
Location: West-Indisch Huis, Amsterdam, NL (Herenmarkt 99, Tel: +31 20 625 7528)

Date: 11 July 2012

Start time: 09:00

End time: 12:30

More info: see www.pelagic-rac.org

Participants

Christian Olesen (chair), Fredrik Arrhenius, Rob Banning, Jose Beltran, Ramon de la Figuera, Antoine Dhellemmes, Lesley Duthie, Carmen Fernandez, Miren Garmendia, Ian Gatt, Almudena Gomez, Piebe Hotsma, Brian Isbister, Nils Christian Jensen, Reine J. Johansson, Anne-Marie Kats, Fredrik Lindberg, Iain MacSween, Audun Maråk, Stefano Mariani, Alan McCulla, David Miller, Fernando Nieto, Jerome Nouis, Francis O'Donnell, Sean O'Donoghue, Verena Ohms, Eibhlin O'Sullivan, Jesper Raakjaer, Eric Roeleveld, Bill Steward, Gerard van Balsfoort, John Ward

(1) Opening of WG I meeting by the chairman, Christian Olesen

The chairman opened the meeting at 9.06 am and welcomed the participants, especially Carmen Fernandez from ICES. Afterwards all participants briefly introduced themselves.

(2) Approval of the agenda

The agenda was approved without amendments.

(3) Approval of the minutes of WG I meeting on 8 February 2012

The minutes were approved without amendments.

(4) Fishing opportunities for 2013 – Presentation of ICES advice by Carmen Fernandez

The chairman explained that first for each stock the ICES advice would be presented by Carmen Fernandez and that subsequently there would be a PRAC discussion on the recommendation for each stock. He then gave the floor to Carmen Fernandez.

Carmen Fernandez thanked the PRAC for the opportunity to present the advice during the Working Group I meeting and said that she would present the advice for the North Sea autumn spawning stock, the Western Baltic Spring Spawning stock and 4 stocks in the Irish and Celtic Sea. Before she got into the details of the advice she explained the ICES advisory process in detail. This process starts with expert groups that meet in April and May and conduct the assessments of stocks. Afterwards a review group carries out a technical review to provide quality assurance independent of the expert groups. Subsequently the advice drafting groups draft the advice based on the

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conclusions reached by the two groups mentioned before. The ICES advisory committee (ACOM) then performs the final check to ensure consistency between different areas and stocks and finally approves the advice through a web conference before it is officially released and published on the ICES website alongside general documents explaining the principles of how ICES develops an advice.

If a management plan is consistent with the precautionary approach and agrees with the objectives, the advice will be given based on the management plan. Otherwise ICES will base its advice on MSY or if this does not appear feasible on the precautionary approach. All options are listed in the ICES advice sheets. The harvest control rule used by ICES is based on MSY. If SSB is above the defined trigger point, advice is given according to MSY. If SSB is below this trigger point, the mortality rate (F) has to be reduced. At very low biomass levels more caution is needed and F has to be reduced even more.

Carmen Fernandez then explained that currently ICES is in a transition process to adjust F so to reach MSY by 2015. That means that the advice for 2013 is a combination of the F in 2010 and F_{msy} . In 2013 F_{msy} gains more weight than the F of 2010. In 2014 F_{msy} will gain even more weight. By 2015 all weight will be given to F_{msy} and therefore by 2015 the advice will be according to the ICES harvest control rule.

She furthermore pointed out that there is a new approach for data-limited stocks, which are stocks for which a full assessment is not available. Until last year only qualitative advice was given on data-limited stocks recommending to either not increase catches or to decrease catches. This year there is a quantitative advice for data-limited stocks. The idea underlying the quantitative advice is using all available information and following the same principle as for data-rich stocks, namely adopting MSY or following the pre-cautionary approach in cases where knowledge of the stock is too limited.

Subsequently Carmen Fernandez presented the 2013 advice for all stocks separately. She pointed out that the first two pages of each advice provide a good overview while the following supporting information explains different aspects of the advice. The table "stock status" on the first page indicates all F values in relation to reference points over the last three years.

- **North Sea autumn spawning herring**

Carmen Fernandez explained that the ICES advice for 2013 follows the agreed EU-Norway management plan and the TAC is set at <480.200 tons including 465.750 tons for the A fleet. Furthermore it is advised that no bottom disturbing activities should take place in spawning areas during the spawning season and within one month before and after. The management plan should be revised due to the outcome of the benchmark in 2012 which changed the perception of the stock. The absolute values of SSB have increased while the values for fishing mortality have decreased. Therefore new reference points will have to be defined too. The main reasons for this new perception are changes

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in the estimated selection of the fishery and natural mortality. However, the stock has been in a low recruitment phase since 2003 and the productivity still seems to be low. Herring has a major impact on other fish species both as prey and predator as well as on herring feeding marine mammals and seabirds. Carmen Fernandez then explained that ICES provided separate TACs for directed (human consumption) fisheries and bycatch in industrial fisheries. Furthermore there is a separation into North Sea and Division IIIa which also catches WBSS. She provided an overview of the TACs based on different scenarios in the ICES advice which include no fishing, the EU-Norway management plan with a 15% limit on TAC change for the A fleet, a roll-over of the 2012 TAC for the A fleet, the EU-Norway harvest control rule with no limit on TAC change (corresponding to F_{msy} and F_{pa}) and a 15% decrease of the TAC.

Ian Gatt wondered if there was not a sixth scenario in the advice which Carmen Fernandez has not presented and which listed a fishing mortality of 0.3 for human consumption.

Carmen Fernandez confirmed that there was indeed a sixth scenario, but she was not sure what the basis for this scenario was and therefore did not include it in her presentation.

The chairman remarked that the stock seems to be in a much better condition than what has been told in the last 15 years when the industry was supposedly over-exploiting the stock. Suddenly ICES finds that the stock is in an excellent condition and he wonders if the new assessment is too good to be true and why people should trust the scientists nowadays more than in the past.

Carmen Fernandez pointed out that if the trends were different it would indeed be difficult to assess what is going on, but given that the trends remain the same and only the absolute values have shifted up, the new assessment can be trusted. The results of the new assessment show that there is a higher SSB than previously assumed, but the recruitment has not changed and therefore the stock still remains in a low productivity phase. She also explained that future reference points will be based on the SSB-recruitment relationship and that she expects B_{lim} and B_{pa} to be set at higher values. There have already been discussions in ICES on whether to drop the current reference points, but it has been decided to keep them for the 2013 advice.

The chairman wanted to know what the value for F_{msy} will be. The benchmark came up with a new proxy which explains the F of 0.3 in the current advice.

Carmen Fernandez said that F_{msy} has not been brought all the way into the advice and is therefore probably not ready yet. She pointed out that although SSB is higher than previously assumed the recruitment has not changed and that means that the stock is actually even less productive. This will have an impact on F_{msy} and she expects it to be lowered, but different simulations might give a higher value.

Reine Johansson responded that ICES can always explain things, but that he does not believe that the stock is still in a low recruitment phase. He claimed that SSB cannot be so high if so many consecutive years the stock has been in a low recruitment

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phase. He is convinced that at least some year classes must have shown average or above average recruitment.

Carmen Fernandez explained that there is always some uncertainty in the stock assessments, but that the data for the assessments is coming from landings. SSB is increasing and recruitment has been slightly higher in the last 2-3 years. Nevertheless the stock is still in a low recruitment phase and the reason for SSB to increase is simply a very low mortality rate.

Reine Johansson insisted upon some year classes having been stronger than claimed by ICES and it is wrong to say that the stock is in a low recruitment phase, but due to the new assessment the picture looks more realistic now.

Another problem which is not acknowledged so far concerns density dependency, but it was decided to follow up on this issue at a later point.

- **Western Baltic Herring (Division IIIa and Subdivisions 22-24)**

Carmen Fernandez explained that the mixing between North Sea autumn spawning and Western Baltic spring spawning herring stocks due to feeding migrations causes complications for the assessment and hence advice. The proportion of the stocks is unknown and depends on migration patterns as well as the state of the stocks. No management plan exists for WBSS and therefore the advice follows the MSY approach. While there is currently a transition phase to reach MSY by 2015 the mortality rate of the WBSS herring stock already reached F_{msy} in 2010 and is now below F_{msy} . Therefore the advice given this year represents MSY itself. Compared to 2011 SSB has increased in 2012. It seems also likely that MSY $B_{trigger}$ is underestimated and will probably change in the future. In 2012 the stock is above MSY $B_{trigger}$ and will likely remain above MSY $B_{trigger}$ in 2013. Recruitment has been generally low over the past years, but is now a little bit higher while fishing mortality has decreased over the last two years. ICES advises that catches should not increase in the North Sea to protect mature fish and that the optional transfer should be eliminated since this is one of the main causes of uncertainty in the assessment. Furthermore it is recommended that directed fisheries and bycatch in industrial fisheries have different TACs. So, on the basis of MSY ICES advises that catches in 2013 should not exceed 51.900 t.

Gerard van Balsfoort noted that according to the advice for 2013 ICES is only objecting the optional character of the flexibility, but not the flexibility itself. He also remarked that flexibility increased in the last three years and he was wondering what the influence of the flexibility is and whether it can be used in the calculations.

Carmen Fernandez replied that the flexibility is used in the calculations and was roughly around 40% in 2011. However, it currently remains unknown what will happen in 2012 and the advice for 2013 is given without taking a transfer into account.

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Gerard van Balsfoort emphasized that he is against flexibility and wanted to know if exporting part of the TAC to the North Sea might create a problem for the stock.

According to Carmen Fernandez there is no good answer to this question. The fact that fishing mortality decreased might be partly attributed to some of the TAC being caught in the North Sea.

It was noted by the chairman that ICES advises against the optionality of the transfer because it increases uncertainty. He then stated that uncertainty would also increase if the advised quotas were not caught. Yet ICES never advises to catch the complete quota and the chairman was wondering why not.

Reine Johansson remarked that ICES has crossed a line and overstepped its competence by advising against the optionality of a transfer. He believes that ICES will never again provide a similar recommendation as he is convinced that with this practice it is not possible to arrive at correct figures and ICES should be aware of this.

Carmen Fernandez reaffirmed that the explanation given to her to recommend against the optionality of a transfer is because it increases uncertainties and hence makes it difficult to provide a good forecast.

Gerard van Balsfoort said that it will be justifiable to allow for flexibility if there is evidence that mixing of stocks occurs. However there must be a strong scientific basis for this especially if the flexibility is around 50%. If it was necessary to lower fishing mortality should this really be achieved by transferring part of the fishing mortality into the North Sea?

Reine Johansson argued that this is not the problem, but that the real problem lies with ICES making false claims. ICES never had such good numbers before and therefore should not say that the flexibility would increase uncertainty.

Carmen Fernandez explained that one of her tasks during the PRAC meeting is to receive feedback from the PRAC members and communicate this back to ICES. At the same time, however, she feels obliged to say that ICES follows a rigorous advisory process as outlined before in order to provide unbiased advice independent of politics.

Reine Johansson respected this remark, but nevertheless was convinced that ICES must not claim that the flexibility increases uncertainties, while it is very well-known how much is transferred. He added that due to the new assessment the situation for providing advice and developing solutions together with the industry has much improved.

The chairman concluded that the transfer is a political decision which should not be part of the ICES advice as it has nothing to do with science.

- **West of Scotland herring (Division VIa North)**

The advice given for this stock is to follow the management plan which implies that landings should be < 27.480 tons. There should be no seabed-disturbing activities in

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spawning areas unless it can be proven that these activities have no negative impact on spawning, larval production and stock dynamics. This stock exhibits reduced recruitment since the 1980ies and has shown a historically low recruitment in the last decade. Fishing mortality is fluctuating around or below F_{msy} while SSB is fluctuating at a very low level just above B_{lim} which is the only defined reference point for this stock. Before 2006 the fishery was evenly distributed, but now the majority of the fishery takes place in the northern part and Q3. It is a clean fishery with little bycatch and low discards. The fishing mortality could be 0.25 if applying F_{msy} , but the 20% TAC constraint in the management plan sets F at 0.22 and provides some stability to the fishery. The assessment is noisy and there is considerably mixing with herring stocks west of the British Isles.

Sean O'Donoghue wanted to know if ICES is going to include seal consumption in future assessments and what ICES's view is on using management plans as the basis for advice.

Carmen Fernandez replied that seal consumption will probably not be considered in the future as its impact cannot be estimated reliably. However, should it become possible at some point to get a good estimate of the impact it will be included in the assessment. She also noted that work is underway to take mixing into account. Regarding ICES's view on management plans she said that if a management plan is found to be consistent with the precautionary approach and nobody with interest in the according stock objects, then the management plan will be used as basis for the advice.

Sean O'Donoghue reminded Carmen Fernandez that during the MIRAC meeting ICES had promised to have a closer look at their policy on using management plans as basis and particularly how to handle objections.

Gerard van Balsfoort remarked that there has been historically misreporting into the VIa North area and he was wondering if that was maybe true for the South too. He also noted that the ICES advice recommends no bottom disturbing activities and he wanted to know if that meant no bottom trawling.

Carmen Fernandez said that this does not apply to fisheries as far as she understood.

Ian Gatt noticed that ICES has placed greater emphasis on avoiding seabed disturbing activities on spawning grounds. He asked if ICES could provide a concrete report as to where the spawning areas are.

Carmen Fernandez responded that at the moment there is not enough knowledge about this stock to pinpoint the spawning grounds. Regarding misreporting she said that a record for this must be available somewhere, but that she does not have it because it is not spelled out in the advice.

- **Herring in areas VIa South and VII b,c**

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The ICES advice for 2013 recommends no catches unless a rebuilding plan is implemented and no bottom disturbing activities on spawning grounds unless it can be shown that these have no negative impact on spawning, larval production and stock dynamics. Currently there are two exploratory assessments, one based on catch-at-age data, the other on an acoustic survey. Although these surveys show different trends in the last decade both estimate SSB to be below B_{lim} and F to be above F_{msy} . In 2011 the PRAC proposed a rebuilding plan which could provide a good starting point for a rebuilding plan, but ICES has not been asked to review it.

Sean O'Donoghue did not believe the charts presented about this stock. He said that there is a huge recruitment coming through which is not shown in the advice. He was confident that this recruitment will eventually be picked up by scientists who usually lack behind the industry in detecting this. Moreover he stated that the mixing issue of this stock with those from the West of Scotland and the Irish Sea and Division VIa North has to be looked into and resolved. The PRAC's rebuilding plan suggests a boundary between 2 areas and that one area will be closed until the mixing problem has been solved.

- **Irish Sea herring (Division VIIa North of 52°30')**

This stock has been benchmarked in 2012 and there is now a full analytical assessment and reference points. Recruitment has been increasing and has been above average for several years now. At the same time F has been decreasing and is below F_{msy} now while SSB has been increasing and is well above $MSY_{Btrigger}$. ICES recommends following MSY in 2013 and hence F should be set at 0.26 and no more than 5.100 tons should be caught. Furthermore there should be no seabed disturbing activities on spawning grounds unless it can be shown that these have no negative impact on spawning, larval production and stock dynamics. Most of the TAC is caught by pelagic trawlers, but some is also caught by small local gillnet fishers. Mixing of this stock with neighbouring herring stocks occurs.

Alan McCulla pointed out that there is still no long-term management plan for this stock, but that there will be a meeting at the end of July in Belfast specifically to put this forward. He furthermore said that according to the benchmark meeting the F in 2010 suggests that this stock is under-utilized and that in 2013 there will still be no full exploitation if following the ICES advice. This has to be discussed, not only today but in general.

Carmen Fernandez clarified that the working group and benchmark reports are one thing, but that the ICES advice is another thing. She uttered surprise that the benchmark report presumably suggests that the stock is under-utilized given that fishing mortality is now at F_{msy} , but has been above before. She wondered if there has maybe been a misunderstanding in the benchmark report.

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Alan McCulla said that SSB is at the highest level since 15 years, but that this stock will be discussed in detail in Belfast at the end of July.

- **Celtic Sea & South of Ireland herring (Division VIIa South of 52°30' and Divisions VII g,h,j,k)**

The ICES advice for 2013 follows the MSY approach and recommends landings <19.700 tons. There should be no seabed disturbing activities on spawning grounds unless it can be shown that these have no negative impact on spawning, larval production and stock dynamics. There have been several good year classes with high recruitment and a low fishing mortality which in turn caused an increase in SSB that is now well above B_{pa} . Carmen Fernandez also explained that a long-term management plan has been agreed upon by the Irish industry and that ICES is currently in the process of evaluating this. Juveniles of this stock migrate further north into the Irish Sea and later swim back into the Celtic Sea to spawn. Discards have been increasing lately due to the quota management system which leads to a higher uncertainty in the assessment.

Eibhlin O'Sullivan asked what the timeframe is for evaluating the long-term management plan and Carmen Fernandez said that the response will be provided sometime in October.

After the presentation by Carmen Fernandez the chairman took over and went through the herring stocks one by one to discuss which advice should be given by the PRAC.

- **Western Baltic Herring (Division IIIa and Subdivisions 22-24)**

The chairman presented a power point slide with an overview of the current ICES advice and a comparison with last year. He asked the PRAC members what the PRAC's advice should be for 2013.

Reine Johansson suggested recommending the same advice as last year.

The chairman reminded the meeting that last year no advice was given as there is no management plan. So, the proposal is to do the same this year and hence give no advice.

Gerard van Balsfoort wanted to know if last year something was said about flexibility and the chairman responded that last year it was advised to discontinue flexibility and he suggested doing the same this year.

However, Reine Johansson did not want to mention flexibility in this year's advice and the chairman subsequently concluded that there are now two proposals: one suggesting doing the same as last year where the PRAC did not recommend a TAC, but did

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recommend discontinuing flexibility and one in which flexibility would not be mentioned. The chairman asked Reine Johansson if he could live with the same advice as given last year.

Reine Johansson responded that the chairman should rather ask Gerard van Balsfoort if he could live with not mentioning flexibility and that he would be happy with not mentioning it and instead referring to a management plan which is currently being developed.

Gerard van Balsfoort replied that he never had a problem with the flexibility being around 25%, but that he did not want it to be as high as 50%. Therefore he was not completely against it, but emphasized that the PRAC's advice had to be consistent and given that last year no flexibility was advised, unless it was based on scientific insight, this year should be done the same. He suggested as a compromise to say in the advice that the PRAC is not principally against the flexibility, but that it is unhappy with a flexibility which is not based on science, but seems to be arbitrary.

The chairman asked the disagreeing parties if they could agree to the flexibility being reduced to historical values.

Reine Johansson once again pointed out that ICES has made a mistake by advising against the flexibility, but that he might have to live with the PRAC doing the same if it means so much to Gerard van Balsfoort.

The chairman explained that Reine Johansson misunderstood the ICES advice. According to him ICES only advised against the optionality of the flexibility, but not against the flexibility itself.

Reine Johansson said that the flexibility has existed for over 21 years and proposed waiting for one year while hoping that next year there will be a long-term management plan. The chairman remarked that a lot of time has been spend on this rather small issue and appealed to Reine Johansson to agree to last year's text. However, in Reine Johansson's view the PRAC might have given a wrong advice last year.

The chairman sought clarification from Carmen Fernandez regarding the meaning of the ICES's text regarding flexibility and Carmen Fernandez reassured that the comment was really only about eliminating the optionality of the flexibility, and not the flexibility itself.

Gerard van Balsfoort suggested having a text like *"any change different from historical levels should be based on science"*. He could not imagine that the EU and Norway will base the flexibility on something arbitrary, but he did not want it to be based on politics either.

Reine Johansson again claimed that the problem lies with ICES being wrong about increased uncertainties due to the flexibility. He could only agree to have this evaluated in the framework of a long-term management plan.

The chairman insisted on finding a compromise, but Reine Johansson wanted to have two different advices. The chairman stressed that this would be the second time in the history of the PRAC where no agreement can be found which would be very disappointing.

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However, Reine Johansson insisted that there were different opinions and that the only way to solve this issue will be within the framework of a long-term management plan. Therefore the PRAC should wait with providing advice until there is a long-term management plan.

This suggestion was not accepted by the chairman and he proposed to discuss this issue during lunch together with Gerard van Balsfoort and to inform the meeting after lunch.

Jesper Raakjaer proposed to postpone a decision till the October meeting and this proposal was followed.

- **North Sea autumn spawning herring**

The chairman explained why it matters for stakeholders to participate as observers in the advice drafting groups. As an example he illustrated the development of the herring advice and pointed out the influence stakeholders had in that process which has now resulted in a combined EU-Norway request to ICES regarding a revision of the current long-term management plan. Given that ICES is expected to respond to this request on the 1st of October the chairman suggested postponing the discussion on the PRAC's advice until the October meeting.

Gerard van Balsfoort uttered full agreement with this suggestion as did the rest of the attendees.

- **West of Scotland herring (Division VIa North)**

Ian Gatt voted to support the management plan as this plan seems to be working well.

Gerard van Balsfoort raised the question whether something should be said about seabed disturbance, specifically that this is referring to gravel extraction and not fisheries.

Sean O'Donoghue, however, explained that such a remark will probably not be necessary. He and Ian Gatt are part of the advice drafting group and therefore he knows that the ICES advice does not refer to fishing gear when talking about bottom disturbance.

The chairman said that including the assumption that seabed disturbing activities does not refer to other fishing activities in the advice will not do any harm.

Ian Gatt agreed with this remark and added that the PRAC should also ask for advice regarding the locations of the spawning grounds. He highlighted that if the recommendation included remarks about seabed disturbing activities, that this might have a significant impact on several areas also outside the fishing industry.

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It was concluded that the PRAC's advice would be to follow the management plan and to include questions regarding seabed disturbing activities in the communication with ICES.

- **Herring in areas VIa South and VII b,c**

Sean O'Donoghue presented a revised rebuilding plan for this stock developed by the Federation of Irish Fishermen (FIF) after STECF did not favour the original plan submitted by the PRAC to the European Commission in September 2011.

STECF had mainly criticized the original plan for not allowing zero catches if necessary and for not taking mixing with the herring stock in VIa North into account. These issues have been addressed in the revised plan by allowing for a linear TAC reduction to zero when SSB falls below $B_{trigger}$ and by having established an interim temporary exclusion zone in order to avoid bycatches and unaccounted mortality.

Sean O'Donoghue emphasized that this closure area would only affect the Irish fleet which already has agreed with the revised rebuilding plan. Therefore he suggested endorsing the plan so to get some movement into the situation.

Gerard van Balsfoort pointed out that a rebuilding plan must aim for a specific stock size and he wanted to know if there were any ideas about what the stock size should be.

Sean O'Donoghue replied that this plan had originally been intended to be a management plan, but ICES decided that there had to be a rebuilding plan first. He furthermore concluded that if there is a benchmark next year it might be possible to afterwards have a management plan.

Gerard van Balsfoort suggested including this in the revised rebuilding plan and Sean O'Donoghue agreed that this was a good idea.

The chairman noted that point 6 regarding the closed area was rather vague and he proposed indicating a time limit for the closure. Sean O'Donoghue accepted this suggestion and proposed a two year time limit.

However, Ian Gatt pointed out that he would prefer an advice, e.g. from ICES, stating that a closed area would indeed be beneficial. If there is no clear benefit of a closed area it will be pointless to have one.

According to Sean O'Donoghue it would be possible to remove the closure if someone was able to figure out the mixing issue, but he anticipated that that will take a lot of time.

It was concluded that the PRAC would recommend following the revised rebuilding plan with a closed area for two years. At the same time it was opted for asking the Commission to send a request to ICES and have them investigate the plan for scrutiny. Point 6 of the revised plan will be conditional on ICES's conclusions. Furthermore point 7 from the Celtic Sea plan will be included in the PRAC's recommendation stating that "*when*

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the SSB is deemed to have recovered to a size equal to or greater than B_{pa} in three consecutive years, the rebuilding plan will be superseded by a long-term management plan".

- **Celtic Sea & South of Ireland herring (Division VIIa South of 52°30' and Divisions VII g,h,j,k)**

Eibhlin O'Sullivan said that it would be difficult to give a recommendation before ICES has evaluated the management plan. She therefore suggested waiting until October.

However, the chairman noted that the Commission wants a proposal in September and Carmen Fernandez pointed out that the ICES evaluation will probably not be ready before late October/early November.

The chairman subsequently proposed to advise a TAC in accordance with the management plan. Although ICES did not follow this plan before Eibhlin O'Sullivan agreed that the PRAC should support the management plan.

Gerard van Balsfoort suggested to also include in the PRAC's recommendation the option to follow MSY if ICES advises against the management plan.

John Ward too favoured following the management plan and in the end it was agreed that the PRAC would recommend the management plan and if this will not be realized to follow MSY instead.

- **Irish Sea herring (Division VIIa North of 52°30')**

Alan McCulla suggested waiting with finalizing a recommendation until after the GAP2 meeting on Irish Sea herring on 24 July. He hopes that this meeting will result in a long-term management plan.

It was hence agreed that the PRAC's recommendation on Irish Sea Herring will be decided through written procedure after the GAP2 meeting.

(5) Letter to WGWIDE

The chairman gave an overview of the communication with HAWG.

Regarding West of Scotland herring the PRAC wondered if predation by seals might be taken into account in future assessments. HAWG informed the PRAC that a benchmark is planned for this stock in 2015 where natural mortality values used in the assessment will be reviewed and if appropriate revised. HAWG also expects research on multi-species assessment in the North Sea over the next 3 years.

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The PRAC was concerned whether local stocks present in area IIIa which declined in abundance in the past have recovered in recent years and also if the sampling scheme is suitable to establish a reliable estimate on the mixing ratio of North Sea herring and Western Baltic herring. HAWG explained that both concerns will be included on the issue list for the 2013 benchmark.

Furthermore there has been the hypothesis that cannibalism occurs as a density-dependent effect in the North Sea herring stock and the PRAC had discussions as to whether it might be feasible to address this issue in future assessments. The 2012 benchmark did not take cannibalism into account and according to HAWG it remains unknown if cannibalism has an impact on this stock and if yes, how big this impact is. More research would be needed in order to take cannibalism into consideration in the future.

The chairman then reminded the meeting that it had been agreed in February to send a letter to WGWIDE which has not been done yet because he wanted to collect suggestions and comments for this letter today. So far two issues have been raised regarding mackerel and two regarding blue whiting.

Concerning mackerel one of the issues regards the current productivity of the stock and if this might be an indication for a regime shift. If so, it would be interesting to find out what would be needed scientifically to determine whether this is actually the case and whether management should take this into account. Furthermore in 2010 a paper published by Simmonds et al. suggested a structural under-estimation of SSB with SSB being at least double of the official figure and the PRAC is curious to hear ICES's opinion about this paper.

In respect to blue whiting it has been noted that since 2006 almost all of the catch of blue whiting has been taken outside the Icelandic EEZ and the PRAC would like to know whether a change in migration pattern or a collapse of the blue whiting stock could explain this observation. Apart from that the PRAC strives to gain more insight into the ecological interaction between the mackerel and blue whiting stocks and possibly resulting management considerations.

The chairman also informed the meeting attendees that any other issues should be communicated to him as soon as possible as the letter has to be sent shortly.

(6) Question round/discussion

There were no questions.

(7) A.O.B.

There was no other business.



Location: West-Indisch Huis, Amsterdam, NL (Herenmarkt 99, Tel: +31 20 625 7528)

Date: 11 July 2012

Start time: 09:00

End time: 12:30

More info: see www.pelagic-rac.org

(8) End of WG I meeting

The chairman closed the meeting at 12.40 pm and thanked the participants and Carmen Fernandez for presenting the ICES advice.