
Location: West-Indisch Huis, Amsterdam, NL (Herenmarkt 99, Tel: +31 20 625 7528)

Date: 5 October 2012

Start time: 9.00 am

End time: 10.45 am

More info: see www.pelagic-rac.org

Participants:

Iain MacSween (chairman), Alex Wiseman, Almudena Gomez, Anne-Marie Kats, Carl Jesper Hermansen, Cecile Fouquet, Christian Olesen, Christine Absil, Eibhlin O'Sullivan, Eric Roeleveld, Esben Sverdrup, Frank Minck, Frederik Schutyser, Fuensanta Candela, Gerard van Balsfoort, Ian Gatt, Ignacio Fontaneda López, Jean-Marie Robert, Jesper Juul Larsen, John Crudden, Jose Beltran, Ken Whelan, Lesley Duthie, Miren Garmendia, Niels Hintzen, Nils Christian Jensen, Reine J. Johansson, Remi Mejecaze, Sarunas Zableckis, Sean O'Donoghue, Stewart Harper, Verena Ohms

(1) Opening of the General Assembly meeting by the chairman, Iain MacSween

The chairman opened the assembly at 9.00 am and noted that some people would have to leave early to attend other meetings in Brussels and therefore suggested a speedy meeting to ensure that people miss as less as possible. He noted that the last General Assembly meeting had been 12 months ago and that in the meantime Verena Ohms became the new executive secretary of the Pelagic RAC. He furthermore explained that the main task of the General Assembly consists of approving the annual work program and budget, dealing with financial matters and electing the chairman of the Pelagic RAC as well as of its Working Groups. The latter had been done last year and hence this year the General Assembly only has to deal with the work program and budget for the year 2012-2013. Furthermore a number of general presentations have been scheduled during this General Assembly meeting.

(2) Approval of the agenda

The agenda was approved without amendments.

(3) Approval of the minutes of the General Assembly meeting from 5 October 2011

The minutes were approved without amendments.

(4) Final financial report for the year 2011-2012 (secretariat)

Verena Ohms presented an overview of the budgeted and realized expenditure of the Pelagic RAC in 2011-2012. Although interpretation and travel costs were significantly higher than initially budgeted the secretariat managed to balance the budget and hence there will be no deficit in 2011-2012.

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(5) Work program and budget 2012-2013 (secretariat)

Verena Ohms presented an overview of the main issues the Pelagic RAC is predicted to deal with in the new contract year 2012-2013, including the development of long-term management plans for several stocks, the provision of short-term management recommendations after receiving the ICES advice, the enhancement of collaborations with fishery scientists, discussions on the CFP reform, participation and preparation of benchmark meetings and MPA management measures. She also presented a preliminary meetings schedule with Executive Committee and either Working or Focus group meetings planned in February, April and July 2013. It was emphasized that this schedule could be adjusted if necessary. Afterwards the budget for 2012-2013 was presented based on expenditures realized in 2011-2012. This budget only took into account contributions from 37 members and 7 member states. The remaining contributions, however, had been received by the time this meeting took place and will be subject to an amendment towards the end of the new contract year.

Sean O'Donoghue suggested raising the establishment of a focus group with the Commission at this point as he considers it likely that a focus group on North Sea horse mackerel will be needed in order to develop a long-term management plan for this stock. He also proposed to take the mackerel benchmark off the list as this has been postponed to 2014, but to add the Pelagic RAC's participation in ICES Advice Drafting Groups.

Christian Olesen noticed that interpretation costs are very high and that the Pelagic RAC could not afford any meetings if every member insisted on interpretation. He therefore asked those members who require interpretation if they might be able to participate in the meetings even if no interpretation was provided.

Almudena Gomez remarked that she does not require interpretation, but that some of her French and Spanish colleagues do in order to follow and actively participate in the discussions. Therefore she was against the idea of generally not having interpretation in future meetings.

The chairman agreed that clear communication is indispensable for a good functioning of the Pelagic RAC. Apart from that the Commission requires the RACs to provide interpretation if requested by members.

Sean O'Donoghue pointed out that the Pelagic RAC had agreed on not having interpretation during focus group meetings. He wondered if some of the herring meetings might be dealt with only in English and therefore have French and Spanish translation only half a day instead of a full day which should save money while at the same time allowing French and Spanish members to participate in discussions relevant to them.

Gerard van Balsfoort provided an update on the conflict that arose with the Commission regarding the splitting of membership costs into fees and donations. The Commission decided to accept this practice for those years in which it occurred, but to prohibit it in the future.

The chairman concluded the approval of the budget and the work program for 2012-2013.

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(6) MYFISH (Niels Hintzen)

Niels Hintzen, a researcher at the Dutch fisheries research institute IMARES, gave a presentation on a recently started research project called MYFISH in which many stakeholders of the Pelagic RAC are involved. Within this project, which deals with the concept of Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), Niels Hintzen is the coordinator of the case study on widely ranging fish. He expects the results of this study to have an impact on fisheries management of pelagic stocks. He explained that MSY is a relatively old concept which has already been formulated in the 1950ies. Nevertheless it proved difficult to precisely define MSY as several variants exist, including Maximum Economic Yield (MEY) and Maximum Social Yield (MSOY). Maximizing yield in one aspect always comes at the cost of lowering yield in another aspect. He pointed out that the ultimate goal of the MYFISH project consists in determining what stakeholders, managers and scientists want respectively and how to accommodate all parties in a reasonable manner. The first steps have already been taken during the kick-off meeting in April 2012 in Vigo by defining and prioritizing MSY variants. He concluded his presentation by informing the meeting that anybody interested in the project can be added to the mailing list by sending an email to Niels.Hintzen@wur.nl.

Gerard van Balsfoort pointed out that the PFA is always approached by many research projects, but that MYFISH is considered one of the most important projects and that therefore the PFA decided to become a partner. He wondered what the next step will be and when the partners will meet again.

Niels Hintzen replied that no date has been set yet for the next meeting, but that after having prioritized different concepts, scientists are currently working hard on the different case studies. The project partners and also the Pelagic RAC will be asked for input in due time as the next step consists of evaluating and implementing different concepts, a process in which stakeholder participation is very important.

Sarunas Zableckis wanted to know when the results of MYFISH will be available for implementation in management.

According to Niels Hintzen this is very difficult to predict. He is hoping to communicate the first results of his case study in some sort of advice to the Commission within one year.

Reine Johansson mentioned that many people use the Baltic Sea as the best example for mixed fisheries and multi-species advice. However, in his opinion the Baltic Sea will prove to be a very complex area which will not be as easy to manage as the Commission seems to assume. During a recent Baltic Sea RAC meeting the issue came up that when talking about different trade-offs science is mixed with other non-scientific considerations and hence scientists become involved in discussions which are not purely scientific anymore, which he considers a dangerous development.

Niels Hintzen explained that he is not an expert on the Baltic Sea and therefore cannot comment on its complexity. Regarding different trade-offs he said that within the MYFISH project these have been taken into account and prioritized together with stakeholders.

Gerard van Balsfoort noted that although MSY has been accepted and is being

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implemented now, people started moving on towards an ecosystem approach which in the end will lead to more trade-offs than just one species versus another which will further complicate the advisory process. He wondered what the consequences will be in the future and also emphasized that the Pelagic RAC has to start discussing the ecosystem approach and participate in research projects dealing with it. He wanted to know if MYFISH is touching upon that.

Niels Hintzen responded that he is sure that MYFISH will deal at least partly with the ecosystem approach although probably not in all sub-projects. Regarding the case study on widely ranging fish, fleet behaviour and species interactions will be investigated as these can no longer be ignored.

(7) Discards proposal (Gerard van Balsfoort)

Gerard van Balsfoort gave a presentation on the fishing industry's proposal regarding discards in the future CFP which is supported by all three European fishermen organizations (Europêche, EAPO, Cogeca-Pêche). He emphasized that discards is a complex issue for which there is no easy solution such as a total discard ban. He explained that even in countries with a discard ban like Norway it is not completely followed and unofficial discards amount to about 16%. Apart from being a simplistic political solution, a total discard ban would lead to a higher fishing mortality without benefits for the stock. It would also create storage and marketing problems and have significant financial consequences for the industry. Furthermore an absolute discard ban would be impossible to control and enforce. He claimed discards to be pre-dominantly discussed by policy makers, media and NGOs while the opinions of scientific experts and industry representatives are mainly neglected. Investments and efforts by the industry to reduce discards are not taken into account and people have to understand that for a large part discarding is a consequence of the current set of CFP regulations. The industry therefore opposes an absolute discard ban and favours by-catch avoidance and minimization of discards as well as a targeted use of the discards ban in pre-defined situations. Subsequently Gerard van Balsfoort presented the industry approach to discards which consists of two principles. On the one hand a discard ban has to be viewed as a tool for fishery managers to prevent stocks from being in danger. On the other hand a discard reduction has to be implemented as part of management plans for each fishery and/or stock. He emphasized that for the success of such an approach the collaboration of policy makers, scientists and industry would be indispensable and that each of the three groups would have to fulfil specific responsibilities. The member states would have to collect data on discards and develop a discards atlas, supported by scientists who would verify the quality and analysis of the data. Furthermore the member states would have to be responsible for facilitating the development of long-term management plans including discards reduction objectives. The European Commission's responsibility would consist of supervising the entire process while the industry would have to deliver the discards reduction for each stock and/or fishery.

Fuensanta Candela responded to this presentation that there is a difference in perception between the Commission and the industry. She stated that the presentation omitted to mention the strong rejection of discards by the public at large. She pointed out

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that policy makers cannot ignore the large majority of society that condemn the wastefulness of discards and want a discards ban. She explained that the Commission's discards policy is not naively formulated: the Commission does not suggest a discard ban on species which do not have a TAC and non-commercial species are not included either. The Commission's proposal is feasible – if the industry works with the Commission and Member States to make it work. In the future, efforts will also be made to manage mixed fisheries in such a way that discards are not a matter of banning, but a matter of prevention, in fisheries that can make the most of the mix available. She reacted in particular to the point made in the presentation that the data collection issue is a responsibility of the Member States, whereas the responsibility of the industry is simply summed up as delivering discards reductions. There will be no real progress on discards without proper data, but Member States cannot possibly ensure proper data collection unless logbooks are properly filled by the captains in the first place, and this is a basic need that the industry must assume and deliver on. She said that, at the end of the day, one thing is very clear, namely that the current amount of discards is simply wrong and we cannot go on discussing more of the same. Regarding the Pelagic RAC she claimed that this RAC could have the cleanest fisheries in the world under its remit and yet slippage occurs. She explained that there is an opportunity for the Pelagic RAC to come forward and lead a policy which will be a lot more sustainable and socially acceptable.

The chairman did not want to further debate this issue in this meeting, but allowed one comment.

Reine Johansson considered the industry's proposal as very good and said that if the Commission enforces a discards ban the fishermen will have to be involved. He furthermore requested the Commission to have all relevant countries sign up for this policy, even Norway and Russia.

(8) Atlantic salmon trust presentation (Ken Whelan)

Ken Whelan thanked the chairman for the opportunity of giving a presentation during the Pelagic RAC's meeting. He explained that the Atlantic Salmon Trust is a UK based charity which supports research on salmon and sea trout. He said that salmon spends most of its life at sea and that only juveniles live in freshwater for about 2 years. Over the last 20-30 years the number of salmon has more than halved from 8 Million to 3 Million. Most research on salmon has been done in freshwater although it really is a species at sea. The SALSEA-merge research project captured 1728 post-smolts and 53 adult salmon in 2008-2009 and a comprehensive biological and environmental database was developed. This information has been submitted to ICES too. Genetic analysis using single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs, pronounced "snips") helped to identify spawning stocks which are differently distributed in time and space. There are mainly three European rivers where salmon are coming from and each of them has a unique genetic makeup which allows the identification of migration routes. Furthermore the diet of salmon, herring and mackerel was studied in 2002, 2003, 2008 and 2009 and it turned out that although these fish feed in close proximity to each other the diets differed between the three species. Even within salmon the diet differed between different years and the condition factor decreased from 2002 to

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2009. Ken Whelan explained that a species without a TAC such as salmon overlapping with other pelagic species might be an excellent indicator of the health of the ocean. He wants to find out more about stock distribution and migration routes in the future and hopes that the Pelagic RAC might be able to help with this. He explained that in 2002 the survival was much better than in 2008 and it is noticeable that the migration patterns differed substantially between both years which could be related to shifts in temperature and salinity as salmon prefer 9-12° C and a salinity above 35‰. He proposed that herring and mackerel seem to know where salmon is doing well and migrate to those areas to feed on small salmon. Furthermore he said that salmon is a by-catch in large pelagic trawls and that he is hoping to find funding to investigate the by-catch situation. For this he would welcome the help of Pelagic RAC members in order to identify ways of avoiding by-catch through gear studies and post-smolts behaviour studies. He suggested that maybe lowering the trawls a bit would already avoid salmon by-catch.

The chairman thanked Ken Whelan for his interesting presentation and pointed out that genetic fingerprinting is currently very interesting to the pelagic industry to identify fish stocks.

Sean O'Donoghue explained that the Pelagic RAC has looked into the effect the subpolar gyre has on the recruitment of blue whiting. He said that a change in the subpolar gyre lead to a massive new recruitment. Since the migration pattern of salmon has changed he wondered if this could also be related to the subpolar gyre. Furthermore he wanted to know whether the SNPs methodology has been peer-reviewed, whether it is expensive and whether it can be used in other species.

Ken Whelan suggested working together in terms of identifying migration patterns and the effects of currents on these patterns. He said that SNPs unlike microsatellites are cheaper to use. However, this methodology is more difficult and more expensive to set up. Although it can be considered a new technology some studies using it have already been published and it can be used in any species.

Christine Absil noted that at the annual ICES conference many researchers have presented stock identification studies using SNPs. She considered it worthwhile to get in touch with them.

(9) AOB

There was no other business.

(10) End of meeting

The chairman closed the meeting at 10.45 am.