in tonnes which was especially low in 2011 due to blue whiting. By adding the percentages of the catches in different years he showed that the EU first had about 85-95% while now the EU only has 60% indicating that the EU is the big loser in recent years. However, looking at absolute values the EU is the winner, because mackerel has increased a lot and the EU has a large mackerel share whereas herring has decreased for which Norway has a high share. Iceland has very little of any of the stocks and therefore might have been the most clever ones by keeping their activities stable. On the other hand Johan Williams said that people can prove whatever they want using statistics. So, how then should people negotiate? One possibility would be to gang up against the biggest, because he is the only one others can get something from. Another possibility would be to show some muscles and fish as much as possible. Alternatively one could sit quiet in a corner and let the other parties wear each other out. A way to definitely not get an agreement is by lying. While some parties are avoiding discussions and are waiting, others try to accommodate others. Some people suggested having swaps between Norway and the EU, but Brussels decided that this was not possible and now BREXIT has entered the scene. With that Johan Williams finished his presentation and thanked people for their attention.

Sean O'Donoghue liked the presentation very much and said that it showed exactly what the EU industry has said for many years. However, the figures for Atlanto-Scandian herring need to be revised, because in 2017 the TAC will increase again.

Johan Williams admitted that this was true and that Norway has a high share of Atlanto-Scandian herring. He said that the nice thing about statistics was that they can be manipulated to suit one's conclusions, especially because the pelagic complex is a moving target. Therefore people should look at percentages and not absolute numbers.

Gerard van Balsfoort thanked Johan Williams for his presentation and wanted to know how NEAFC can become more than just the sum of all Coastal States negotiations. He said that NEAFC only confirms the outcome of the negotiations, but that it should also have the ambition to become more than just a stamping agency.

Johan Williams said that the only way NEAFC could become more than a stamping agency would be if it became a super national organization that gets the power to make decisions. However, the parties, especially Norway and Iceland, do not want that.

Gerard van Balsfoort furthermore pointed out that the Pelagic AC has now existed for 11 years and that some people have been thinking about establishing a sort of AC under NEAFC. This might become even more specific when the UK leaves the EU. He said that in general people feel that the ACs in the EU really help making better management decisions even though they are not always listened to. He wanted to know if such an AC could exist under NEAFC.

Johan Williams said that the way this was done at the moment is by having industry representatives in the national delegations. There is a difference, however, between the EU and other fora. He said that there was nothing in the rules of procedure that would prevent such a NEAFC AC and if a party raised this issue he was sure that it would be accepted, but someone had to propose it.

Following up on the previous question Sean O'Donoghue pointed out that the EU pelagic industry has in the past tried to put this forward in NEAFC and the idea seems to get new impetus given BREXIT.

However, stakeholders do not have the possibility to bring the proposal forward in NEAFC without being backed.

Johan Williams said this was true, but also that the secretariat could back the proposal. However, it would be easiest if one of the contracting parties proposed it. There are now two Working Groups, one of which looks at how to conduct Coastal States negotiations and that is the basis for getting a NEAFC regulation. He suggested convincing the EU delegation to raise the issue, but also proposed that the EU industry has friends outside the EU fleet and their delegations could raise the issue as well.

6. Advice from Working Group I

Esben Sverdrup-Jensen presented the stock advice from Working Group I. In regards to blue whiting the Working Group recommended to follow the MSY approach, to explore possible stabilizing measures in regards to the proposed NEAFC management strategy and to explore the two-tier approach to F as developed by the Pelagic AC in 2012. The meeting agreed.

For Atlanto-Scandian herring it was recommended to follow the management plan, to await work on reference points and the evaluation of the management plan and to pursue data on discards. The meeting agreed.

Regarding North Sea horse mackerel it was recommended to set the TAC at 15 200 tonnes and to explore the discards data from the demersal fisheries ahead of the benchmark.

Sean O'Donoghue agreed with the recommendation, but considered it important to highlight that 15 200 tonnes are less than the ICES advice.

Stella Nemecky agreed with the comment, but suggested including the reason why the Pelagic AC recommends a lower figure than the ICES advice. The meeting agreed.

For North Sea autumn spawning herring it was recommended to revise the management strategy in accordance with the new ICES reference points and to raise the issue of ad hoc revision of reference points at the next MIACO meeting.

Gerard van Balsfoort agreed with the recommendation, but also emphasized that the revision has to take place this autumn so that the TAC can be based on the revised management strategy.

Esben Sverdrup-Jensen promised to include this point in the recommendation and the meeting agreed.

In regards to Western Baltic spring spawning herring the Working Group recommended to revise the TAC setting mechanism based on a potential revision of the management strategy for North Sea herring. The meeting agreed.

7. Advice from Working Group II

Sean O'Donoghue announced that an agreement has been reached in terms of the advice for Northeast Atlantic mackerel. He recommended following the management strategy agreed by the EU, Norway and the Faroe Islands and to set the TAC accordingly at 1 020 996 tonnes provided that STECF or ICES evaluates the management strategy to be precautionary by the end of 2016. Otherwise MSY should be followed. He further recommended to actively participate in the benchmark and to tackle a number of technical issues including the different trends between the egg survey and the IESSNS, RFID tagging and density-dependent growth.

Stella Nemecky agreed in principle with the recommendation, but pointed out that the Council meets already on 12 December. Consequently it was decided to change the date in the recommendation to early December. It was furthermore pointed out that ICES is unlikely to evaluate the management strategy before the benchmark in March and therefore the meeting agreed to recommend that STECF will carry out the evaluation.

Regarding Southern horse mackerel it was recommended to follow the ICES MSY advice and set the TAC at 73 349 tonnes accordingly and to continue the development of a management strategy.

For Western horse mackerel it was also recommended to follow the ICES MSY advice and set the TAC at 69 186 tonnes. Furthermore, preparations for the benchmark had to continue and included a list of issues to be submitted to ICES, the groundfish survey data and the industry data. Developing a new management strategy had to continue too and a possible seasonal closure from April until September in the West of Ireland should be examined to protect juveniles.

José Beltran said that this enormous revision of the TAC will cause problems for many companies, especially for artisanal vessels which are mainly catching horse mackerel and have no other species to rely on. He was aware that the Pelagic AC has agreed to follow MSY if there was no management strategy. However, he pointed out that there were other options as well and maybe more effort should be put into developing a management strategy quickly or look for other alternatives. Such huge changes in TAC upwards and downwards were unacceptable to him.

Sean O'Donoghue thought that there was a huge problem with the assessment. He did not believe the advice last year and he did not believe it this year either. Assuming that the benchmark could resolve some of the issues he suggested adding to the recommendation that in light of the benchmark there should be an update of the assessment. The meeting agreed.

Regarding boarfish it was recommended to follow the ICES precautionary approach and to set the TAC at 27 288 tonnes accordingly. Moreover, the issues with the acoustic survey should be addressed and the closures as foreseen in the management strategy developed by the Pelagic AC should be implemented. The assessment had to be developed further to move from a category 3 assessment to a category 1 assessment. In order to do so people in the Marine Institute had to provide help. The Executive Committee agreed to the recommendations.

In terms of herring in 6.a and 7.b-c Sean O'Donoghue said that a monitoring TAC for 2017 had to be agreed before the end of the year to ensure that the industry acoustic surveys could continue in 2017. These surveys were crucial to contribute to a rebuilding plan. He suggested asking STECF what such a monitoring TAC could look like and pointed out that advice in this regard had to be provided before the December Council meeting. Another aspect of developing a rebuilding plan was the genetics project and funding had to be secured for 2017 and 2018. In addition the Pelagic AC should engage with the Norwegian marine research institute on a larval and genetics study if this study receives funding. The Pelagic AC should also seek a benchmark in 2017 and actively prepare for this benchmark.

The chairman thought that it might be better to say "have a benchmark if there are enough data to warrant it".

Steve Mackinson agreed and said the recommendation could ask for a benchmark at the earliest opportunity. It is more likely to get a benchmark in 2018 anyway and if there will be a monitoring TAC in 2017 to continue the industry surveys, then there would be two years of data to feed into the benchmark.

Sean O'Donoghue understood the arguments raised, but in his experience people will just keep putting off the benchmark if the Pelagic AC did not try to pursue it for 2017.

Regarding Celtic Sea herring it was recommended to follow the management strategy and set the TAC at 16 145 tonnes in 2017. The Commission should also be encouraged to ask ICES to use the management strategy as top line for the advice instead of MSY, because having MSY in the top line of the advice causes major problems with some fishermen who accuse the Pelagic AC of being too precautionary. The advice was adopted.

For Irish Sea herring it was recommended to follow the ICES MSY advice and set the TAC at 4 127 tonnes. Sean O'Donoghue furthermore hoped that Alan McCulla will continue working a management strategy. The meeting agreed.

José Beltran wanted to go back to Southern horse mackerel and suggested following the same recommendation as for Western horse mackerel, i.e. that the assessment should be updated after the benchmark and given that a management strategy is almost available.

Sean O'Donoghue said that he was trying to be consistent in recommending following the ICES MSY advice whenever there is no management strategy. However, he admitted that it would have been worth mentioning the benchmark. Regarding the issue of minimum conservation reference sizes (MCRS) he suggested parking the issue for the moment given the discussions he had with various people and that the South Western Waters regional group decided to go ahead anyway. He therefore proposed not providing a recommendation in relation to MCRS at this stage.

José Beltran said that he and his Spanish colleagues simply wanted to maintain the situation as it has been for a long time, i.e. allow catches of 5% between 12 and 15 cm. The problem was created by a specific fleet in Portugal and since Portugal was not a member of this AC he suggested that the Pelagic AC could just propose to maintain the regulation as it is.

Sean O'Donoghue agreed that this sounded like a reasonable proposal, however, he pointed out that the decision has been taken off the Pelagic AC's hands, because the South Western Waters regional group went ahead with its amendment anyway without properly consulting the Pelagic AC. Things have moved on and there is now a Commission proposal which goes much further than what José Beltran was saying. At this point nothing the Pelagic AC recommends will make any difference anymore. Therefore, he suggested parking the issue for now and taking it up in relation to the consultation process in a meeting with the regional groups where hopefully the Commission can act as facilitator.

José Beltran suggested putting forward a complaint requesting that the proposal should not go ahead and instead that the situation should be maintained as it is.

Sean O'Donoghue pointed out that the Pelagic AC has already sent a formal complaint to the South Western Waters regional group and the Commission about the lack of consultation. He hoped that the issue could be further clarified in a face-to-face meeting with the Commission and the regional groups.

The chairman thanked the Executive Committee for unanimously endorsing the recommendations from the Working Groups.

8. AOB

There was no other business.

9. End of meeting

The chairman closed the meeting at 10:55.