

Minutes Pelagic RAC Working Groups I and II on 7 February 2007 at the Hilton Grosvenor Hotel, Edinburgh, Scotland

The meeting was attended by 37 participants (plus 4 interpreters), (see annex 1).

1. Opening of the meeting

The meeting was opened at 10.00 by Working Group II chairman, Sean O'Donoghue.

2. Approval of the agenda

The agenda content was approved and it was agreed that Working Group II would precede Working Group I in order to accommodate travel arrangements.

3. Approval of Working Group minutes of 3 November 2006

The minutes were approved without alteration.

Working Group II

4. Outcomes December Council

The Chairman presented the various coastal State and December Council outcomes, comparing them to the RACs recommendations. He advised that the RAC management committee had met with the Commission at end-November 2006 to discuss the recommendations and had been encouraged by the fact that the Commission had provided a written response to the RAC within one week which had duly been circulated by the Secretariat to members.

4a. Blue whiting combined stock

The Chairman reminded the WG that the TAC had already been decided before the November WG meeting. On the subject of timing, it was decided that the WG would recommend to the Executive Committee that the RAC pursue a change in the schedule of meetings to allow adequate opportunity to consider the ACFM advice before commencement of coastal State negotiations.

The Chairman pointed out the apparent lack of progress on the subject of protection of juvenile blue whiting. The establishment of a small group of experts, including scientists, to consider this problem and come forward with a paper on how to deal with the issue was considered, however Members favoured Maurice Clarke's suggestion of a direct request to ICES in order that the ICES Working Group with its wide membership could consider the problem. Kenneth Patterson supported this approach. Ciaran Kelly reminded the WG that ICES had answered a special request on this topic a number of years ago and the Secretariat was asked to track down this work in time for the February Executive Committee meeting.

Action: Secretariat to include on Executive Committee agenda the follow-up of previous RAC recommendations to the Commission including the timing of coastal State meetings.

Action: Secretariat to track down and circulate the ICES response to a special request on the protection of juvenile blue whiting ahead of the Executive Committee.

4b. Horse mackerel

The Chairman summarised by stating that the RAC had achieved a number of its objectives on horse mackerel. A good number of its recommendations had been followed by the Commission.

I. Western horse mackerel

It was noted that the Commission had eventually taken the view of the RAC to roll over the TAC. The Chairman was pleased to report that the RAC recommendation to set up an informal group to look at the science surrounding horse mackerel and start the ball rolling on a management plan was making good progress. It was noted that the subject of re-aligning scientific advice with management areas was complicated.

II. North Sea horse mackerel

It was noted that the RAC advice to roll over the TAC had been adopted.

III. Southern horse mackerel

It was noted that the RAC advice of a rollover of TAC had been achieved. The Chairman reiterated that the RAC recommendations on this component in no way meant to interfere with relative stability.

5. Horse mackerel management plan

Following on from the special SAFMAMS workshop on horse mackerel on 6 February, the Chairman invited Beatriz Roel and Ciaran Kelly to synthesise their proposals with regards to horse mackerel management before the WG took a view on how to take the matter forward (see annex 2). Beatriz Roel stated that the different harvest control rule options presented both required further robustness testing before the consequences could be fully evaluated. Ciaran Kelly posed a number of questions which he felt required further consideration before further progress could be made.

The Chairman thanked the informal working group for their work to date which he felt had been very helpful. On his suggestion, it was decided to establish a Focus Group to look at the harvest control rule options and address the questions set by Mr Kelly. The membership of the Focus Group would be: Sean O'Donoghue, Gerard van Balsfoort, Marc Ghiglia, Andrew Tait and Christian Olesen. The Secretariat was tasked with arranging a meeting of this group prior to the RAC's May WG. On the enquiry of Beatriz Roel, the Chairman confirmed that the Focus Group would require robustness scenarios to be provided for its first meeting.

Maurice Clarke thanked SAFMAMS for arranging the horse mackerel workshop on 6 February.

Action: Secretariat to arrange meeting of Horse mackerel Focus Group before the Pelagic RAC's Working Groups meeting in May.

6. Blue whiting management plan

The way forward on blue whiting management had already been decided at 4a).

7. Technical conservation measures

The Chairman explained that the Commission had been unimpressed with the RAC's submission to the consultation on technical measures and had asked the RAC to reconsider the matter and come forward with a more detailed response. On his suggestion it was agreed that the WG would consider each of the nine areas on the Commission paper in turn.

a. Simplification

The Chairman suggested that at present the technical measures regulations were too unwieldy. He was in favour of one reference document being available rather than having rules scattered across many different texts. Mr Patterson said that the present system had not evolved not by accident. On the suggestion of Andrew Tait, the WG agreed that there should be one reference document for pelagic fisheries. Mr Patterson confirmed that the pelagic gear configuration proposals brought forward by the RAC in 2005 would be adopted by Council on 7 February 2007.

Gerard van Balsfoort questioned whether amendments to technical measures should come under the competence of the Council or the Commission. On the suggestion of Mr Ghiglia, it was agreed that in well defined circumstances competence should lie with Management Committee otherwise it should lie with the Council.

b. Effectiveness of existing measures

Following discussion it was agreed that although most of the present measures worked quite well there remained a question mark over the relevance of mesh sizes to pelagic fisheries.

c. Harmonisation/regionalisation

Various opinions were given, including preference for measures to cover fisheries rather than geographical areas and a suggestion that mesh size should be adjusted to gear type and fishery. Another view was that fishermen should be able to refer to one document which listed all technical measures relating to a particular fishery in a particular geographical area, e.g. west of Scotland herring. No conclusions were drawn on this section.

d. Mesh sizes

The present RAC position, as communicated to the Commission in November 2006 was reiterated.

e. Closed areas/seasons

The Chairman referred to a chart which showed various existing closures. He reminded the WG that the RAC had already recommended that the Butt of Lewis herring closure be removed. Following discussion the WG agreed that the removal of the Butt of Lewis box should not be held up by the technical measures review. Mr Tait said that each closure required to be considered on its own merits. Mr Patterson stated that a STECF meeting was due to be held shortly to decide on the guidelines for reviewing closures. That would be followed by 6-9 month consultation which the RAC would be invited to participate. On the suggestion of Christian Olesen it was agreed that it was not a good idea to remove closed areas in the North Sea to protect juvenile herring while there were recruitment problems.

f. Minimum landings sizes

As there was no strong feeling regarding the present minimum landing sizes for pelagic fish it was decided not to recommend changes.

g. Discards

During discussion it was accepted that a level of discards in pelagic fisheries did exist, however it was difficult to quantify as it changed through time and area. It was also noted that fishermen tried to avoid discards wherever possible. Mr Kelly said that it was important to quantify the level of discards for stock assessment purposes. Mr Ghiglia reminded the WG that they would have the opportunity to return to the subject when the Commission released its communication paper in March. It was agreed that the RAC should endeavour to work with scientists to confirm the extent of the discards problem in the various pelagic fisheries. In addition, the WG resolved to return to the subject when the Commission communication became available.

h. Marine environment

The Chairman reasoned that there needed to be more dialogue between managers and the pelagic industry when closed areas for corals were being proposed as pelagic fishing had little or no contact with the seabed. On the enquiry of Mr Ghiglia, Derek Duthie confirmed that Scottish fishermen had participated in a voluntary cetacean observer scheme and were now involved in the compulsory scheme and there had been no incidence of cetacean bycatch. It was agreed that pelagic fisheries should not be affected by environmental closures if they were not the cause the problem.

i. Evaluation

On the suggestion of the Chairman, it was agreed that a full evaluation of technical measures was required.

8. MSY

The Chairman stated that this item had been on the RAC agenda for some time and the RAC now needed to decide whether or not to make comments on the methodology and evaluation of socio-economic consequences of adopting MSY. No one seemed to oppose the principle of MSY; it was how it would be implemented and what the effect might be that was in question.

Mr Patterson said that little of note had happened on this subject recently. He reported however that some of the other RACs had set up Focus Groups and he thought it sensible for the Pelagic RAC to also start working on scenarios and put forward requests to the Commission for advice on particular stocks from STECF. The Chairman told the WG that the RAC Secretariat had put forward a funding proposal for work in this area and it was agreed that the Secretariat would circulate this to all members. The Chairman felt that the RAC needed independent scientific advice on the matter, particularly with regard to the implications for horse mackerel and blue whiting. It was agreed that the item would be discussed further at the February Executive Committee.

Action: Secretariat to circulate MSY study proposal to RAC members.

Action: MSY to be placed on February Executive Committee meeting agenda.

9. Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing

The Chairman referred to the consultation paper on the initiatives envisaged by the Commission to improve the fight of the European Community against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing circulated with the meeting papers. On the suggestion of Mr van Balsfoort it was agreed that as this was a horizontal subject and as many other fora would be

considering the paper and responding to it, the WG should recommend to the Executive Committee that it was not a good use of RAC time to respond to the paper and that the item should be removed from the RAC agenda.

Action: Recommend to Executive Committee removal of this item from the RAC agenda.

10. Any other business

Susane Røntved stated that the European processing industry was under pressure from the multiple retailers to attain certification for fisheries supplying them. At Mrs Røntved's suggestion it was agreed that an agenda item on certification/sustainability would be added to the WG II agenda for the May meeting and that Mrs Røntved would prepare a short presentation to stimulate discussion.

Action: Secretariat to add certification/sustainability item to May WG II agenda

Action: Mrs Røntved to deliver presentation at May WG II meeting

Working Group I (Chaired by Christian Olesen).

11. Outcomes December Council

The Chairman presented the TAC outcomes compared to the RACs recommendations for each stock.

11a. Herring stocks

I. Celtic Sea herring

It was noted that the TAC had been reduced by 15% against RAC advice for a rollover.

II. VIa North herring

It was noted that the RAC proposal for a rollover had been the eventual outcome. Mr Patterson explained the Commission's rationale for initially proposing a 15% cut and subsequently supporting a rollover. Mr Patterson also informed the WG that the proposed management plan was not likely to be adopted until 2008. There had been two areas of disagreement between the Commission and the RAC, namely; control measures and the action to be taken in the event of there being two consecutive years without adequate scientific advice. The first matter had now been resolved, however the second remained outstanding and Mr Patterson invited the WG to offer alternatives to the present text. Following discussion it was decided the members would reflect on this matter and that the subject would be revisited at the next WG I meeting.

The Chairman noted the WG's disappointment with plans to link the Butt of Lewis closure with the management plan because it delayed the removal of the closed area. On the suggestion of Mr Balsfoort it was agreed that the WG would recommend to the Executive Committee that the RAC write to the Commission seeking the box to be dislocated from the management plan and removed immediately.

Action: Secretariat to include VIa North herring management plan on May WG I agenda.

Action: Secretariat to prepare draft RAC letter to the Commission seeking the immediate removal of Butt of Lewis box for approval of the Executive Committee.

III. VIa South herring

It was noted that although the RAC had recommended a rollover the TAC had been reduced by 10%. In addition, it appeared that no progress had been made on devising a recovery plan. Mr Patterson confirmed that the Commission had requested STECF to draft a management plan but it had been unable to do so within the time available. Mr Kelly said that the WESTHER project report had been finalised and submitted to the Commission, however its findings were unclear.

IV. North Sea herring

The Chairman expressed satisfaction that the RAC majority recommendation to reduce the TAC by 25% had been adopted by the EU and Norway. The RACs influence on the outcome was a success story and he felt that the presence of Norwegian observers at the meetings had brought dividends as they had advocated the RAC position in their own country. Mr Patterson stated that the 2006 decision was step in the management of the stock and that further steps were likely. Mr Ghiglia felt that industry professionals needed to get close to the ICES process during 2007. The Chairman confirmed that industry had been invited and had participated in the 2006 ACFM meetings. He suggested that the RAC seek a preview of the 2007 recruitment survey results as soon as they were available.

Mr Patterson advised that ICES had been asked to review the reference points and had decided not to change them. He suggested that the RAC may wish to pose a supplementary question to ICES concerning the effects of different catch scenarios. For example the question could be: What would be the effect of successive 25% reductions in the TAC? After further discussion it was decided to reformulate the question the RAC had posed ICES in 2006 in time for it to be presented to the February Executive Committee for approval.

Action: Secretariat to reformulate the RACs request to ICES in 2006 concerning North Sea herring and present a draft letter to the Executive Committee for approval.

V. Sub division 22-24 and IIIa herring

It was noted that the TAC had been reduced by 15% despite the RAC recommending a rollover. Mr Patterson reminded the WG that the long-term North Sea herring management plan was up for review at end-2007 and the Commission had requested ICES to provide harvest rules for each of the four fleets as at present there was only a clear rule for the 'A' fleet.

VI. Irish Sea herring

It was noted that the RAC recommendation for a rollover of the TAC had been adopted.

VII. Atlanto-Scandian herring

It was noted that the coastal States had eventually reached agreement in January with a TAC of 1.28mt agreed – the top end of the ICES advice and higher than the 15% increase originally advocated by the RAC. Regrettably, neither of the RACs recommendations of +/- 15% fluctuation in TAC's and 10% year to year flexibility had been incorporated into the management plan. This would continue to be pursued.

11b. Mackerel stocks

Western mackerel

The Chairman explained that the coastal States had not reviewed the mackerel management plan as recommended by the RAC. Industry had however been taking the initiative. On the invitation of the Chairman, Mr Duthie explained that the industry grouping Northern Pelagic Working Group (NPWG) had been considering various management strategies and that one approach was setting a constant TAC. NPWG had decided to write to ICES asking them to evaluate the utility of the constant TAC approach while responding to the special request of the Commission to propose harvest control rules. Mr Duthie read out the NPWG letter and the WG agreed to recommend to the Executive Committee that the RAC write to ICES in similar terms. Mr Patterson asked to be copied in on the NPWG letter in order that he could also add the Commission's support to the request to ICES.

Action: Mr Duthie to provide Secretariat with copy of NPWG letter to ICES.

Action: Secretariat to place draft RAC letter before Executive Committee for approval. Herring VIa South management plan. This item had already been dealt with under agenda item 4. a). (III).

12. Celtic Sea herring management plan

In the absence of Jason Wooley, Mr O'Donoghue reported that the management plan had not yet been fully developed although work had commenced. It was possible that the plan could be ready for the next Working Group meeting in May.

Action: The Secretariat was instructed to place this item on the May WG I agenda.

13. Closure of meeting

Mr Olesen closed the meeting at 15.45, thanking the Scottish Executive for their hospitality and the interpretation team for all their hard work.

Annex 1

Participants

<i>Name</i>	<i>Organisation</i>	<i>E-mail</i>	<i>6-feb</i>	<i>7-feb</i>
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Annex 2.

Harvest control rules

- 1) the rules use an estimate of spawning stock biomass (SSB),
 - It works taking a proportion of that SSB.
 - Advantages: results on higher yields on average for a given risk; responds to the current state of the stock.
 - Disadvantages: results in high variability in TACs so it needs constraining; requires a full stock assessment.
- 2) the rules use the estimate of annual egg production provided by the survey
 - They work on the basis of the slope of the last 3 egg estimates.
 - Advantages: more stable TACs. Based on survey data only.
 - Disadvantages: Result on lower yields for a given risk; reacts to the long-term dynamics of the stock
- All the above approaches require further robustness testing before we can fully evaluate the consequences of implementing them.

Concluding remarks

- The smoother (or less variable) HCR you have the lower the average yield for a given risk level.
- Assuming pulse recruitment with a probability of 1/20 halves the risk associated with any strategy, or conversely assuming no pulse recruitment doubles the risk.
- When you apply a 15% limitation rule below Blim, you have to lower the target yield to offset the increased risk to the stock collapse
- The risk profile (in general) changes above 150kt.