

## **Minutes of the Pelagic RAC Executive Committee meeting on 13 February 2009 at the Golden Tulip Hotel in Leiden, NL**

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Schipholweg 3  
2316 XB Leiden

### 1. Opening of the meeting

The meeting was opened at 13:30 by the chairman, Iain McSween.

### 2. Approval of the agenda

The chairman noted that Gerard van Balsfoort had proposed to add an item to the agenda on mackerel under point 6. Sean O'Donoghue proposed an additional point on the CFP reform under point 7. The meeting agreed and the agenda was approved.

### 3. Approval of the minutes of ExCom meeting held on 4 September 2008

The minutes were adopted without amendments.

### 4. Interpretation arrangements

The chairman gave the floor to the secretariat, to elaborate on this point. Aukje Coers explained that during the Working Groups meeting on 14 October it had been discussed and decided that the secretariat's procedure for arranging interpretation for meetings, would be reversed, since the interpreters had been sent home twice last year. The chairman proposed that the secretariat was given a mandate to cancel interpretation in the case that no participants had specifically made a request for it at least two weeks in advance to a meeting (WGs as well as ExCom). The meeting agreed. The chairman asked the secretariat to include a paragraph in the Rules of Procedure and to communicate the change to the members.

### 5. Membership fees

Aukje Coers explained that due to the amendment of some financial rules of the Commission, the RAC could get in serious trouble in the case that not all expected income in the form of membership fees would be raised. The secretariat therefore proposed to change the timing for payment of these fees. The members would consequently receive invoices for next year's fees around the 1<sup>st</sup> of May this year. Payments would have to be made before the first of July at the latest to be included in the P-RAC's budget for 2009-2010. At the same time structural changes would be made to optimise its benefits. The level of membership fee for 2009-2010 would be as follows: 150€ for GA, 125€ per WG and 75€ for ExCom. This would be elaborated on in the invoice letter sent in May. The meeting agreed that the secretariat would follow this amended procedure. The secretariat then showed an overview of the current state of realisation of the budget, which showed that there was no cause for worries on over-expenditure yet.

### 6. Report from Working Group I

The chairman gave the floor to Gerard van Balsfoort, who, in Christian Olesen's absence, had chaired the latest WG I meeting.

### *6.1 Non-paper on the management of stocks without catch option tables (annex 3)*

The WG proposed to write to the Commission to:

- Note that the P-RAC appreciated the fact that the Commission was proposing a creative solution for the management of stocks where scientific data are scarce and;
- Note that the P-RAC appreciated the fact that the Commission was doing so by taking an approach to use commercial fleet data and;
- Note that, in general, the P-RAC found it incomprehensible that the Commission still aimed to define the basic principles and objectives in terms of compliance with the WSSD implementation plan, (catches at MSY-level), considering the fact that the status of these stocks were unknown, and MSY catch levels could therefore not be defined, and ICES could consequently not advise in relation to this and;
- Note that CPUEs would not be a useful indicator for trends in pelagic stocks, because the variable was rather insensitive to decreases and increases in the stock size and;
- Recommend that the Commission entered into debate with the Pelagic RAC, to discuss alternative management possibilities for pelagic stocks that fell in this category and;
- Recommend that the list of stocks included in this category was reviewed, since, e.g. herring VIa North and VIa South could potentially also be included in the list.

Gerard van Balsfoort made a remark on a pilot study that the PFA was conducting in the Pacific, where sonar data from the fleet were analysed to see whether it contained useful information regarding trends in the stock. Tom Blasdale (JNCC) noted that he found that a very interesting approach and informed the meeting that he would be chairing a joint meeting between RACs and deep-sea experts to discuss use of information from fisheries on the 9th of March in Copenhagen. It is possible that a benchmark/data-compilation workshop will take place in early 2010. He thought that addressing the argentine stocks (included in the Commission's non-paper) could possibly be added to the terms of reference for that meeting. Gerard van Balsfoort noted that the Dutch fleet held the major part of the quota, and that he was interested in receiving information on that meeting. The chairman asked the meeting if it agreed to the proposed recommendations by the WG. The meeting agreed. The secretariat would keep in contact with Tom Blasdale on the meeting.

### *6.2 Atlanto scandian herring*

The WG proposed to write to the Commission to:

- Note that the current fishing mortality was substantially under  $F_{pa}$  and;
- Note that SSB was far above  $B_{pa}$  and;
- Note that the plan was 12 years old, and had not yet been reviewed and;
- Recommend that ICES was requested to test whether the current HCR delivered maximum sustainable yield from the stock.

Didier Fourgon mentioned that the NGO's felt that  $F_{pa}$  and  $B_{pa}$  were not the only parameters that should be taken into account in that regards, and that recruitment levels were also important. The chairman asked the meeting if it agreed to make a recommendation to the Commission as suggested by the WG, including the remark by the NGO's. The meeting agreed.

### *6.3 Celtic sea herring*

Gerard van Balsfoort gave the floor to Gerard O'Flynn to elaborate on this point. Gerard O'Flynn commented on the rebuilding plan that had been developed by the Celtic Sea Herring Management Advisory Committee and submitted to the Commission by the Irish authorities in December 2008. He noted that the Commission's request to ICES reflected many of the principles put forward in the Committee's proposal. A short discussion followed on the ICES request, until the chairman concluded that the P-RAC could write to the Commission to:

- Express gratitude for being consulted at this early stage and for the Commission having taken into account the rebuilding plan proposed by the Irish industry and;
- Ask for clarification of what is meant by 'taking into account national management arrangements by Ireland' and;
- Ask for elaboration on the choices of parameters identified for the socio-economic research to be conducted by STECF.

The chairman asked if the meeting agreed with this proposal by the WG. The meeting agreed.

### *6.4 Western Baltic herring*

Gerard van Balsfoort recapitulated the presentation and discussion that was held at the WG meeting and presented the WG's proposal to write to the Commission to:

- Explain that the P-RAC was committed to the JAKFISH/GAP1 project and;
- Advocate that no management plan should be introduced by the Commission until the results of the project were known.

The chairman asked Gerard van Balsfoort whether the Baltic sea RAC was involved in this project as well, considering that this stock seemed to be within their remit. Gerard van Balsfoort confirmed that it was. The chairman of the pelagic WG of the BSRAC, Ryszard Malik, had been present at the WG meeting and all preparations in advance to the WG meeting had been in collaboration with the BSRAC. Christian Olesen would continue to liaise with the BSRAC, starting by attending the pelagic WG meeting in Gdynia, in Poland, in April, where this project would be further discussed. The chairman asked the meeting if it agreed with the proposal by the WG. The meeting agreed.

### *6.5 Evaluation of the functioning of the P-RAC*

The chairman commented that the WGs had, in principle, approved the evaluation document that had been drawn up by the secretariat. A few remarks had been made, and these had been taken into account in the second draft. Also, the conclusions had been written and included in the document. The chairman asked the meeting if it agreed that the document would be sent to the Commission as it was now. The meeting agreed.

### *6.6 Mackerel*

Gerard van Balsfoort informed the meeting that Norway and the Faroe Island had decided to set an autonomous TAC for mackerel, on top of the TAC agreed by the Coastal States. He felt that the RAC should write to the Commission, and particularly to the Commissioner Joe

Borg to express that this decision was outrageous and was introducing a threat to a stock that was very well managed. Several people expressed their consent and a specific remark was made that the NGO's should especially be on top of this issue as well. Derek Duthie commented that John Spencer and Andrew Thompson (EC) were meeting with the Norwegian Minister of fisheries in Bergen on Monday 16 February. The letter should, therefore, be sent immediately, with copies to Mr Spencer and Thompson, so that it was possible for them to take it into account during the meeting with the Norwegian minister. Gerard van Balsfoort had prepared a draft letter, of which paper copies were distributed during the meeting.

Derek Duthie reiterated that the WGs had concluded at their latest meeting that it had been very disappointing that, despite the best efforts of the RAC, the Norwegian industry had not supported the RAC recommendations on the 2009 TAC and had lobbied for a higher TAC and more risky management rules. The WGs had decided to propose to the ExCom that the Management Team would make one final effort to meet with the Norwegian pelagic fishing industry to establish:

- Whether there was any future prospect of the two parties reaching common agreement on fisheries management issues; and,
- If so, who the main Norwegian industry representatives for future dialogue were.

Derek Duthie expressed that in the light of these developments, the action by the MT should be postponed. There was no sense in trying to liaise with the Norwegian stakeholders in order to improve the management, if even the Coastal States agreement was not being adhered to by all Coastal states parties. The chairman asked whether the meeting agreed that the letter drafted by Gerard van Balsfoort would be sent to the Commissioner and that the initiative by the MT would be postponed until further notice. The meeting agreed.

## 7. Report from Working Group II

Sean O'Donoghue was given the floor to report from WG II and present the suggested recommendations by WG II.

### *7.1 Western horse mackerel*

The WG proposed to write to the Commission to request ICES to:

- Explain why the horse mackerel management plan is not considered precautionary in the long-term; and suggest what action should be taken to make it precautionary;
- Advise on the best way to approach forming rules around the minimum TAC of 85,000 tonnes which is included as part of the formula for setting the TAC;
- Advise how the management plan should be tested for efficacy in periods of low recruitment;
- Clarify in the 2009 ICES advice why there was no revision of the horse mackerel assessment to reflect the missing egg survey data that related to mackerel as egg survey covers both mackerel and horse mackerel.

In addition, with regard to the late publication of the annual advice, ICES should be asked to explain why WG WIDE could not meet in spring like other ICES Working Groups (not only in relation to the horse mackerel advice, but in relation to all the stocks).

The chairman asked if the meeting agreed with the WG proposal. The meeting agreed.

### *7.2 Blue whiting*

The WG proposed to write to the Commission to request ICES to:

- Promote the fast-tracking of a project on the structure of the blue whiting stock as envisaged in the ICES advice for 2008;
- Re-examine the fishing mortality rate  $F = 0.18$  target level;
- Undertake a benchmark assessment on all reference points and in particular resolve the difficulty with  $F_{pa} 0.32$ ;
- Develop a recruitment index;
- Investigate the environmental factors affecting the stock and influence these have on periods of high and low recruitment;
- Provide guidance on how fishermen's knowledge can be integrated into the assessment from both a short and long-term perspective; and

The chairman asked if the meeting agreed with the WG proposal. The meeting agreed.

### *7.3 CFP reform*

Sean O'Donoghue informed the meeting that the Working Groups had decided to hold one dedicated WG meeting to discuss the CFP reform after the Commission's Green-paper would be published. A number of questions to be dealt with in relation to that topic would be:

Regarding the CFP:

- Should some aspects of fisheries management take place on a regional level or not?

Regarding the role of the RACs after the CFP reform:

- Should the RACs have an advisory role or should they be involved in the decision making process more actively?
- (How) should the RACs be involvement in general CFP issues
- Is the differentiation in scopes of the RACs (defined by species or geographical area) the most effective one?
- Should a formalised body be established to function as an inter-RAC or not?
- What functions should the RACs have ?
- How should the RACs be funded?
- Should the RACs be directly involved (be able to commission projects) in biological and socio-economic research?

The chairman asked the meeting whether they had any additions to this preliminary list of topics and with the proposed way forward. The meeting agreed.

### *7.4 Herring VIa South*

The WG proposed to write to the Commission to request that the Commission would ask ICES

- To develop possible harvest control rules for the VIaS and VIIbc herring stock, that would be robust to data poor situations and in particular to the absence of a recruit index;

- To start drafting a management plan for Via(S), VIIbc, based on these harvest control rules

The chairman asked if the meeting agreed with the WG proposal. The meeting agreed.

### *7.5 Socio-economics*

Sean O'Donoghue informed the meeting of a meeting by the secretariat and himself with experts from the Seafish Authority in Edinburgh (see annex 4). That meeting had mainly concluded that:

- Dealing with socio-economics should go hand in hand with considering the biological basis for management measures. This should ideally be done by means of using models which integrate data from both, or otherwise through an iterative process, where the analyses take place separately but take into account each other's results;
- It would be useful to identify a case study for the Focus Group to deal with in order to bring this into practice. Celtic sea herring was mentioned as a possibility;
- Considering that the Commission was about send to STECF a request on Celtic sea herring and the P-RAC was asked to provide input, the P-RAC should express that it was unclear what the basis for the identified parameters to be investigated by STECF was.

Christian Olesen remarked that at the ICES/STECF meeting where he had been the week before, a discussion had taken place on dealing with socio-economics as well. That meeting had also felt that doing a case study in order to investigate integration could be a very useful exercise. Atlanto scandian herring had then been proposed. The meeting had, however, limited itself to the theoretical discussion and had not decided upon any action. Sean O'Donoghue acknowledged that that stock could also be considered of course, although it would become a much more complicated case than the Celtic sea herring. Gerard van Balsfoort posed the question whether the Focus Group should just do a theoretical exercise to study the feasibility or also actually endeavour to bring this idea into practice. In the latter case, would there not be some funds needed? Sean O'Donoghue expressed that he felt that the practical work should be undertaken as well and the focus Group should then naturally consider the finances as well.

The chairman proposed that the Focus Group would meet to draw up Terms of Reference, and make a proposal to the WGs. In the mean time, the P-RAC could of course ask the Commission for the explanation on the parameters in the Celtic sea herring request and explore the possibility to have observers involved in the process of STECF as well. He asked the meeting if it agreed with that way forward. The meeting agreed.

## 8. Natura 2000

### *8.1 French areas*

The chairman gave the floor to Xavier Marill (French authorities) to inform the meeting on the developments in France on the process of designating Natura 2000 areas at sea. Xavier Marill explained that a draft letter in response to the P-RAC request had been sent to the secretariat (which had been distributed before the meeting; see annex 5). He explained that the appointed steering committees would advice and not decide on the areas. Local fishermen were invited to partake in these steering committees. Consultation of other Member States and RACs would be done by the European Commission, after the French authorities had submitted their proposed areas. It would therefore not be appropriate if the P-RAC would participate in these steering committees. The steering committees could be asked to consult the RAC in case they thought it was relevant, however.

Marc Ghiglia expressed that he felt that it was inappropriate of the French authorities to decide to only embrace the involvement of local fishermen, because some proposed areas were outside of the 6 mile or even 12 mile zone and it would thus be likely to be relevant. These areas were fishing ground of international interest. He proposed that the RAC would wait until the formal reply was received, but in the case that the response would be the same as in the current draft letter, would make a complaint against this choice of procedure and express that the French authorities had a moral obligation to involve *all relevant* stakeholders. He was afraid that the steering committees would not automatically make the correct choices in relation to involving the relevant stakeholders, because they would be made up of the same people that decided on the terrestrial N2000 areas, where consultation of stakeholders on an international level was not relevant. The chairman thanked Xavier Marill for his commentary and asked the meeting if it agreed with Marc Ghiglia's proposes way forward. The meeting agreed.

### *8.2 UK areas*

The chairman gave the floor to Tom Blasdale (JNCC) to give a presentation on two additional areas that would very likely be proposed to be designated as N2000 areas (see annex 6). As soon as this would be confirmed by the UK government, a formal consultation procedure would be started by JNCC on the designation of the Dogger Bank and North West Rockall. In this first round, the JNCC was mainly looking to receive complementary information on the character of the areas that could be relevant for setting the boundaries of the areas. A second consultation round would follow when management measures for the area would be decided upon. Possible establishment of a wind park in the Northern part of the Dogger Bank would also have to be discussed in that context. The chairman asked if JNCC could send the consultation documents to the secretariat, as soon as the formal consultation period would start, so that the secretariat could distribute the documents to allow for response by the stakeholders. Tom Blasdale confirmed that that would be done. The P-RAC would obviously particularly be interested to be consulted in the second stage of the process, when management measures would be discussed. The chairman thanked Tom Blasdale for his presentation.

### 9. A.O.B.

There were no other business.

### End of meeting

The chairman thanked all participants and the interpreters and closed the meeting at 17:00.

<i>No</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Action points</i>	<i>Dead-line</i>
4	Interpretation	The secretariat to cancel interpretation in the case that no meeting participants have registered and requested interpretation two weeks in advance to a meeting. The secretariat to include a paragraph in the Rules of Procedure, to explain this.	1 April
5	Membership fees	The secretariat to invoice for next year's fee in May.	1 May
6	Recommendations from WG I	The secretariat to draft and send a recommendation* letter to the EC. *Celtic sea herring dead line: 16 February	27 Feb
7	Recommendations from WG II	The secretariat and the chair of WG II to draft and send recommendation letter to the EC. The secretariat to facilitate a meeting for the socio-economics focus group.	27 Feb 1 April
8	Natura 2000 - FR	The secretariat to await official response from French ministry and draft and send reply letter.	February (?)
8	Natura 2000 - UK	Tom Blasdale to send consultation documents to the secretariat. The secretariat to distribute documents, collect comments from members and draft recommendation to be sent to JNCC.	March (?)
9	A.O.B	Gerard van Balsfoort to draft letter on Norwegian/Faroese autonomous TAC.	13 Feb