

## **Minutes Pelagic RAC Working Group I meeting on September 3 at ICES headquarters in Copenhagen, Denmark**

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The meeting was attended by 32 people (Annex A)

### **1. Opening of the meeting**

The meeting was opened at 9.15 by the Chairman Christian Olesen who welcomed the participants and expressed his satisfaction with the large number of people having turned up. He further provided some practical information about the meeting.

### **2. Minutes**

The minutes of the last Working Groups meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> June were approved.

### **3. Recommendations**

Christian Olesen explained that the recommendations had been dealt with during the last Working Groups meeting in June, but that except for a recommendation on herring in the Irish Sea (Div VII North) decisions were postponed to September.

#### Celtic Sea herring

For 2008, ACFM has advised that no fishery should proceed on this stock without a rebuilding plan being in place. Gerard O'Flynn (IS&WFPO Ltd) presented a rebuilding plan (Annexes B and C) that has been drawn up by the Celtic Sea Herring Management Advisory Committee (CSHMAC) in collaboration with the Marine Institute (MI) in Ireland.

Mr O'Flynn explained that there are two options: either two cuts of 15%, which would be very severe on the industry, or an alternative (the presented plan) which proposes to freeze the quota for 3 years until 2010. The 2007 TAC is a 15% cut of the 2006 TAC.

Box C, the Dunmore Box, is a scientifically recognised key spawning area and fishing should be banned there. Furthermore, a series of surveys should be carried out. If the stock increases, the TAC will be adjusted.

Christine Absil (Seas at risk) notes the scientific back-up of the plan, but argues that the plan should include a provision that the TAC should be adjusted in a situation where the stock shows a negative development.

The plan, including Christine Absil's remark, will be put forward to the EC who will then send it to ICES for scientific scrutiny and conformity with the precautionary approach to fisheries management.

Final recommendation for herring of the Celtic Sea and Div VIIj is:

- The TAC for 2008 should be set at the same level as 2007.

- The Commission is to take note of the proposal for a recovery plan (annex B) with the request to forward this plan to ICES for scientific scrutiny.

#### Herring VIa South, VIIb,c

The ACFM advice for this stock is that a rebuilding plan be put in place or there should be no fishing. The rebuilding plan should be evaluated with respect to the precautionary approach. The herring stock in these ICES divisions are composed of both autumn and winter/spring spawners. Ireland and the Netherlands share the TAC for this stock, though Irish vessels now mainly exploit it. There is disagreement between scientists and the industry about the size of the stock.

Sean O'Donoghue (KFO) explains that he has talked with Martin Pastoors (ICES) about improving the stock assessment through better acoustic surveys. Together with scientists from the Marine Institute (MI) in Ireland, a pilot study has been designed for an additional stock assessment (Annex D). The costs of the plan are substantial (1,5 mln €) and will be funded by the Irish Development Agency, the Industry, and the Marine Institute. No funds will be diverted from other surveys. The pilot study will be carried out by 3 pairs of commercial vessels with acoustic specialists on board. If approved, it will be conducted in Nov/Dec 2007 and Jan/Feb 2008 by the Irish Marine Institute and will incorporate industry information and concerns.

In the mean time, Sean O'Donoghue suggests, the TAC for 2008 for this stock should be set at the same level as 2007.

The plan is praised and accepted by the Working Group to be put forward as a recommendation to the EC.

Final recommendation for herring of Div VIa South and VIIbc is:

- ICES is requested to speed up the evaluation of the WESTHER project.
- The Commission is to take note of a proposal for a pilot study (annex D) which has been designed to improve the acoustic surveys and hence come to a better assessment of the stock.
- The Commission is requested to forward the proposal to ICES for scientific scrutiny.
- Pending the outcome of the new stock assessment, the TAC for 2008 should be set at the same level as 2007.

#### Herring VIa North

Derek Duthie (SFPA) comments that the industry has no confidence in the assessment and that the great uncertainty does not justify a cut in the TAC of more than 15%. A 56% cut in the RAC will be detrimental to the industry. The industry wants to discuss how to improve the surveys.

It is further argued that the implementation of the management plan should be postponed. The management plan has previously been endorsed by the Pelagic RAC Executive Committee. On the question of why the management plan has not been implemented yet,

Kenneth Patterson (EC) replies that it was put on hold depending on the evaluation of the WESTHER project.

Derek Duthie suggests following clause 2E of the management plan which states that in case of uncertainty in available data a precautionary TAC reduction of 10% should be agreed on. In contrast with a 56% reduction, this would also streamline more with the ultimate aim of the management plan: to stabilize catches.

Sean O'Donoghue proposes to initiate a partnership between industry and scientists to obtain additional information with regard to the stock status. Kenneth Patterson warns that a one-year survey will not generate sufficient data which can be interpreted in such a way that it will serve the purpose of the industry.

Sean O'Donoghue says that this could be the start of a new time-series, with a survey carried out the appropriate time and following the right tracks. But this needs to be further developed.

Christine Absil notes that it is important that any plan should involve clarity on actions to be taken in a situation of recovery.

Kenneth Patterson (EC) notes two things to consider when looking into improvement of the surveys or adaptation of the management plan. Regarding the first point, he explains that the current survey methods are the result of thorough consideration by the Aberdeen lab. If these were to be improved by including input of the fishers, it will still take much time to develop a new time series. Mr Patterson adds that it would be better to look at building stability mechanisms into the management plan than developing a new acoustic survey methodology. With regard to the second point he explains that the reasons for the low ACFM advice were: (1) estimated misreporting, (2) the stock is estimated to fall below 75,000 t in which case F should be reduced from 0.25 to 0.2, and (3) according to the management plan, if the stock falls below the trigger level the 15% rule is abandoned. He further states that until the management plan is a fact, the EC will follow the ICES advice.

Christian Olesen proposes to postpone formulating a definite advice for this stock to Oct/Nov this year. In the mean time the advice for a 10% reduction, and the development on an additional stock assessment as described above stand as a draft recommendation until Oct/Nov when more explicit plans with regard to the partnership should be available. Derek Duthie promises to look into possibilities with regard to improving the acoustic survey and looking at what transitional arrangements might be included in the management plan.

Final recommendation for herring of Div VIa North (west of Scotland) is:

- The Pelagic RAC will formulate a recommendation on this stock in Oct/Nov 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 IIIa, Div 22-24

The ACFM advice for 2008 for this stock is 35,000 t, which constitutes a reduction of 49% of last year's TAC. The recommendation of the Pelagic RAC is to develop a formula and clarification on the methodology to deal with this stock.

Christian Olesen, Reine Johansson (SFF) , Martin Pastoors and Henrik Mosegaard (HAWG) had a meeting to discuss the problem areas in the assessment of this stock. These are:

- the sampling method (and extent) was questioned by the industry
- the splitting of the catches between different stocks was questioned, particularly in the 'transfer area' (Norwegian sector in the North Sea and the Baltic spring spawners).
- The allocation of catches by fleet segment was questioned; particularly catches by Swedish purse seiners that may be written up as fleet D, but should correctly be fleet C
- The forecasts of catches by fleet A which are assumed constant was also questioned.

All questions will be taken up in HAWG when they next have Baltic spring spawning herring on the agenda. And a recalculation of the data in the past could mean a change in the assessment of the stock.

With this uncertainty on the stock assessment, Christian Olesen and Reine Johansson propose that the RAC does not give recommendation on the TAC for 2008, but reiterate the recommendation to document the rationale behind the setting of a TAC for ICES area IIIa.

This proposal is adopted by the WG.

The final recommendation for herring of subdiv 22-24 and Div IIIa (Baltic spring spawners) is:

- 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 C and D.

### North Sea herring

For this stock, ACFM advises a 50% cut in the TAC. At the last Working Group meeting on 27 June additional calculations made by ICES as requested by the Pelagic RAC were presented. However, Martin Pastoors expressed some reservations, and for this meeting new calculations have been received from ICES. The new calculations only change the SSB in the different scenarios – and only by small volumes.

Christian Olesen commented on the discussion about the value of using deterministic calculations instead of probabilistic calculations and he concluded that seen from an economists' perspective, deterministic calculations are maybe even more valuable and that discussions should go forward on the basis of the newly received material from ICES.

Christian Olesen continued to show a presentation (annex E) that included an extract from the ACFM advice which explains that with the current low recruitment the SSB will fluctuate around 1,1 mt and that future catches between 200-240 kt could probably be taken. The ICES calculations show that for the years 2008-2011, with catches of 220.000 tonnes per year, the SSB will remain at or around 1 mt. The new calculations only predict a dip to 0,9 mt in 2009, for the other years, the numbers remain the same.

The proposal put forward by Olesen at the June meeting was:

Postpone review of harvest control rule until 2010

Take time-out for 3 years

Use the next 3 years to (let ICES):

- Find reasons for poor recruitment
- Establish robust reference points

Set TAC for each of the next 3 years:

Fleet A           220,000 tons

Fleet B           14,000 tons

Fleet C           13,000 tons NS herring

Fleet D           6,000 tons NS herring

He then showed an extract from the EC Policy Statement which stated that for stocks outside safe biological limits (1) the TAC should be set [...] no more than 15% higher or lower than the TAC in 2006, (2) that will not lead to an increase in fishing mortality (F) or decrease in Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB).

With the proposed TAC of 220,000 t (implying a TAC reduction of ~35%), F will be reduced to 0.23 and the SSB will be maintained at or around 1 mt. Hence, the criteria set by the European Commission are met.

Ad Corten was invited to present his views. He explained that the low recruitment is not due to fishing, but to natural causes and that there are basically three possibilities: (1) these are lasting due to climate change, (2) these are temporal, or (3) these are a negative effect of the large stock (annex F). He concluded that under none of the scenarios, Blim will fall under 800,000 t.

He further shows that maximum recruitment in fact has taken place when SSB was below 1 mt. When looking at historical data, the optimum recruitment since 1970 has been at a stock size of 0,8 mt. Hence, a drop of the SSB below this point is unlikely to affect recruitment. His conclusion is therefore that at an SSB level of 1 mt, there is no need for emergency measures.

When discussing the way forward and what recommendation should be made on the TAC, Johannes Nakken from Norway stated that the Norwegian government is likely to follow the ACFM advice while the fishers will only support a maximum cut of 25%.

Gerard van Balsfoort (PFA) adds that the situation is difficult because ICES does at this stage not want to discuss the reference points (refers to letter Connolly), while it is impossible to bring the stock back to Bpa (1,3 mt). A reduction of 37% is an enormous step for the industry.

Derek Duthie states that the Scottish industry accepts the package, but only as a whole.

Christine Absil accepts that the causes are environmental and the different visions on options and reference points. She notes that the Pelagic RAC has committed itself to a sustainable and precautionary approach. The first part of the proposal of Olesen can be accepted, however, only if F remains at a level below 0,25.

The chairman confirms that, according to the calculations made by ICES, in his proposal F is likely to remain below Fpa.

Reine Johansson states that he can accept the package, but points out that the issue has both political and market implications that are relevant in the positions of the EC and Norway.

Carl Jesper Hermansen (SFPO) approves of the proposal but argues for the removal of fleets B and D as the TAC for bycatch needs to be higher than the stated number and needs to be set annually.

Stewart Harper accepts the proposal and reiterates that a cut of 37% has a huge socio-economic impact. He explains that while the EC states that the reference points are under constant revision, ICES has stated to see no need for a review (letter Connolly), so he would like to ask for a reassessment of the reference points.

Ken Patterson (EC) explains that ICES just had a workshop to review reference points in Gdynia. He also underlines the importance of a large stock as to keep spawning at a high level.

Ad Corten replies that at the meeting in Gdynia no herring experts were present and that it was said that there was not enough information to change the reference points, which he found very unsatisfactory.

The Pelagic RAC had asked ICES specific questions on the dome shape versus static recruitment and statistical method (segmented regression vs. probabilistic approach) which were not adequately answered. Also the term 'impaired recruitment' as used by ICES needs to be explained.

It is felt that the scientific basis for the Blim and Bpa is weak and that the points are chosen arbitrarily or on political grounds and that instead of organising a workshop on reference points in general, the herring working group (HAWG) should specifically be asked to look into this.

It is decided to adopt the chairman's proposal with the following changes:

- (1) the TAC is only for the A and C fleet.
- (2) a clause is inserted referring to F a clause is inserted referring to the procedure if F falls below 0.25.
- (3) ICES should specifically be asked to let HAWG review the reference points.

The final recommendation for North Sea herring is:

- Postpone the review of harvest control rule until 2010
- Take time-out for 3 years
- Use the next 3 years to (let ICES):
  - Find reasons for poor recruitment
  - Establish robust reference points (HAWG)
  - Make 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

#### **4. Closure of the meeting**

The meeting ended at 12.45.

## Annex A Participants list WG 3 September 2007 Copenhagen

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## Annex B

### Rebuilding Plan

### *Celtic Sea and Division VIIj herring*

Proposal by 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 9 393\* t.
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<sup>1</sup> vessels 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 in stock status as shown by ICES.

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<sup>1</sup> Single trawl as opposed to pair trawl.

## Annex D

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

#### **Proposal and Recommendation to Working Group 1 Pelagic RAC Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> September**

### **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 echosounder. Each vessel will be accompanied by its partner vessel, the latter engaged in scouting and fishing operations.
- 3 The echosounders, 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

**Annexes C, E, and F are separate files (Powerpoints).**