

Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Pelagic RAC on Monday 18th September 2006 at hotel Schiphol A4 in Hoofddorp, the Netherlands

The meeting was attended by 27 participants (plus 4 interpreters and technician), see annex A.

1. Opening of the meeting

The meeting was opened at 11.30 by Chairman Iain MacSween. The Chairman apologised for starting the meeting early especially before one member of the ExeCom (Peter Sand Mortensen) had arrived. Given, however, that the General Assembly had finished earlier than anticipated this would make the best possible use of time. The chairman agreed to accept responsibility for any latecomers. All present agreed.

The new head of the DG Fish unit Mr Emmanouil (Manos) Papaioannou was present and gave a brief introduction. With regards to financial management, it was explained that the process to change Council Decision of December 2004 and therewith change the status of the RACs into bodies pursuing European interest was taking place. The proposal will be adopted by the Commission mid-October if matters proceed according to plan and will then proceed to the Council and hopefully enter into force as soon as possible. The main advantages of this change will be constant financing and more simple procedures.

Mr Papaioannou added that in June-July 2007 there will be a mid-term review of the RACs. This process may be advanced to March-April. There will also be an overall evaluation of the Community framework and review of stakeholder consultation in 2007-2008. It is not clear what the possible implications are for the RACs.

The Commission has organised a meeting on 28 September with the Member States, RACs, ACFA, etc. to discuss issues such as the scientific quality of the RAC recommendations and how to integrate the advice, the composition of RACs and financing. The final Community work programme for 2007 is hoped to be issued mid-October.

2. Approval of the agenda

The agenda was approved

3. Approval of the minutes of 5 July 2006

The minutes were approved

4. Letter Scottish Executive

Sara Stewart (SEERAD) explained that the Scottish Executive is unable to make a financial contribution to the RAC as the Member States and Commission were in disagreement on this issue. The Scottish Executive now offered an “in kind” contribution to the Pelagic RAC.

5. Recommendations Working Groups

North Sea herring

The Chairman reported that the last Working Group I meeting on 12 September had focused on formulating a TAC recommendation on North Sea herring. It had been a very worthwhile meeting with interesting scientific presentations, mature debate and an open and frank dialogue between the stakeholders. It had been agreed that the ExCom would be invited to make a final decision on the recommendation.

Christian Olesen (chair of WG I) explained that ICES had been requested to make new calculations based on different assumptions and that there had been a discussion on the stock reference points. Two possible options for recommendations were tabled.

Christine Absil (Seas at Risk/North Sea Foundation, also representing WWF) noted that the management plan is based on mortality (F) fixed on 0,25. She added that in drafting this recommendation the Pelagic RAC had an opportunity to demonstrate its proactive image and commitment to long-term management. She suggested that the RAC should refrain from using the “Large Stock Syndrome” hypothesis until ICES supports this hypothesis.

To explain the position of the NGOs, Ms Absil suggested that the arguments in Option 1 could be elaborated. The final recommendations are presented in annex B.

Jean-Pierre Plormel noted that there should be agreement on the distribution key with Norway. Given the life-span of herring he agrees with Option 1 but with a smaller reduction of 15-20%. It is noted that the percentage, however, has already been decided in previous meetings by majority agreement and will not be changed.

After a round of discussion all members of the Executive Committee agree to adopt Option 1 with the following adjustment to bullet point 2. - “There is general agreement amongst scientists” is replaced with, “A number of scientists have suggested”.

A letter has been drafted to be sent to Commissioner Borg. The content of the letter is discussed and approved by the Executive Committee. Similar letters will be sent to the Norwegian administration and ICES.

The recommendation on the protection of juvenile herring was amended to remove the sentence regarding the introduction of tighter bycatch rules.

VlaN herring

The RAC comments on the long-term management plan for west of Scotland herring were approved.

6. Fishing opportunities 2007, Technical Measures and Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY)

It is noted that the document on fishing opportunities does not cover pelagic species in any great detail.

It is agreed that technical measures will be discussed in a joint forum at the RAC Working Group meetings on 3 November and that MSY will be dealt with by the Executive Committee on 15 November.

7. AOB

There is no other business.

8. Closure of the meeting

The meeting is closed at 13.15

Annex A **Participants ExeCom Pelagic RAC 18 September 2006 in Amsterdam**

	Name	Organisation
1	Alvaro Fernández	Spanish Institute of Oceanography
2	Andrew Tait	SPFA
3	Borja Velasco Tuduri	Spanish Administration
4	Bruno Hoffstadt	BMELV
5	Christian Olesen	Danish Pelagic PO
6	Christine Absil	Seas at Risk/North Sea Foundation
7	Derek Duthie	SPFA
8	Dirk Jan Berends	Dutch Fisheries Association
9	Eckart Riediger	SVG Germany
10	Eric Roeleveld	PFA
11	Gerard van Balsfoort	Secretariat Pelagic RAC /PFA
12	Guus Pastoor	Visfederatie
13	Helge Korsager	EU Fishmeal Association
14	Iain MacSween	Chairman
15	Ingvild Harkes	Secretariat Pelagic RAC
16	Jason Whooley	IS&WFPO Ltd
17	Javier Garat	FEOPE
18	Jean-Pierre Plormel	FROM Bretagne
19	Johannes Nakken	Norges Sildelaget
20	Jose Beltran	OPP-Lugo
21	Manos Papaioannou	CEC
22	Reine Johansson	SFR Sweden
23	Sara Stewart	SEERAD
24	Sean O'Donoghue	KFO
25	Sigrun Holst	Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs Norway
26	Tomasz Jadowski	North-Atlantic Producers Organisation
27	Wim van der Zwan	PFA

Annex B: **Pelagic RAC Recommendations, September 2006**

Questions on scientific methods of the herring fishery in VIId and IVc

Recommendation:

- The RAC is willing to discuss with the Commission if and how scientific surveys can be improved.

Herring Celtic Sea and Div VIIj

Recommendation:

- The Commission is asked to request STECF to review the stock and draft a rebuilding plan. The timing should be so that the plan can be assessed by ICES, and be commented on by the Pelagic RAC before implementation on 1 Jan 1007.

Herring Div VIa north (west of Scotland)

Recommendations:

- The TAC should be set at 34 000 tonnes.
- The Management Plan should be adopted and implemented, with the following comments:

Harvest Rule

The trigger points are accepted. The RAC, however, recommends that it is defined for which year the trigger points apply, and propose that the projection year is chosen.

The RAC is concerned over the intention to include clause 2e. The assessment of this stock depends heavily on the annual acoustic survey. This type of survey can be technically difficult and it would not be right for the TAC to be automatically reduced by 10% in the event that a scientific forecast is unavailable due to technical problems with the survey.

In point 3, the RAC proposes to put ICES and STECF on equal terms, i.e. to change the wording from: “STECF” to “ICES and STECF”.

Quota Flexibility

The introduction of an inter-annual flexibility of up to 10% on national quotas is supported.

West of Scotland Closure

The removal of the closure of this area is strongly supported.

Control and inspection measures

The RAC agrees with the intention of minimizing misreporting. Also, bearing in mind the present situation regarding North Sea Herring, the RAC agrees that special measures should apply. Hence, under the condition that the west of Scotland Closure is removed, the RAC agrees with the proposed specific control and inspection measures.

Herring subarea IV Div VIId and IIIa autumn spawners

Recommendations:

- Sufficient effort and resources need to be invested immediately to clarify the causes of the poor survival rate for larvae.

- The RAC recommends to the Commission and member states that every effort is made to protect the juvenile herring.
- In the light of the uncertainties in the scientific advice the majority¹ of RAC members support the setting of the 2007 NS herring TAC at a level 20-25% below the 2006 TAC of 455,000 tonnes. This is on the basis that:
 1. The ICES paper on additional stock projections dated 7 September 2006 gives several new catch options. The final option on page 3 shows the projected effect that a 15% reduction in TAC in each of the next 4 years would have on SSB. Under this scenario the estimated SSB never falls below 1mt, while a larger reduction in the range 20-25% keeps SSB above 1.1mt, which is well above B_{lim} and maintains a healthy stock size when recruitment is plotted over a 40-year time line.
 2. The present recruitment difficulties may well be caused by the so-called “Large Stock Syndrome”. A number of scientists have suggested that this hypothesis is worth further consideration. Following this thinking, a massive cut in the 2007 TAC might well exacerbate the recruitment problem rather than solve it.
 3. The Community has introduced enhanced control and enforcement measures which will significantly reduce the possibility of over quota landings from 2006 onwards. In addition, the introduction of the industry supported VIaN herring management plan in 2007 will address misreporting concerns.
 4. There is significant scientific uncertainty surrounding the reasons behind recruitment difficulties and also what represents realistic stock reference points. A cut of 47% will have a detrimental effect on those dependent on the fishing industry, while a cut of 20-25% is manageable. A responsible management decision must be taken and a reduction of 20-25% would strike a balance between protecting the condition of the stock and limiting the socio-economic impact.
- The minority² of RAC members support the setting of the 2007 NS herring TAC at 300,000 tonnes corresponding to a 35% reduction on 2006 according to scenario 3 in the table of options in the 2006 ICES advice. This is on the basis that:
 1. The precautionary principle requires maintaining stock levels above B_{pa} and F at the agreed level.
 2. By choosing a 35% reduction, F will be kept at the level as agreed in the management plan. The stocks are foreseen to drop slightly below B_{pa} in the first year, but will recover to above B_{pa} in 2008.
 3. Before the “Large Stock Syndrome” hypothesis is used as a basis for management decisions, it needs to be validated by ICES.
 4. It is assumed that the pelagic industry is able to manage the socio-economic impacts that result from a TAC reduction of 35%.

Irish Sea Herring

Recommendation:

- The advice is adopted without comment.

¹ All members with the exception of those listed at 2 below.

² Members from Seas at Risk/North Sea Foundation and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

Herring Div VIa south and VIIb c

Recommendations:

- The RAC urges the Commission to request STECF to draft a management plan that meets the advice from ACFM.
- The plan should be assessed by ICES and be commented on by the RAC before implementation on 1 Jan 2007.

Herring subdiv 22-24 and Div IIIa spring spawners

Recommendations:

- The RAC requests that the presentation of the advice from ACFM be two-dimensional: the stock being one, and the management areas the other.
- The RAC recommends that the model used when forecasting catches in area IIIa be reviewed.

Mackerel

Recommendation:

- Adequate funding should be made available to ensure that the 2007 egg survey geographical coverage is at the same level as previous surveys.

Sprat

Recommendations:

- The RAC recommends that the Commission revise the TAC downwards compared to 2005 because of the bycatch of herring.

Blue Whiting

Recommendation:

- The RAC requests the Commission to instruct STECF to draft a research proposal for juvenile blue whiting.

Horse Mackerel

Recommendation:

- The RAC requests the reinstatement of funding for surveys.

MSY

- Before the Pelagic RAC can adopt MSY, it needs a socio-economic impact assessment for individual stocks and requests the Commission to provide this information.