



## ▶ Pelagic AC

**Working Group I**  
9<sup>th</sup> July 2020  
10:00 – 12:00 (Amsterdam time)  
Online platform

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### Participants

Esben Sverdrup-Jensen, chairman	Danish Pelagic Producers Organisation
Sean O'Donoghue, chairman WGII	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
Andrew Campbell	Marine Institute Ireland
Anna Gruszczyńska	Ministry of Maritime Economy and Inland Navigation
Anne-Marie Kats	Pelagic AC
Anton Paulrud	Swedish Pelagic Federation
Bart Adriaenssens	Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management
Basilio Otero	Federación Nacional de Cofradías de Pescadores & Federación Provincial de Cofradías de Pescadores de Lugo
Cannelle Beauchesne	European Commission
Cindy van Damme	Wageningen University and Research
Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn	Danish Pelagic Producers Organisation
Colm Lordan	ICES
Delphine Roncin	From Nord
Despina Symons	EBCD
Eric Roeleveld	Jacson
Geoffroy Dhellemmes	France Pelagique
Gerard van Balsfoort	Pelagic Freezer-Trawler Association
Goncalo Carvalho	Sciaena
Ignacio Fontaneda Lopez	Spanish Government
Jerome Jourdain	Union des Armateurs à la Peche de France
Jesper Raakjaer	University of Aalborg
John Ward	Irish Fish Producers Organisation
Jonathan Shrives	European Commission



José Beltran	Organizacion de Productores de Pesqueros de Lugo
Justyna Zajchowska	Pew charitable trusts
Laurens van Balsfoort	Pelagic Freezer-Trawler Association
Linda Planthof	North Sea Foundation
Ludmilla van der Meer	Pelagic AC
Katrina Borrow	Mindfully Wired
Mads Larsson	AIPCE
Patrick Murphy	Irish South and West PO
Simon Bolger	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Soren Anker Pedersen	European Fishmeal and Fish Oil Producers
Stavroula Kremmydiotou	EBCD
Stella Nemecky	WWF
Steve Mackinson	Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association
Wietze Kampen	European Transport Worker's Federation

### **1. Opening of the meeting by the chairman, Esben Sverdrup-Jensen**

The Chairman opened the meeting at 10:01, noting that this was the first occasion on which WGI had held a digital session. He hoped the new system would work for everyone, and handed over to Executive Secretary, Anne-Marie Kats, for some digital house-keeping and advice on using the platform.

### **2. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda was adopted without amends. The Chair noted that the day's session would revolve around the presentation of ICES advice for key pelagic stocks. Decision-making on Pelagic AC advice on these stocks would be postponed to the October meeting, when discussions could be held in person.

### **3. Actions from the previous meeting**

The Chairman presented the actions from the previous meeting, and provided updates on progress.

Martin Pastoors had an action to check the ICES underwater noise data portal for data relevant to PELAC work. Pastoors was unable to attend the meeting, and this action was assigned as 'on-going'.

The PELAC had followed-up on a letter sent to DG ENVI and the ICES WG on impacts of seismic surveys, and a joint PELAC-NWWAC seismic Focus Group had been held on June 15<sup>th</sup>. Goncalo Carvalho provided extra detail, explaining that the FG had considered sending two separate requests to ICES – one specifically on seismic impacts [on fisheries] and another on windfarms. Further discussions were due the following week, prior to these PELAC-NWWAC requests being sent to the Commission. Carvalho added that the FG may seek input from ICES on appropriate framing for the request.

A letter on banking and borrowing principles for pelagic quota had been sent to the Commission, and a response received. The Chair characterized this as a 'useful exercise', providing the information that the AC required on 'how to manage existing...principles'.



There was an action to invite scientists involved in the blue whiting survey to speak to the PELAC, to discuss survey quality. This has been postponed due to the ongoing pandemic. The Chair hoped this could be picked up in the October meeting, or otherwise addressed in the Blue Whiting FG. On a similar theme, a link to the blue whiting survey blog was to be circulated to all PELAC members. As the survey had been cancelled, the Chair commented that there was not much new content of note.

Also postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the PELAC was due to invite scientist Ed Farrell to present his work on North Sea horse mackerel genetic stock ID. This was postponed to October.

The PELAC had asked the Commission for an explanation of the calculations for deductions in TACs for North Sea (NS) horse mackerel. This was a shared action with WGII, and was complete – with a response received. Sean O’Donoghue (Chair of WGII) commented that the response showed a problem with the data used for the calculations: that it was from 2018, prior to the full implementation of the Landing Obligation in 2019. Anne-Marie Kats noted that Jonathan Shrikes from the Commission had registered to join the WGII meeting later in the day, and may be able to answer questions on the subject.

The next action focused on deep-sea mining advice. Goncalo Carvalho updated the group that the advice had been adopted and was complete. The paper is available on the PELAC website.

Information from a Commission workshop on circular fishing gear and plastics was to be circulated to the wider group. This had been done, alongside a draft advice from the NWWAC on the Single Use Plastics Directive. Anne-Marie Kats noted that the NWWAC were ‘eager’ to find co-signatories for the advice, and suggested this be further discussed under the Ecosystem FG agenda item. Sean O’Donoghue highlighted that two words within the advice had been changed by the NWWAC since the previous day, so an updated version was required. Patrick Murphy added that he had attended an NWWAC Webex meeting with the Commission the previous day, including an update on their work on plastics with the consultancy MRAG. He would draft a ‘quick report’ and circulate to the group.

Draft ToRs for the Ecosystem Focus Group had been completed. The WG was subsequently seeking a date for a meeting.

Finally, a letter had been sent to the Commission on the subject of western Baltic spring spawning herring management. An answer had been received, delineating that a multi-annual plan is in place for the stock, so any PELAC-proposed rebuilding plans but be within the framework of that plan. Any amendment to the multi-annual plan has to go through co-decision, which the Chair said was a ‘complex process, but we’ll look into it together with the Baltic Sea AC’.

#### **4. Presentation of ICES advice**

Colm Lordan presented ICES advice for pelagic stocks under the remit of WGI. He thanked the Chair for the opportunity to present the advice, and explained that it would be shared in an ‘altered format’, due to COVID-19 disruption. The advice sheets for July 2020 are in an abbreviated format, with all core outputs from stock assessments and forecasts. In some instances, the previous year’s advice has been appended onto the end of the 2020 sheets.

##### **North Sea Autumn-spawning herring**

Catches for NS herring have been fluctuating over time. Catches in 2019 declined a little in comparison to 2018, and totaled 442.000 tonnes. Fishing mortality for the stock has also fluctuated, and in the recent period has been below the target level of fMSY at 0,26. The latest mortality estimated in the assessment was at 0,178.

Stock size has also been changeable. In the recent period, a declining trend is seen. At the end of the time series, SSB in 2020 is projected to be 129.000 tonnes – below the MSY btrigger level.



Recent recruitment has been at a lower level than previously – when sporadic incidences of strong recruitment were seen. Recruitment has been reduced for the past several years.

The resulting headline advice is that catches should be no more than 365.792 tonnes in 2021. In terms of stock status, mortality remains ‘green ticked’ as it is below MSY. Stock size has just dropped below btrigger in 2020, but remains above BPA and Blim.

The advice sheet shows estimated total catches in 2020 will be 400.000 tonnes – leading to SSB of 1,2 million tonnes in 2021.

The management options table for the stock revealed the consequences of the headline advice:

- total mortality for MSY approach is 0,22, which is below the fMSY level. The reason for this is because the stock size in 2021 is below the MSY btrigger and ICES has applied a ratio in the advice to reduce mortality.
- The implication of advice is that total catches should be 365.000 tonnes, expected to lead to further decline in stock size of 7,9%. This figure represents a 15% reduction on advice provided in 2019.

All scenarios detailed by Lordan were based on an assumption of zero catch for D fleet and E fleet – western Baltic herring.

### ***Discussion of advice***

The chair opened the floor to questions on the NS herring advice, first requesting that Colm Lordan explain the MSY approach used for this stock. Lordan explained that the fMSY target for the NS herring stock is 0,26, but because the SSB 2021 is 1,18million tonnes, below btrigger value of 1,4millions, ICES applies a ratio of 1,18 divided by 14, and multiplies this by the fMSY value. This figure is then used to determined mortality. This is because SSB is on a downwards trajectory. Lordan added that this approach is used across all stocks, including those within MAPs.

Lordan also remarked on the quality of the assessment, highlighting that there have been some inconsistencies linked to catch age data, as well as decreasing internal consistency for the HERAS acoustic survey. This shift in balance between information sources has caused some retrospective bias. However, he added that ICES can now see the issue with retrospective bias seems to now be decreasing in the assessment model. Lordan said it was a positive that ICES had established the root of the inconsistencies, and that they seem to be becoming less important within the assessment. It should be more consistent in future.

Gerard Van Balsfoort commented that the retrospective change in perception of the stock always seemed to be in the same direction – with SSB being re-assessed as higher, and mortality re-assessed as lower. He asked how more accurate figures could be achieved for biomass and mortality, and also why the retrospective bias did not appear to have an equivalent impact on assessments of recruitment. Lordan said the assessment seemed to be consistent in its assessment for recruitment. Mortality and SSB ‘trade offs’ were used to reconcile different pieces of information fed into the assessment. He added that if retrospective bias issues are consistent, then they can be addressed – but in this instance, there have been large revisions and then (more recently) a reduction in retrospective changes.



## **Western Baltic Spring-spawning herring**

For western Baltic herring, catches have declined over time, with catches in 2019 shown as 25.000 tonnes. Lordan noted that mortality has been high for this stock over the full time series, above the fMSY target level for this stock, which is 0,31. Mortality in the last year has declined somewhat to 0,38, but remains above fMSY and above FPA level. SSB shows a declining trend over time and has been flatter, but still declining, in the most recent period. SSB is well below the stock's blim value, set at 120.000 tonnes. It is also well below the MSY btrigger value of 150.000 tonnes. Recruitment for the stock has been very low in the recent past and has remained as such, with no sign of impending positive recruitment.

The headline advice, under the MSY approach, is that there should be zero catches in 2021. This advice applies to Subdivisions 20-24 and the eastern part of subarea 4. One feature of the stock at this time is that it is migrating into the eastern part of North Sea for part of the year.

Lordan underscored that the stock status is 'red' in terms of sustainability: above the fMSY level, and below reference points. The stock is now suffering from reduced reproductive capacity. The implications of this advice are:

- Zero catch leading to an SSB of 66.000 in 2021 and 87.000 in 2022 – representing a 32% increase.
- This is still far below the blim value, and no catch options considered provided an option to be back above reference points in the short-term.

On the quality of the assessment, Lordan detailed that there had been a revising down of SSB over time, and estimated for mortality had increased. The reasons for this retrospective bias are not fully understood, and he added that there are 'lots of issues in terms of different migration patterns and sub-populations mixing in this stock'. This is part of the underlying reason why there is a large variability in both the assessment and the retrospective bias.

Lordan went on to explain that within ICES a workshop on rebuilding plans had been held, where the Western Baltic herring stock had been used as a case study. Plans are underway for a follow-up workshop on the subject, and ICES would also be carrying out some work looking at how reference points for different stocks, including the Western Baltic herring, are defined. ICES aims to hold a rebuilding workshop and a reference points workshop at the end of 2020, or in early 2021.

### ***Discussion of the advice***

The Chairman characterized the advice as 'not a lot of good news, but not so surprising'. He noted that Western Baltic herring is a 'key stocks' for a number of fisheries, and that the PELAC is keenly interested in ensuring the stock is returned to a better condition. He noted the 'new element' in the advice this year – the fact that this stock is being caught in the North Sea for part of the year. He asked Lordan to elaborate on this factor. Colm Lordan explained that in Previous years, when there was a fishery in division 20-24 for the stock, the bycatch of western Baltic herring in the North Sea was a minor issue. However, now that management measures have been put in place to reduce catches in core area of stock, any catches taken outside that core area (including in the North Sea) are becoming a major component of total catches. In 2019, catch of this stock in the North Sea was unusually high – at 5.000



tonnes. Lordan added that ICES has not defined any particular spatial management measures in its advice, but is flagging the subject to managers and advice-users that this is now an area of concern. Bycatches are now impeding recovery of the stock.

Justyna Zajchowska posed a question related to the historic EU-Norway TAC-setting procedure, quoting an ICES report from earlier in the year that states that the calculation used for herring in division 3a for the combined TAC should reflect 41% of MSY advice for Western Baltic spring-spawning herring, plus 5,7% of TAC for the A fleet. Then, according to a 'safety clause' in the advice, this method should not exist if there are concerns about the sustainability of the stock. Colm Lordan confirmed that it is the ICES interpretation of the advice that when one of the [shared] stocks is in poor condition, this transfer procedure should not take place. ICES 'points this out', but is not directly involved in the management negotiations for the stocks.

Goncalo Carvalho encouraged members to reconsider how the PELAC engages on the issue of Western Baltic spring spawning herring. In 2019, the PELAC 'pointed towards' the BSAC advice on the stock, but Carvalho suggested this be re-visited in the October meeting to see if specific PELAC recommendations are warranted.

Linda Planthof inquired to what extent ICES would be able to provide advice based on spatial or temporal measures, to which Colm Lordan responded that this would require scientific work to look at the distribution of catches over time. This would need to be based on a special request, as resources for this work are not currently in place.

### **North Sea horse mackerel**

Colm Lordan underscored that advice had been issued in 2019 for this stock that covered the subsequent two years. As a result, the advice in 2020 remains the same as in the previous year: that catches should not exceed 14.1014 tonnes. As this is a Category 3 stock, no plots of SSB, mortality and recruitment were available. An abundance index for the stock is based on two groundfish surveys' combined indices.

As a Category 3 stock, an 'uncertainty cap' is applied to the advice, as well as a precautionary buffer – which is applied every three years, precipitating a 20% decrease in advice if ICES is not aware of the stock status.

An estimate of fishing mortality can be generated in relation to an fMSY proxy. This has indicated that the North Sea horse mackerel stock is over-exploited in terms of MSY. Colm Lordan commented that he's aware of some discussion in the PELAC around discarding in this fishery, and noted that there have been some discards registered amongst catch data in the past, with a lower level of discarding seen in 2018. ICES WGWIDE will be updating statistics on this in their September 2020 meeting.

Sean O'Donoghue queried discard data for the fishery, pointing out that the discards listed in the advice are 'negligible', whereas there appeared to be significant discards in the demersal fisheries included for this stock. He asked if Lordan was aware of the STECF discard figures for the fishery in 2018. Lordan confirmed that these factors were considered in the advice and went on to say it 'was not a surprise' if there are differences in ICES and STECF data – concluding that it is 'important to estimate as accurately as possible and transparently report the different components estimated'.

The Chair thanked Colm Lordan for his presentation, noting that further discussions and development of advice would take place during the WGI October meeting.

## **5. Discussion of ICES advice**

The Chair moved on to a wider discussion of advice, including previous recommendations from the PELAC for the stocks presented. He noticed that there had been a discussion on how to secure more clarity in the formulation of the PELAC recommendations, especially in regards to North Sea Herring. He then opened the floor for any additional comments from WGI.

Gerard Van Balsfoort commented that the PELAC recommendation issued for North Sea Autumn-spawning herring in 2019 had not been sufficiently clear, saying ‘we made a nuanced recommendation that we felt would end up with advice of around 400.000 tonnes – lower than the ICES advice – but we didn’t say this specific figure’. EU-Norway managers concluded negotiations with a ‘rollover’ of previous catch limits. He remarked on the complexity of finding agreement around management for the North Sea herring stock when EU-Norway negotiations have been ‘consumed’ by North Sea cod recovery discussions. He added that ‘we don’t yet have an approach for setting TACs based on an agreed management plan – I don’t see this coming for the rest of this year’.

Goncalo Carvalho concurred with Balsfoort that future recommendations on this stock should include ‘specific numbers’.

Bart Adriaenssens highlighted that discussions on TAC-setting procedures for shared stocks needed to precede any management plan discussions [for North Sea herring] with Norway, but noted that the relevant Working Group was not currently active, due to COVID-19.

On Western Baltic Spring-spawning herring, the Chairman said the advice from ICES is clear: zero catches. There is no rebuilding above blim for this stock in the near future. The Chair noted Goncalo Carvalho’s suggestion that the PELAC reconsider its position on issuing recommendations for this stock, despite it falling under the remit of the BSAC, adding that it was clear from the ICES advice that parts of the stock are being caught in fisheries in area 3a and in the North Sea. For background, the Chair extrapolated that the BSAC’s recommendation had been for a rollover of the previous TAC. A minority position within the BSAC support setting the TAC at zero.

On North Sea horse mackerel, Sean O’Donoghue noted that the issue of discards with regards to this fishery should be re-examined in the October meeting.

## **6. Ecosystem Focus Group update**

An update on the Ecosystem Focus Group was provided by Goncalo Carvalho.

A Focus Group on seismic activity impacts on fisheries had been held in June, jointly with NWWAC membership. The meeting was characterized as productive, and had been structured around pre-prepared questions to be posed to ICES on seismic impacts of drilling for wind turbines, and on other issues. During the course of the FG, it had been determined to separate out the various issues at play.

In terms of seismic activity specifically, an opportunity was identified to ask for some specific and ‘non-recurrent’ advice from ICES. A request to this effect had been drafted.

The FG is also drafting input into a recently created ICES WG on windfarms.



A few unspecified issues had been identified as being more appropriate for the two ACs to tackle individually, rather than through the joint FG.

In response to a question from Sean O'Donoghue, Anne-Marie Kats confirmed that draft advice papers from the Seismic Activity FG would be completed via written procedure, pending a further meeting of the group in the following week.

Other highlights in the Ecosystem FG programme of engagement, including through joint work with the NWWAC, included the completion of advice on seabed mining. Carvalho thanked Anne-Marie Kats for her efforts in supporting the work, as well as the 'contributions of many members'. He noted that the WG was 'close to co-signing' advice on the circularity of fishing gear (as discussed during the previous actions update at the outset of the meeting).

For the WG moving forwards, draft Terms of Reference were being developed with Anne-Marie Kats. Carvalho felt a 'good mix of overall issues' fell under the remit of the group, including large topics such as climate change – and some more specific items that 'can be translated into advice quite soon'. He added that the online format for meetings had proved productive for the group, and that further online meetings would be held in 2020.

The WG had considered a session of presentations from research projects that focus on the impacts of climate change on fish stocks in EU waters. This had been postponed but was still on the table for a future meeting. Carvalho welcomed input and opinions on the functioning and plans for the group.

He concluded by noting that the issue of cetacean bycatch is high on the agenda in Europe overall, and with the Commission. This should be addressed within the Ecosystem FG. Gerard Van Balsfoort supported this suggestion, highlighting a recent ICES roadmap published with specific advice on measures for this type of bycatch. Whatever the resulting proposing from the Commission, he felt it should be examined by the Ecosystem FG.

Jerome Jourdain thanked Anne-Marie and Goncalo Carvalho for their work, and specifically for the Terms of Reference. He suggested an addition to the ToRs, in the form of a work stream on the EU's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Carvalho thanked him for this insight, agreeing this would fall under the group's remit.

Patrick Murphy felt the EWG's work and remit would become 'increasingly important' in the context of growing changes in the marine ecosystem, and 'new entrants' in the form of wind farms and other marine users.

Gerard Van Balsfoort interjected that Greenpeace in the UK are working on a campaign with 'high political profile' to ban all pelagic fisheries in all MPAs in UK waters. Many such MPAs are designed to protect seabed features. He asserted that this 'could well step over the waters into our remit'.

This remark was noted. The Chair concluded the discussion by saying that it is 'increasingly clear' that ACs are working on 'much more than TAC advice'. He was grateful to Goncalo Carvalho for his Chairing of the WG.

## **7. AOB & End of meeting**

The Chairman thanked all participants for their input, 'despite the hurdles of technology' and noted that the next meeting would take place in October.

The meeting then concluded.



## Action items

Action #	What	Who
1	Keep ICES underwater noise data portal on agenda as an ongoing item	Secretariat, Martin Pastoors, Chairman
2	Invite scientists involved in the blue whiting survey to the upcoming October PELAC meeting to provide an update	Secretariat
3	Circulate link to blue whiting survey blog to PELAC members	Martin Pastoors, secretariat
4	Invite Ed Farrell to upcoming October PELAC meeting to present an update on the North Sea horse mackerel genetic stock-ID project	Secretariat
5	Draft a short report summarising a NWWAC meeting with the Commission, including an update on their work on plastics with the consultancy MRAG. This will be circulated to the PELAC members	Patrick Murphy, secretariat
6	Investigate amendment process for the western Baltic spring spawning herring stock multi-annual plan	Chairman, Secretariat
7	PELAC to reconsider its position on issuing recommendations for the Western Baltic spring spawning herring stock, at the upcoming October PELAC meeting	Goncalo Carvalho, Secretariat, Chairman
8	Re-examine the issue of discards from the North Sea horse mackerel fishery, at the upcoming October PELAC meeting	Sean O'Donoghue, Secretariat, Chairman
9	Suggestions welcomed ahead of the Ecosystem FG session of research project presentations on the impacts of climate change on fish stocks in EU waters	PELAC members, Goncalo Carvalho, secretariat
10	Examine the issue of cetacean bycatch in relation to a recent ICES roadmap published with specific advice on measures for this type of bycatch	Ecosystem FG

