



▶ Pelagic AC

Working Group I meeting

21 April 2016
12.20-14:40 hrs
Parkhotel Den Haag, The Netherlands

Louis Braillelaan 80
2719 EK Zoetermeer
The Netherlands
Phone: +31 (0)63 375 6324
E-mail: info@pelagic-ac.org
Website: www.pelagic-ac.org

Participants

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|----|---------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Esben Sverdrup-Jensen, chairman | Danish Pelagic Producer Organisation |
| 2 | Alex Wiseman | Scottish Fishermen's Federation |
| 3 | Aukje Coers | Cornelis Vrolijk |
| 4 | Carl Jesper Hermansen | Danmarks Fiskeriforening |
| 5 | Christine Absil | Seas at Risk |
| 6 | Claus Reedtz Sparrevohn | Danish Pelagic Producer Organisation |
| 7 | Eric Roeleveld | Jaczon |
| 8 | Fredrik Lindberg | Swedish Fishermen's Federation |
| 9 | Frederik Schutyser | European Commission: DG MARE |
| 10 | Gerard van Balsfoort | Pelagic Freezer Trawler Association |
| 11 | Goncalo Carvalho | Pew Charitable Trusts |
| 12 | Ian Gatt | Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association |
| 13 | Ignacio Fontaneda Lopez | Ministerio de Agricultura, Alimentación y Medio Ambiente |
| 14 | Inge van der Knaap | Pelagic Freezer Trawler Association |
| 15 | Irene Kingma | Dutch Elasmobranch Society |
| 16 | Jerome Nouis | From Nord |
| 17 | Jesper Juul Larsen | Danmarks Fiskeriforening |
| 18 | Jesper Raakjær | AIPCE |
| 19 | John Anderson | Scottish Fishermen's Organisation |
| 20 | John Ward | Irish Fish PO |
| 21 | José Beltran | OPLUGO |
| 22 | Kees Taal | Van der Zwan |
| 23 | Lesley Duthie | North Sea Women's Network |
| 24 | Lotte Worsøe Clausen | DTU Aqua |
| 25 | Ludmilla van der Meer | Pelagic AC |
| 26 | Maria Aira Martin | Shetland Fishermen's Association |
| 27 | Martin Pastoors | Pelagic Freezer-Trawler Association |
| 28 | Matthew Cox | National Federation of Fishermen's Organisation |
| 29 | Miren Garmendia | Federacion de Cofradias de Pescadores de Guipuzcoa |
| 30 | Norman Graham | European Commission: DG MARE |
| 31 | Patrick Murphy | Irish South & West PO |
| 32 | Reine Johansson | Swedish Fishermen's Federation |
| 33 | Rob Banning | Parlevliet & Van der Plas B.V. |
| 34 | Sean O'Donoghue | Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation |
| 35 | Søren Anker Pedersen | Marine Ingredients Denmark |
| 36 | Stella Nemecky | WWF |

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

The chairman opened the meeting at 12.20.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted without amendments.

3. Follow-up on action items

The first action item was for the Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST) to link with the ocean tracking network. Since no representative of the AST was present the chairman decided to keep this action item on the agenda for the next meeting.

The second action item was to draft a proposal on how to move forward with the ecosystem focus group and the chairman announced that this issue will be taken up later during the meeting.

In relation to the fourth action item, i.e. the Commission's approach to safe biological limits, Frederik Schutyser explained that the safe biological limits as applied by the Commission are in line with the Basic Regulation. Biomass is assessed in relation to B_{pa} and fishing mortality is assessed in relation to F_{pa} . There are issues when no reference points have been determined, but the Commission cannot influence that. The 5% footnotes in the TAC and Quota Regulation are not in line with the Basic Regulation and strictly speaking should be removed from the TAC and Quota Regulation. However, there are serious issues concerning choke species which have to be taken into account. The Commission will therefore listen to all suggestions and possible solutions presented by the Member States and then make a decision. It remains to be seen what comes out of the joint recommendations and what should be included in the next TAC and Quota Regulation.

The chairman said that there is a definition of safe biological limits in the Basic Regulation and there is an interpretation of that definition used by the Commission. The ACs had not been consulted on this interpretation and the chairman wanted to know if the Member States had.

Frederik Schutyser replied that the Commission decided on the interpretation itself, but had discussed it with people involved in the negotiations of the Basic Regulation and with people working on scientific advice. It was concluded that in order to have a high probability of avoiding B_{lim} it was best to stay above B_{pa} . This is the way the Commission approached the issue and uses it in the TAC and Quota Regulation.

The chairman said that if this was the definition Member States wanted, then it should have been included in the Basic Regulation from the beginning.

Martin Pastoors understood that there has been a request to ICES from the Commission to provide reference points that are needed to determine safe biological limits.

Frederik Schutyser confirmed that the Commission has requested ICES to deliver this information in a user-friendly way, but there will still be some reference points that cannot be provided.

The next action item was in relation to the benchmark for Atlanto-Scandian herring aiming to provide input into that process. ICES is currently working on guidelines on how to work with ACs and set up ad hoc workshops. These guidelines should be submitted to the ACs soon. The chairman also asked members to keep an eye on the ICES calendar themselves and to forward any type of question or request to the secretariat who will then take the issue forward to ICES.

In terms of herring spawning grounds not much has been done given that there was no time to deal with the issue at the last HAWG meeting. The chairman announced to come back to this later in the agenda.

Another permanent action item is the monitoring of developments under the landing obligation for all stocks, e.g. changes in fishing patterns. The chairman invited comments from meeting participants.

Gerard van Balsfoort said that the implementation overall is running relatively well and control is going well too. So far no major difficulties have been encountered. However, it became clear over the past months that hake continues to be a choke species which is caught in the horse mackerel and blue whiting fisheries. He said that a solution has to be found for this issue. Both the boarfish TAC and the de minimis are much lower this year compared to last year and the de minimis has already been used entirely. He called for a continuation of the boarfish de minimis. In the future it will be as low as 0,5% of the TAC and he asked people to think about solutions.

Sean O'Donoghue wanted to know how catches of zero TAC stocks will be dealt with under the landing obligation.

Frederik Schutyser said that he did not want to run ahead of an official reply, but pointed out that there are guidelines for how to deal with this kind of over quota catches, e.g. deduct them from a similar stock with a similar value caught by the same fleet. This has also been applied for other stocks, e.g. spurdog.

Regarding blue whiting the chairman recalled that a request has been sent to ICES on a management strategy developed by the Coastal States. This request will probably be dealt with by WG WIDE. Currently an inter-benchmark is ongoing which will be addressed later during the meeting.

The next action item was to provide advice to ICES on the use of the flexibility of Western Baltic spring spawning herring which has been done by the chairman and Reine Johansson.

Another action item was in regards to monitoring mixing between Western Baltic spring spawning and North Sea herring. Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn pointed out that ICES does monitor mixing and takes it into account when providing advice.

Lotte Worsøe Clausen added that the amount of mixing is changed inter-annually and being monitored in both surveys and catches.

Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn said that it might be more relevant that there is also mixing with Eastern Baltic herring which could cause problems in the future.

Lotte Worsøe Clausen explained that there has been an increased percentage of Eastern Baltic herring in the surveys and the ICES advice also refers it.

The chairman concluded to have a look at the issue when the stock advice is being presented.

Carl Jesper Hermansen wanted to know if the mixing of Eastern and Western Baltic herring leads to an increased flow into the Skagerrak given that Western Baltic herring migrates into the Skagerrak.

Lotte Worsøe Clausen responded that some Eastern Baltic herring has been encountered in the Skagerrak, but the stock seems to stay mainly in the East. However, no data are available on this topic.

Reine Johansson said that there is always some mixing being observed in the catches, but people should not say that this has an influence in the future on Western Baltic spring spawning herring when e.g. addressing the North Sea.

The final two action items were in relation to horse mackerel and the chairman said that they would be dealt with at a later point during the meeting.

4. Atlanto-Scandian herring

- **Benchmark results**

Claus Reedtz-Sparrevojn provided a summary of the benchmark on Atlanto-Scandian herring. There were mainly four items being discussed: determining a new model to assess the stock, which surveys to include, natural mortality and there was a strong wish from the Norwegian industry to have a look at reference points. The Norwegian industry financed an acoustic spawning stock survey and there was a lot of debate what the reference points should be based on this survey. Skippers were of the opinion that there is a lot of fish out there, but scientists thought that school size detected with sonar is quite small. It was decided to use the acoustic spawning stock survey and the May survey and to kick out some of the older surveys. In terms of natural mortality some retrospective issues were detected and the Norwegian industry, especially Jens Christian Holst, thinks that natural mortality has been higher than thought. However, it was decided to keep natural mortality at the same value it has always been for this stock. The benchmark also looked at a new model. The ambition was to move to a catch at age model as has been done for many stocks. Moving away from Bpa models to statistical models that can deal with small cohorts has been a general pattern. The new model is called XSAM and has been developed in Norway. The model can take into account variation in survey and catch data, which means it can emphasize which data it trusts more and a lot of noise is being down-weighted. It is a brand new model and it took a lot of time to get it to run. This in turn meant that there was no time to look at reference points. Claus Reedtz-Sparrevojn considered this a serious problem. Often 95% of the time in a benchmark process is spent on the model, but it when it comes to reference points, which are very important for management, there is not enough time. The new model gives a new perception of the stock. In general there is a downward revision in the previous period with the stock believed to have been smaller 20-30 years ago, but bigger in recent years. Claus Reedtz-Sparrevojn hoped that there will be enough time to look at reference points during WGWIDE. He also mentioned that he attended a meeting in Norway in the previous week where he had been informed that IMR got funding to start a tagging project of Atlanto-Scandian herring. The intention is to tag 40.000 to 50.000 herring and start a time series that can be included in the assessment in a couple of years. He said that factories in the EU should consider setting up scanners to scan those tagged herring.

Ian Gatt wanted to know if the same scanners can be used for herring that are being used for mackerel. Claus Reedtz-Sparrevojn confirmed that this is the case since the same tags are being used.

The chairman wanted to know if the benchmark report is already available, but as far as Claus Reedtz-Sparrevojn was aware this was not the case. At the end of the benchmark it was not yet clear which model settings would be used and this has been decided only recently during a web conference.

5. North Sea herring

- **Update on work on herring spawning grounds**

The chairman explained that only little progress has been made in HAWG and ICES in regards to mapping herring spawning grounds. However, he intended to follow-up on this issue. At the recent Long Distance AC meeting Eskild Kirkegaard showed a number of maps that might be useful.

- **Presentation on the sprat box on the Danish West Coast by Lotte Worsøe Clausen**

Lotte Worsøe Clausen thanked the Pelagic AC for providing the opportunity to present some information on the origin of the sprat box, its evaluation and results. Implementing the sprat box is a consequence of the stock collapse of North Sea herring in the late 1970ies which was mainly driven by an excessive fishery on recruits. Industrial sprat fisheries have been associated with high bycatches of juvenile herring, especially in certain nursery areas. In 1984 herrings stocks had increased significantly which made it impossible to keep the bycatch below the 10% limit. Random sampling showed that 90% of the herring bycatch took place within the current sprat box area and as a result the sprat box was established. An evaluation of the sprat box in 2002 found that there was no clear evidence that the closed area resulted in a decrease of annual mortality of age 0 herring in the North Sea. On the contrary, there was an almost constant decrease in the catches and mortality of age 0-1 herring after 1996 when a bycatch ceiling for herring for the small-meshed fishery was implemented. The observed increase in the age 0 catches during the 1990ies after the establishment of the closed area could not be explained by variations in herring recruitment or sprat biomass. However, the study concluded that more data was needed for a definitive conclusion. In 2007 STECF evaluated a number of closed areas including the sprat box. Analysis based on IBTS Q3 data suggested that the current placement of the sprat box may be suboptimal. However, it was also pointed out that the relationship between the IBTS indices and the expected bycatch rates of juvenile herring in the sprat fishery is unclear, as is the reliability of a bottom-trawl survey for assessing sprat abundance. In other words, more data was needed. In 2013 DTU Aqua started collecting the data asked for by experimentally fishing inside and outside the sprat box. 15 vessels were allowed to fish inside the box on the condition that they fish two days inside the box followed by no less than two days outside the box. One sample from each haul was taken and no slipping or discarding was allowed. However, the number of samples collected in 2013 was not impressive and hence the results were quite inconclusive. Data collection improved significantly in 2014 and 2015 and now there is enough data available to draw some conclusions. Looking at the compositions of sprat and herring it turned out that in 2014 it was predominantly sprat that was caught inside the box while herring was caught outside. In 2015 only sprat was caught inside the box. In general it can be concluded that there is less herring inside the box than outside and therefore it is believed that the sprat box has not led to a decrease of herring bycatch and is a rather useless measure. Denmark has therefore initiated the formal work to remove the closure from the regulations which will probably take months. More important will be the effects of changing dynamics of the North Sea herring and sprat stocks in combination with the landing obligation since this will shape the future of bycatch issues. As an example for changing dynamics Lotte Worsøe Clausen pointed at the low North Sea herring recruitment due to low larval survival. Scientists are currently looking into reasons for that. It will also be important, however, to consider that proportions of different herring stocks change which can lead to changes in the catches of juveniles.

Gerard van Balsfoort had not been aware of the sprat box. He pointed out that the experiments carried out by DTU Aqua in 2013, 2014 and 2015 took place in a period during which the sprat stock and TAC has been very high, whereas it is now changing back. Until a few years ago the major driver for herring abundance was the Downs component. Now this component is on the lower side. He

wondered whether it was possible that the research has been carried out in a time when historically speaking there was a special situation, i.e. a large sprat stock and a low Downs component. He therefore wanted to know whether it was a good idea to propose getting rid of the sprat box under these circumstances.

Lotte Worsøe Clausen replied that the scientists have discussed this issue as well, but that the studies in 2002 and 2007 provided the same indications as the recent experiments by DTU Aqua. Taking this into account she believed that the results are solid enough to support a removal of the sprat box. However, she did agree that the bycatch is determined by the dynamics of the stocks, not the box.

The chairman thanked Lotte Worsøe Clausen again and said that the Working Group will come back to this issue when dealing with newly proposed Technical Measures Regulation.

Gerard van Balsafoort wanted to know if Denmark is going to present a formal proposal for getting rid of the sprat box before the discussion on the proposed Technical Measures Regulation.

The chairman explained that Denmark is expected to propose a derogation from the Technical Measures Regulation in the discard plan for industrial species. He was not sure if it could be done this year, but Denmark was aiming to implement this as soon as possible. In the end it will have to be dealt with formally when changing the Technical Measures Regulation.

6. Blue whiting

• Results of the inter-benchmark

The chairman asked Martin Pastoors to provide an update on the blue whiting inter-benchmark. Martin Pastoors explained that the reason for this inter-benchmark is because last year's survey saw less blue whiting than anticipated and there is a big difference between the survey and catches. It was concluded that people needed to have a better look at the assessment model. The current inter-benchmark takes place by correspondence and through web meetings. People have looked at developing a recruitment index for blue whiting, but at the moment this is not included in the assessment. However, the work looks promising and might be included in the future. There has also been a lot of discussion on the assessment model and an alternative has been presented. In the end it was decided to use the same model, but with some modifications and people are still working on the diagnostics of the model. The assessment takes place in August, the survey at the end of the first quarter and the fishery in the first two quarters. That means all information should be available by August, but the relevant scientific institutes will have to carry out their analyses very quickly after the fishery stops. The inter-benchmark should be finalized by the end of May. Martin Pastoors felt uneasy about doing an inter-benchmark like this which significantly changes the assessment process. In his opinion people should look at the assessment diagnostics in much more detail than is being done at the moment.

The chairman thanked Martin Pastoors for this update and concluded that the process sounded rather flimsy. He suggested taking the issue up with ICES. He remembered that the quality of the acoustic survey has been discussed and questioned for a number of years and he wanted to know whether this was also discussed at the inter-benchmark.

Martin Pastoors said that the survey was not discussed by the inter-benchmark, but that the assessment group simply uses the outcome of the survey group and according to the survey group the survey went ok.

The chairman hoped that the final results will be presented at the July meeting.

Gerard van Balsafoort said that Martin Pastoors did not expect that the results of the inter-benchmark will change the current assessment much. However, if the results are very different, e.g. in relation to

reference points, would it then be necessary to have a real benchmark? He said that there has been a long history of strange assessments for this stock and he did not feel reassured about what happens with blue whiting in ICES.

Martin Pastoors was not too familiar with all the different ICES regulations. He expected the assessment methodology to be comparable to last year, but he was not sure what the outcome will be in terms of stock assessment. The inter-benchmark is trying to figure out a more realistic fishing mortality and consequently there will likely be changes in the dynamics of the stock, but probably not so much in the status of the stock.

Sean O'Donoghue understood that this inter-benchmark is self-imposed by ICES in light of what happened to the assessment last year. He said that the Working Group has to seriously talk to ICES about this inter-benchmark in July given the continuous problems there are with the stock and given that there seems to be a major shift in stock perception every two years. He thought that a real benchmark was needed rather than trying to fix something that is fundamentally flawed. Last time there was a benchmark people agreed on a value for mortality, but the advice in the subsequent year changed the mortality. He urged the Pelagic AC to try to put together a recruitment index for blue whiting. He understood why this had not been done to date, but he hoped that there might be new ways of doing this and people should look into that. He uttered his concern about these inter-benchmark procedures.

Martin Pastoors said that a recruitment index from Norway and Iceland is already being looked at and he thought that some information on recruitment will be included in the assessment. Regarding the general comment about the inter-benchmark he said that the inter-benchmark itself is not the issue, but rather that the assessment carried out after a benchmark gives a very different picture of the stock. He said that this is a flaw in the way people develop methodologies. In ICES the thinking about benchmarks seems to slowly change and people start to agree that tinkering with the models can take place in expert groups. He was not happy about this development, but also acknowledged that the current system is not working well either.

The chairman explained that the last point was also raised with ICES at the MIACO meeting and in the discussion it was clear that for many stocks things happen between benchmarks.

7. North Sea horse mackerel

- **Update on PFA research plan**

Martin Pastoors pointed out that the research plan on North Sea horse mackerel is no longer only a PFA research plan. It started as an initiative put forward by the PFA, but over time there has been more and more overlap with Western horse mackerel questions. In the PFA part of the research the focus is on developing new stock indicators and looking at stock separation. To this end genetic and chemical tools are being used. The work is carried out in close collaboration with IMARES and University College Dublin. Samples have been taken in the North Sea and western waters and both the genetic and chemical analyses are almost completed. The plan is to have this work finalized before the summer. Martin Pastoors also said that the PFA has just hired Inge van der Knaap for a few months. She recently graduated in marine biology and will work on stock separation data from commercial vessels trying to develop stock indicators, abundance indicators and compare catch records from Dutch, Danish and Irish commercial vessels over time to see if e.g. search time has changed. He furthermore wants to check whether additional survey information is available. For North Sea horse mackerel this has already been done during WGWIDE last year, but the results still have to be written up. A French survey could be used in combination with the IBTS survey. On the western side there is no conclusion yet from Irish researchers.

Sean O'Donoghue considered this a good initiative, but emphasized that the plan is no longer only a PFA research plan and asked the chairman to change that. He advocated that there has to be a close relationship with WGWIDE in regards to the research carried out and he wanted to link all relevant people.

The chairman agreed.

8. Ecosystem focus group

The chairman explained that not much progress has been made in regards to the ecosystem focus group. However, there was a good reason for this. Verena Ohms took two weeks of unpaid leave from the Pelagic AC at the beginning of April to participate in a twinning project with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) on behalf of the MareFrame research project.

Verena Ohms explained that the MAFMC is an organization that is somewhat comparable to the Pelagic AC. In 2011 the MAFMC started to work on an ecosystem guidance document and the idea behind this document is similar to the idea behind the ecosystem focus group, i.e. to prepare for implementing an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management (EAFM). When the opportunity came up to twin with another project on behalf of MareFrame, Verena Ohms suggested to twin with the MAFMC to learn how they tackle EAFM and to get some inspiration from another part of the world. Some of the issues the MAFMC has identified as priorities under an EAFM are comparable to the issues identified by the Pelagic AC, e.g. the importance of forage fish in the food web and the need to preserve habitat. Other topics, although considered important by the ecosystem focus group as well, have received much more attention by the MAFMC, e.g. the effects of climate change on fish stocks. She suggested to circulate the MAFMC's ecosystem guidance document to the focus group for inspiration and to arrange a WebEx in the near future at which the next steps will be discussed.

The chairman agreed that the MAFMC has done some interesting work and that it is certainly worthwhile to have a look at their document. He acknowledged that the ecosystem focus group has not touched climate change very much, but he considered this an important issue that deserves more attention. He agreed to circulating the ecosystem guidance document and arranging a WebEx meeting afterwards. He also pointed out that the secretariat has invited representatives from the MAFMC to attend the July meeting and present some of their work on EAFM.

9. AOB

Frederik Schutyser wanted to clarify what he said earlier in relation to zero TAC species. He pointed out that the guidelines for deductions he referred to are used to determine deductions of catches over quota, it was certainly not his intention to indicate that this would be the way forward to deal with zero TAC species and the landing obligation.

Sean O'Donoghue said that the issue with pelagic fisheries is that there can be bycatch of zero TAC species, but this bycatch will not be detected before the catch arrives at the factory. How is this going to be dealt with? Member States also asked that question and so far there has been no definitive response from the Commission. He said that there are different rules for prohibited species versus zero TAC species and he wanted to know if the Commission has come to a conclusion on how to offset these catches.

Frederik Schutyser was not aware of a final view on this issue, but promised to check with the Commission.

The chairman said that in regards to the damaged fish recommendation there has been a good brief meeting during lunch and it was decided to give it one more try to get to a consensus recommendation. He announced that he will come back to the Executive Committee in writing.

10. End of meeting

The chairman closed the meeting at 14.40 and asked participants to return for Working Group II at 15.00 sharp.

Action items

- Link with the Ocean Tracking Network (Atlantic Salmon Trust)
- Circulate MAFMC's ecosystem guidance document and arrange WebEx meeting for the ecosystem focus group (secretariat)
- Ask ICES about increased mixing of Eastern Baltic herring and Western Baltic spring spawning herring at July meeting (chairman)
- Distribute benchmark report for Atlanto-Scandian herring once available (Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn, secretariat)
- Follow-up on herring spawning grounds with HAWG (chairman)
- Ask ICES to present results of blue whiting inter-benchmark at July meeting (chairman, secretariat)
- Raise concern about inter-benchmark procedures with ICES at July meeting (chairman)
- Facilitate recommendation on damaged fish (chairman)