

Minutes of the Pelagic RAC Executive Committee meeting on 25 September 2007 at Schiphol Hotel A4, Hoofddorp, The Netherlands

The meeting was attended by 29 people (Annex A).

Opening of the meeting

The meeting was opened at 11.30

Approval of the minutes

The minutes of 13 July 2007 are discussed. Two issues are still outstanding: 1) the participation of NGOs in the Management Team, and 2) the document on Coastal State swaps.

Regarding point 1) The Secretariat explains that the NGOs have been contacted by e-mail but that there was no reply. Christine Absil noted that an e-mail was sent proposing the NGOs would be present on an alternate basis. Carol Phua said she never received the mail, probably because she was on pregnancy leave. The Secretariat will follow-up on this.

Regarding point 2) Gerard van Balsfoort explained that there was no agreement within the industry on this point, so no proposal was written.

Sean O'Donoghue addresses the Commission's reply on the Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and that the response was not satisfactory in that the pelagic fishery should be exempt from this closure. The RAC needs to send another letter to take this up.

It is discussed that the EC has no valid argument and that the plan does not distinguish between demersal and pelagic species. The issue here is control even though large pelagic vessels should be traceable through their VMS system. Mr O'Donoghue suggests that the Commission and the Pelagic RAC should sit together to address this. The issue also needs to be addressed at the Control Agency (which had a meeting on September 26 which chairman Iain MacSween was going to attend).

Mercedes Rodriguez Moreda (Spain) stresses that it is important to distinguish the different fisheries, also the demersal ones. It is noted that the Pelagic RAC is only dealing with pelagic fisheries. It is decided that the Management Team will draft a new letter to address the issue and propose a meeting with the EC and the Control Agency.

The minutes of 13 July 2007 were adopted.

Consultations

Earlier it was decided that requests for consultations would be put forward to the Working Group meetings. As the deadline for one consultation is September 28 (on Habitats directive), it is tabled here.

- a) It is decided that it is not feasible anymore for the Pelagic RAC to have an opportunity to provide a response to the Habitats directive consultation, because of the tight schedule.

b & c) It is decided to deal with the other two consultations at the next Working Groups.

Recommendations Working Group I for TACs and quota 2008.

Christian Olesen presents the recommendations drafted by the Working Group members on 3 September.

Herring Irish Sea Div VII (North)

For this stock a recommendation was already endorsed by the ExeCom of July 13.

Recommendation:

- The advice is adopted without comment.

Herring Celtic Sea and Div VIIj

For 2008, ACFM has advised that no fishery should proceed on this stock without a rebuilding plan being in place. In order to provide for this, the Celtic Sea Herring Management Advisory Committee (CSHMAC) has drawn up a plan which applies to the years 2007-2010.

Mark Dickey-Collas notes the proposal is not a rebuilding plan, but a “TAC stability plan” and hence that ICES will not support it as a recovery plan as it does not include no population dynamics nor a goal. He further states that, although the plan suggests it, the Marine Institute does not support it either.

It is proposed to change the wording from recovery plan to a “plan put forward by the herring advisory committee.” This is approved upon by the Execom.

Recommendations:

- The TAC for 2008 should be set at the same level as 2007.
- The Commission is to take note of the proposal put forward by the Celtic Sea Herring Management Advisory Committee (included as annex B) with the request to forward this plan to ICES for scientific scrutiny.

Herring Div VIa South and VIIbc

It is decided to delete two bullet points and the following wording is agreed upon:

Recommendations:

- The Commission is to take note of a proposal for a pilot study (included as annex C) which has been designed to improve the acoustic surveys and hence come to a better assessment of the stock.
- Pending the outcome of the new stock assessment, the TAC for 2008 should be set at the same level as 2007.

Herring Div VIa North (west of Scotland)

The ExeCom adopts the recommendations.

Recommendations:

- The Pelagic RAC will formulate a recommendation on this stock in November 2007 when more explicit plans with regard to the assessment are expected to be available.
- In the mean time, the Pelagic RAC recommends a TAC of 30,600 t, which represents a 10% cut of the TAC of 2007.

Herring subdiv 22-24 and Div IIIa (Baltic spring spawners)

Christian Olesen and Reine Johansson had met earlier with Martin Pastoors (ICES) about this stock and issues concerning management areas of which the definition is still unclear. The Pelagic RAC should recommend to sort this out and give no recommendation on a TAC.

Mark Dickey-Collas notes that an ICES Working Group has been set up to resolve issues around this stock and that a meeting is organised in February and that participation is encouraged. This suggestion is received with appreciation by both Mr Olesen and Mr Johansson as it is time the issue is resolved.

The recommendations are adopted.

Recommendations:

- The Pelagic RAC will not put forward a recommendation on this stock.
- The Commission should develop a formula for the setting of the TAC in area IIIa for fleets C and D.

Herring subarea IV, Div VIIId and Div IIIa (North Sea herring)

Carol Phua (WWF) states that bullet point 4 is too cautious. She notes that the Pelagic RAC is ahead in the development of long-term management plans and it has the moral obligation to make adaptations when F falls below 0.25. That if it is put as a 'condition' it would have more weight for the Commission.

Christian Olesen explains that the proposed wording is the strongest formulation the industry can agree upon. The -35% is already a huge step and the industry cannot do more than that. The 3-year stability is very important. Sean O'Donoghue adds that everybody needs to trust that it will be revisited if there is a problem with the stock. It is also noted that it is important to come up with a consensus decision.

Carol Phua notes that the NGOs have never agreed with a stable TAC with any other RAC.

Gerard van Balsfoort notes that the 3 years are needed to review the reference points. That the industry has always been cautious and that building trust between the NGOs and the industry within the Pelagic RAC is important.

Christine Absil notes that it needs to be stated more clearly what will be done if the F falls below 0.25. Mark Dickey-Collas notes that he interpreted the sentence as a condition: "as long as F is < 0.25, the catch will be stable". Carol Phua notes that she hopes that others will read it the same and that when the situation changes, it will not come to a clash next year, but

that the industry and the NGOs will work on a solution together. If this is clear, they will support the plan.

The recommendation is adopted with consensus.

Recommendations:

- Postpone the review of the harvest control rule until 2010.
- Take a time-out for 3 years.
- Use these next 3 years to (let ICES):
 - Find the reasons for the poor recruitment of North Sea herring.
 - Establish robust reference points (by the Herring Assessment Working Group).
 - Make a proposal for a new management plan/HCR.
- Assuming that F remains below 0,25 the TAC for each of the next 3 years should be set at:
 - Fleet A: 220.000 tons.
 - Fleet C: 13.000 tons NS herring.

Response to Policy Statement.

Sean O'Donoghue presents a draft proposal in reply to the Commission's invitation to comment on the Policy Statement 2008. He is pleased that the EC gives the Pelagic RAC the possibility to give input in the policy statement. There is a commitment to support socio-economic analyses on impacts. The remaining issue is the timing: The Commission will have a meeting with the Coastal States on 22 and 23 October and the Pelagic RAC will then not have had an opportunity to deliver input to the blue whiting, Atlanto scandian herring, and mackerel TAC. Next year this should be put forward.

The letter gives a mandate to the Management Team to convene a meeting with the Commission to talk about the three stocks, just before their meeting. An NGO representative is invited to come along.

Mark Dickey-Collas explains that at the Annual Science Conference (Sep 2007) the ICES reform was discussed. It was decided to change in phases. The two Working Groups will be put together, but this will be in the autumn of 2008. For the years in between we will have to deal with an ad-hoc arrangement.

The letter is adopted and will be sent out by the Secretariat.

AOB

EU call for tenders

Mark Dickey-Collas explains about EU tender for proposals to improve data collection. Steward Harper has already sent a letter of support. Other industries will receive requests too. The letters of support have to be in by Friday the 28th of Sep.

Norway pout and sand eel

There is a discussion on whether Norway pout and sand eel should be taken up by the Pelagic RAC. It would include a lot of work and there are serious issues involved in this fishery. Yet,

no other RAC is dealing with these stocks and it is important to develop management plans and recommendations for these stocks.

Carol Phua will check if the North Sea RAC is planning to deal with these stocks as they fall under their responsibility. The issue will be further discussed at the next Coordination or Inter-RAC meeting. This is agreed upon.

ACFM invitation

The Pelagic RAC has received an invitation for the ACFM meeting early October. It is decided that Sean O'Donoghue will attend the meeting on behalf of the Pelagic RAC. The Secretariat shall write to ICES to confirm this.

End of meeting

The chairman thanks the interpreters and attendants and the meeting is closed at 13:00

Annex A Participants list

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17	Sean O' Donoghue	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation	kfo@eircom.net
18	Christian Olesen	Danish PO	po@pelagisk.dk
19	Carol Phua	WWF	c.phua@wwf.org
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26	Jaime Tejedor Urnaga	Federacion de Cofradias de Pescadores de Gipuzkoa	
27	Pim Visser	EAFPA (replaces John Wallace)	wvisser@visafslag.org
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Rebuilding Plan

Celtic Sea and Division VIIj herring

Proposal by the Celtic Sea Herring Management Advisory Committee

July 2007

Background

In 2006, ICES advised that no fishery should proceed on this stock without a rebuilding plan being in place. The Celtic Sea Herring Management Advisory Committee (CSHMAC) therefore began developing a rebuilding plan. This plan applies to the years 2007-2010. It is initially being presented to the Pelagic RAC. The plan will be referred to ICES, which will be asked to advise on its conformity with the Precautionary Approach to fisheries management.

RECOVERY PLAN 2008 -2010

1. TAC for 2007 is reduced by 15%, relative to 2006. This equates to a TAC in 2007 of 9 393 t. In the subsequent years, 2008, 2009 and 2010 the TAC will be fixed at 9 393t.¹
2. Spawning Box C (Sub-Division VIIaS) will be closed indefinitely for the years 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010.
 - a. A sentinel fishery will be permitted in this box, up to a maximum quota of 646t, for vessels < 50 ft only, or such other single trawl vessels² as may be deemed appropriate by management. This will facilitate intensive sampling of catches. This is necessary to help measure the strength of recruitment.
3. A new recruit survey will be conducted by the Marine Institute. This survey will improve the predictive power of the assessment and help to improve quantification of strength of incoming year classes.
4. The TAC provision in Point 1 above will be adjusted in the event of improvements or deterioration of the stock status as shown by ICES.

¹ Attention is drawn to a proposal to the Pelagic RAC on the tolerance level for water in fish landings. The outcome of possible negotiations with the European Commission may result in changes to point 1 above.

² Single trawl as opposed to pair trawl.

Pilot Acoustic Survey on Northwest Ireland Herring (VIa S VII bc)

September 2007

Background

The herring stock in ICES Divisions VIaS and VIIbc is composed of both autumn and winter/spring spawning components. Ireland and the Netherlands share the TAC for this stock, though Irish vessels now mainly exploit it. Herring fisheries are an important component of the Irish pelagic fishing industry and support several processing factories on-shore.

The fishing industry contends that this stock is healthier than the ICES advice suggests. This more optimistic perception of stock size, has led to a series of discussions between the Irish industry and Irish Marine Institute scientists leading to a decision to conduct a scientific programme to elucidate stock size. In particular, the industry is concerned that acoustic surveys conducted to date, have not been adequate to measure stock size.

During November/December 2007 and January/February 2008 two Pilot Acoustic Surveys will be conducted on this stock, incorporating industry information and concerns, in a design that achieves a synoptic coverage of the herring stock in ICES Divisions VIaS and VIIbc. The survey will be conducted by specialists contracting scientists, with the full support and supervision of the Irish Marine Institute. A brief summary of the project is outlined below.

Summary Pilot Acoustic Surveys Herring VIa S, VIIbc

- 1 Two synoptic acoustic surveys, of the herring in ICES Divisions VIaS and VIIbc, will be conducted in November/December 2007 and in January/February 2008. The survey design will incorporate industry concerns about current acoustic surveys.
- 2 These surveys will be conducted simultaneously on three commercial pelagic fishing vessels, each equipped with a scientific echo-sounder. Each vessel will be accompanied by its partner vessel, the latter engaged in scouting and fishing operations.
- 3 The echo-sounders, property of the Irish Marine Institute, will be calibrated, maintained and operated by the specialists contractors on board the vessels, in accordance with ICES protocols.
- 4 The biological sampling will be conducted in accordance with relevant protocols.
- 5 A final report will be presented to ICES, the Pelagic RAC and the European Commission.
- 6 The specialists contractors will obtain peer review of the survey methodology and results through ICES.

- 7 Close cooperation will be maintained with the Marine Institute and the Irish fishing industry at every stage of the process, in the design, implementation, analysis and dissemination of results stages. Every effort will be made to address industry concerns. At all times during the pilot project the Marine Institute will maintain a supervisory role.

Recommendation for Herring TAC 2008 in VIa S, VIIbc

In light of the extensive pilot acoustic surveys outlined above to be carried out at the end of this year and start of next year and the uncertainties that exist with the present assessment the Irish fishing industry is recommending that the TAC for 2008 be set at the same level as the 2007 TAC.

Sean O'Donoghue
Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation