
Location: Parkhotel, Molenstraat 53, The Hague, Netherlands (+31 (0)70 362 43 71)

Date: 4 February 2014

Start time: 13:47

End time: 14:25

More info: see www.pelagic-rac.org

Participants:

Esben Sverdrup-Jensen (chairman), Anne Mette Bæk Jespersen, Barry Delany, Bent Pallisgaard, Björn Lindblad, Brian Isbister, Christine Absil, Claus Reedtz Sparrevohn, Eibhlin O'Sullivan, Eric Roeleveld, Frederik Schutyser, Fredrik Lindberg, Gerard van Balsfoort, Iain MacSween, Ignacio Fontaneda Lopez, Jerome Nouis, Jesper Raakjær, Jesper Juul Laarsen, John Ward, José Beltran, Kari Stange, Konstantinos Kokosis, Lesley Duthie, Miguel Nuevo Alarcon, Miren Garmendia, Nico Bogaard, Reinier Hille Ris Lambers, Rob Banning, Uwe Richter, Verena Ohms, Victoria Beaz, William Stewart

1) Opening of Working Group I meeting by the chairman, Esben Sverdrup-Jensen

The chairman opened the meeting at 13.47 hrs and introduced himself as the CEO of the Danish Pelagic Producer's Organisation who inherited the seat as chairman of Working Group I from Christian Olesen who recently retired. He thanked the Executive Committee for supporting him as chairman.

2) Approval of the agenda

The chairman explained that for many stocks the Pelagic RAC is dealing with international negotiations are still ongoing. Therefore a lot of the information currently available is still preliminary. The agenda was approved without amendments.

3) Follow-up on action points from October meeting

The first action item was to present the Working Group I recommendations for the herring and mackerel stocks to the Executive Committee for approval. This has been completed and a formal recommendation has been submitted to the Commission.

The second action item asked to arrange a mapping meeting with HAWG on herring spawning grounds. Unfortunately, HAWG did not have time yet for such a meeting, but promised to take this issue up in spring.

The third action item was raised by the chairman himself at the last meeting and suggested encouraging scientists to produce high quality maps on stock distributions. Maps are powerful tools when communicating complex issues and the chairman discussed with ICES to produce such maps. However, this takes technical skills and effort. While ICES is already working on this no concrete results have been achieved so far. Therefore the chairman proposed keeping this issue on the action list and continuously mentioning it to scientists.

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4) Evaluation of efforts and results in 2013

The chairman explained that he would go through the results for each stock separately. On top of each slide the ICES recommendation was listed, followed by the STECF and Pelagic RAC advice and finally the political agreement.

• Western Baltic spring spawning herring

ICES advised based on the transition to MSY that catches of the C-fleet should be no more than 18.848 tonnes, catches for the D-fleet no more than 905 tonnes and catches for the F-fleet no more than 19.754 tonnes. STECF agreed with ICES. The Pelagic RAC did not advise on a specific TAC number, but to continue the work started by the Commission and Norway to find a TAC setting method that will include both the C and D fleet. The chairman explained that the final TAC figures have yet to be decided and negotiations with Norway were ongoing. He also mentioned that work in relation to a long-term management plan for this stock was done within the GAP2 research project and he hoped that a transparent way for setting TACs will be found in the future. There were no further comments.

• North Sea autumn spawning herring

ICES advised based on the long-term management plan that catches should be no more than 482.477 tonnes and STECF and the Pelagic RAC agreed. The chairman also summarized that the long-term management plan is currently undergoing a revision and that the Pelagic RAC had advised to set fishing mortality at 0.25, the B_{trigger} at 1.1 Mio tonnes, the inter-annual flexibility at +/- 10% and that an FIAV stability mechanism should be included. At the moment it seemed that the EU and Norway will agree to the Pelagic RAC's suggestion, but negotiations are still ongoing. The Pelagic RAC also recommended continuous stakeholder involvement as was foreseen when Norway invited stakeholders to a seminar on long-term management plans in Svalbard in 2012. The chairman noted, that since then, however, stakeholder involvement actually seems to have decreased.

• West of Scotland herring

All parties suggested following the management plan for this stock and the agreed TAC was set in accordance with the plan. Furthermore, the Pelagic RAC advised establishing SSB reference points before the benchmark in 2015 and work is underway to do so.

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• **VIa South and VIIb,c herring**

ICES had advised that there should be zero catches of this stock unless a rebuilding plan is implemented. The Pelagic RAC revised its previously submitted plan over the summer and STECF has commented on the plan. There were still some issues which according to STECF needed consideration and the chairman thought that these comments will be difficult to address by the Pelagic RAC alone.

Sean O'Donoghue pointed out that the Pelagic RAC had at numerous occasions submitted something for this stock and that finally there was a starting point. He understood that the main issue STECF addressed was that the closure in the revised rebuilding plan was not far enough North. If that was the case, however, and the closure will have to be shifted further north, also the Dutch and Scottish fleets will be affected. He assumed that at the July meeting more information will be available as the ICES Working Group will deal with the issue. The TAC and quota regulation did follow the closure as suggested by the Pelagic RAC and Sean O'Donoghue hoped that the plan would not have to be revisited again, but that the scientists at this stage will be able to resolve the remaining issues.

The chairman recommended adding the issue relating to the closure on the action item list. He thought that the problem will become more challenging if more fleets are involved.

Frederik Schutyser emphasized that the Commission was very happy last year to facilitate discussions regarding the closure. He said that the Commission would again be happy to get the attachés from the relevant Member States together, possibly before the ICES meeting, to get their views on the issue. He wanted to try organising a meeting next time Sean O'Donoghue would be in Brussels.

Sean O'Donoghue agreed that this was a useful idea, but also stressed that he wanted to be cautious since it was not clear in which direction ICES will go. If the closure has to be further north, then this meeting should take place rather sooner than later. He remembered that last time some very small fleets were involved which are not members of the Pelagic RAC and to be safe the attachés should indeed be informed of the process.

The chairman added this item to the action list.

• **Celtic Sea herring**

ICES based its advice on MSY implying that catches of this stock should be no more than 35.942 tonnes. STECF agreed with the stock assessment, but also noted that the Commission's request to ICES to give advice based on MSY was not in accordance with its rules for proposing TACs outlined in document COM(2013)319Final. The Pelagic RAC noticed this discrepancy as well and asked for clarification why the Commission decided not to follow the agreed long term management plan. The written reply received from the Commission was rather unsatisfactory and basically stated that the Commission had

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every right to ask for advice based on MSY. The Commission representative explained that ICES was asked for all stocks to provide advice based on MSY where available. ICES will in any case also provide advice based on existing plans. Asking for advice based on MSY does not prevent that the Commission may base its TAC proposal (cf. the Policy Statement) on a plan rather than on the MSY advice. Indeed, in the end it was agreed to follow the management plan as proposed by the Pelagic RAC.

• Irish Sea herring

ICES provided advice based on MSY which implied catches of no more than 5.251 tonnes. Both STECF and the Pelagic RAC agreed with this advice and the Council decided to set the TAC accordingly. The chairman also pointed out that work on a management plan for this stock was underway, but had been delayed due to problems with the model. It was agreed to follow up on this process throughout the year.

• Atlanto-Scandian herring

The ICES advice for Atlanto-Scandian herring was based on the management plan and provided a TAC figure of no more than 418.487 tonnes and STECF agreed. The Pelagic RAC also had advised following the management plan while seeking a return to the international agreement by all parties and having an international inspection team. Reason for this recommendation was that the Faroe Islands had stepped out of the international agreement and increased their TAC unilateral by sixfold. The Coastal State meeting was currently ongoing and it was expected that the Coastal States would follow the ICES advice.

• Northeast Atlantic mackerel

The chairman explained that also for the Northeast Atlantic mackerel stock negotiations were still ongoing. The ICES advice was based on an average of the last three years landings' and the stock has been downgraded to a data limited stock. This was a very unfortunate situation since mackerel is the most important pelagic stock in the North Atlantic. The chairman expressed hope to upgrade the stock to a data rich stock again at the upcoming benchmark and to have sound scientific advice in the future. The Pelagic RAC, in its advice, encouraged the Commission to find an acceptable Coastal States agreement.

Claus Reedtz Sparrevohn said that the model to be presented at the benchmark will mainly be based on Norwegian tagging data. The Norwegian tagging program is more

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than 30 years old and will be included in the assessment model. This should allow a more reliable estimation of stock size.

The chairman added that a tagging program has also been set up in Scotland and Denmark and that hopefully the results will be even better in the future.

Gerard van Balsfoort wondered whether it was already known when the results of the egg survey will be finalized.

Claus Reedtz Sparrevohn replied that the ambition was to have the results available before the benchmark, but he was not sure whether the scientists would be able to manage this in time.

The chairman was disappointed that the egg survey results might not be finalized before the benchmark and hoped that it was only details that still needed to be updated.

José Beltran wanted to know whether Claus Reedtz Sparrevohn could provide more information. He doubted that even with the new assessment model the results will be spectacular and he considered it unfortunate that the Pelagic RAC members did not have better data to contribute.

Claus Reedtz Sparrevohn replied that to his knowledge Norwegian survey data and a recruitment index from the ISBT will also be taken into account next to the Norwegian tagging data. The problem with the egg survey, which gives an estimate of TSB, was that the timing of the sampling had not been ideal. That was probably the reason why the results of the egg survey gave a lower biomass estimate.

5) Initiatives in 2014

The chairman presented a list of initiatives and invited members to add to that list. One of the most crucial elements will be the integration of the landing obligation into long-term management plans. This will not only be a major task for the Pelagic RAC, but also for the industry itself. The benchmark for mackerel and Celtic Sea herring will be important as well and several RAC members will participate in the process. Together with the GAP2 project and the Baltic Sea RAC work is ongoing to develop a management plan for the Western Baltic spring spawning herring stock. The chairman stressed the importance of stakeholder involvement throughout the entire process. Another issue was to finalize the management plan for herring in area VIa South and to continue the work on Irish Sea herring.

Sean O'Donoghue pointed out that Alan McCulla is the main stakeholder for the Irish Sea herring stock. He said that the project needed new impetus to get it back on track. A lot of effort has already been put in the modelling part, but the method used did not seem to work for this stock. He said that someone had to push and get things running again. He therefore suggested making this stock Alan McCulla's responsibility.

The chairman agreed and concluded that the secretariat will let him know about his

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responsibility. The final initiative foreseen for the coming year was in relation to organizing a mapping meeting with HAWG on herring spawning grounds.

Sean O'Donoghue wanted to add two other items to the list. Firstly, the yearly advice provided for all stocks and secondly technical measures. He also pointed out that there are many Natura 2000 sites and that others are being designated. The Member States are very active in that field, but it seems that the Pelagic RAC is not involved in the process at all anymore and someone should take on the task to look into the issues related to Natura 2000 sites and MPAs.

The chairman responded that the yearly advice is of course on the list of tasks the Pelagic RAC has to fulfil. However, this was not a new initiative. The Natura 2000 sites might need a new Working Group and the North Sea RAC was already working on this issue.

Gerard van Balsfoort remarked that three years ago the Pelagic RAC hired someone to look at MPAs. While he agreed that this topic will have to be taken up again, he also pointed out that this will be quite a huge task. Therefore he suggested offering an internship possibility to an interested student. The student should then produce a report and the Pelagic RAC can continue from there. He knew a lot of people participating in MPA meetings, but they were all from the demersal sector. He added that an internship would not be very expensive and hence not pose a threat to the Pelagic RAC's budget.

Sean O'Donoghue embraced the idea and mentioned that the Marine Strategy Framework Directive should be covered in the report as well.

Christine Absil offered help setting up terms of reference for such an internship and promised to help search for a student.

The chairman agreed with the suggestion. In terms of technical measures he said that it had to be decided who would deal with this. He wanted to keep it on the agenda for now.

6) AOB

There was no other business.

7) End of meeting

The chairman closed the meeting at 14.25 hrs.

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Annex I: Action items

- Arrange mapping meeting with HAWG (Esben Sverdrup Jensen, secretariat)
- Encourage scientists to produce high quality maps of stock distributions (Esben Sverdrup Jensen)
- Discuss closure in the rebuilding plan for VIa South herring with Member State attachés (Sean O'Donoghue, Esben Sverdrup Jensen, Frederik Schutyser)
- Follow-up on Irish Sea herring management plan (Alan McCulla, secretariat)
- Participate in the benchmark on mackerel and Celtic Sea herring and distribute report once available (Claus Reedtz Sparrevohn, Sean O'Donoghue, Esben Sverdrup-Jensen)
- Develop management plan for Western Baltic spring spawning herring within the GAP2 project (Claus Reedtz Sparrevohn, secretariat)
- Find a student intern to prepare a report on Natura 2000 sites and MPAs (Christine Absil, Gerard van Balsfoort, Verena Ohms)
- Decide who should deal with technical measures (Working Groups)