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

Date: 4 February 2014

Start time: 14:50

End time: 16:50

More info: see www.pelagic-rac.org

Participants:

Sean O'Donoghue (chairman), Anne Mette Bæk Jespersen, Barry Delany, Bent Pallisgaard, Björn Lindblad, Brian Isbister, Christine Absil, Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn, Eibhlin O'Sullivan, Eric Roeleveld, Esben Sverdrup-Jensen, 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 II meeting by the chairman, Sean O'Donoghue

The chairman opened the meeting at 14.50 hrs and announced that he will try to finish by 17.00 hrs. He also announced that David Miller and Aukje Coers will present a draft management plan for North Sea horse mackerel later at the meeting.

2) Approval of the agenda

The agenda was approved without amendments.

3) Follow-up on action points from October meeting

There were four action points to be followed up upon from the October meeting. One was in relation to the MIRAC meeting and this point had already been discussed at the Executive Committee meeting.

The second action item dealt with the development of a management plan for southern horse mackerel. José Beltran explained that the situation was the same as in October. As far as the Spanish fleet is concerned people are very willing to endorse a management plan. However, regarding the Portuguese fleet no feedback was received. José Beltran did talk to the Portuguese industry at several occasions and encouraged them to contact the Pelagic RAC, but they did not. Therefore José Beltran suggested organising a meeting and inviting the Portuguese representatives, who seemed interested in developing a management plan at the beginning. Other than that he did not know what else to do.

The chairman understood José Beltran's frustration and fully accepted that he tried everything he could to get Portugal involved. He wondered whether Antonio Cabral would be willing to join the Pelagic RAC and said that Portugal's participation would be very welcome. He also pointed out that the secretariat had huge problems getting data from Portugal.

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José Beltran remembered that Portugal was a member of the Pelagic RAC at the beginning, but terminated their membership after a while. He did not know whether that was for budget or other reasons. He offered contacting Antonio Cabral again and inviting him to join the Pelagic RAC.

The chairman suggested a two point approach. On the one hand he asked José Beltran to informally contact Antonio Cabral again. On the other hand he asked the secretariat to send an official invitation to him to the next Pelagic RAC meeting. He also was in favour of the idea to organise a Spanish-Portuguese stakeholder meeting. However, at the moment there was no budget for this.

José Beltran understood the budget constraints, but proposed another solution. Rather than organising a meeting on behalf of the Pelagic RAC he said that the South West Waters RAC might be able to facilitate the process by inviting a Pelagic RAC representative to their own meeting and having the Pelagic RAC representative present its request and see how the southern states react. He thought that there was a South West Waters RAC meeting in relation to the GEPETO project in March or April in Dublin and that might be a good occasion.

The chairman agreed to this suggestion and offered to participate in the GEPETO meeting as Pelagic RAC representative.

Miren Garmendia added that in the South West Waters RAC stakeholders from Spain and Portugal participate and both have an interest in horse mackerel. She was aware of budget issues and only a few stakeholders were able to attend RAC meetings and therefore could not cover all RACs. Therefore, sending a Pelagic RAC representative to the GEPETO meeting to talk to the president of the South West Waters RAC is likely a good way forward.

The third item on the action list was the boarfish management plan. There are six categories in the plan, but five of them relate to data poor stocks and are not needed now that boarfish is considered a data rich stock. These categories can easily be removed from the management plan without this constituting a new plan. There was no urgency to do so. Rather the urgency lied with ICES performing a full analytical assessment of the plan.

Frederik Schutyser remarked that ICES evaluated the first part of the management plan to be precautionary. As long as the conditions to apply this section of the plan are met, the Commission is happy to use the plan as basis when considering its proposals for TACs.

The chairman said that the boarfish management plan will have to be revisited later, also with regards to the closures. The final action point was to provide advice on fishing opportunities in 2014 which had been done. The chairman expressed his satisfaction with the progress on all action points listed.

José Beltran noted that there has already been a discussion on external reviewers in ICES. Nevertheless he wanted to add that good results sometimes depend on getting the right and innovative reviewer. In unlucky cases, however, processes might get stuck just because of the wrong person.

The chairman concluded that it might be worth raising the issue again as he

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considered it very important. He stressed that it was ICES' matter to choose external reviewers, but he was worried that ICES might not have sufficient resources to always make the best choice. He pointed out that the United States and Canada always pay the full expenses when they get a reviewer from Europe. However, this was not the case the other way around which could lead to choosing less qualified reviewers due to budget constraints.

4) Evaluation of efforts and results in 2013

The chairman then continued dealing with each stock separately and summarized the results of efforts in 2013.

- **Western horse mackerel**

The chairman explained that area VIIIC is now included in the management area even though it is treated separately in the TAC and quota regulation. ICES decided that there was a problem with the management plan and therefore based its advice on MSY. STECF agreed with ICES. However, STECF also said that if the management plan was to be followed the TAC would amount to 137.524 tonnes. The Pelagic RAC, after long discussion, reached consensus to set the TAC at 136.000 tonnes and develop a management plan as soon as possible. If there is no management plan in 2015 MSY shall be followed. The Commission when proposing a TAC did not follow the Pelagic RAC suggestion, but MSY. However, the Council saw things differently, but due to postponed negotiations there is no final TAC figure available yet. The provisional figure is 133.420 tonnes for the EU portion and 135.420 tonnes for the entire catches. Basically, the Council hence agreed with the Pelagic RAC's proposal.

Frederik Schutyser explained that the Pelagic RAC proposal had been considered, but that the political choice was to follow MSY. Nevertheless, the Commission was very aware that the Member States defended the Pelagic RAC proposal. The reason for the TAC being still provisional is because a small part of the quota may be used for exchanges with the Faroese.

The chairman said that he was a bit disappointed that the Commission did not follow the Pelagic RAC proposal even though the Commission officials were quite supportive at the last Pelagic RAC meeting.

Frederik Schutyser underlined that the Commission did seriously consider the option, but eventually decided to use the MSY advice available when proposing a TAC. A joint Council and Commission statement made at the December Council states that "[...] the Commission and Council agree on the desirability of a long-term harvesting strategy for the Western stock of horse mackerel based on stakeholder proposals, provided that the latter are assessed as precautionary and able to ensure the stock is harvested at MSY levels as soon as possible and no later than 2020. [...] the Commission and the Council agree that

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future fishing opportunities for this stock could be fixed in accordance with such a strategy once the scientific advisory bodies have had the opportunity to carry out this assessment and suggested any necessary improvements to meet the above conditions.”

- **North Sea horse mackerel**

ICES provided advice based on MSY and STECF agreed. The Pelagic RAC, however, supported the proposal it had made in the previous year, namely to stepwise reduce the TAC which would be superseded by the implementation of a management plan. The provisional TAC figure is 27.815 tonnes, but does not include a transfer to Norway yet. The chairman thought that the final TAC will likely be in accordance with the Pelagic RAC recommendation.

Gerard van Balsfoort wanted to understand how the TAC figure was decided. He understood that the TAC was only provisional and that there would be a transfer to Norway. However, the difference between the provisional TAC and the Pelagic RAC recommendation was 4.000 tonnes. This seemed quite high to him.

The chairman replied that the final figure will be quite close to the Pelagic RAC recommendation. He also said that the Norwegian transfer will certainly not amount to 4.000 tonnes. He was not sure why exactly there was this difference of 4.000 tonnes, but thought that it might be a rounding issue.

Frederik Schutyser promised to look into this issue.

- **Southern horse mackerel**

Given the lack of a management plan all parties had recommended following MSY which led to a TAC of 35.000 tonnes.

- **Blue whiting**

ICES advised based on the management plan that landings should be no more than 948.950 tonnes and STECF agreed. There was a long debate about that stock at the October meeting and the Pelagic RAC did not have enough time to settle on a precise TAC number. Instead it recommended an immediate evaluation of the Pelagic RAC management plan. This evaluation was provided in the 3rd week of October and basically said that the plan was precautionary and could be used if managers saw fit. The TAC has still not been decided yet, but the chairman hoped that the Coastal States would reach an agreement this week and resolve any outstanding issues. The main question is at what value fishing mortality will be set. It will be something between 0.22 and 0.3. The chairman was also

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certain that the TAC will be higher than in 2013 and higher than the 900.000 tonnes suggested by ICES.

- **Boarfish**

The chairman explained that due to the full analytical assessment now available the TAC changed significantly and ICES advised landings of less than 127.509 tonnes which was supported by STECF. The Pelagic RAC recommended the same TAC figure, but also pointed out that the closures as set out in the management plan should be applied. Furthermore the management plan should be updated in light of the ICES advice and the boarfish acoustic survey should be included under the Data Collection Framework. Regarding the suggested closures the chairman pointed out that they were ignored in the case of boarfish, but endorsed for VIa South herring. He wanted to know what the reason for this was and whether it had to do with co-decision.

Frederik Schutyser confirmed that this could be due to the fact that the closures proposed may require a co-decision act to be adopted. The story is different in the case of, for example, VIa South herring where it was easier to apply the closure because the closure is intimately linked to the level of the TAC, which was not the case for boarfish.

The chairman appreciated the clarification offered and said that the closures will be discussed during the year. If they could only be implemented through co-decision this will have to be taken into account. He also wondered whether there has been any progress on including boarfish under Data Collection Framework.

Frederik Schutyser confirmed that it should be no problem to include boarfish in the data collection and that his unit was pushing for including the stock.

The Council agreed on the TAC as suggested by ICES and the Pelagic RAC. Esben Sverdrup Jensen pointed out that in the TAC and quota regulation this TAC is mentioned to be precautionary, even though it is an analytical TAC. The Pelagic RAC sent a letter to the Commission asking for rectification and he wanted to know whether any response had been received.

Frederik Schutyser replied that he had not seen the Pelagic RAC letter. He remembered that in 2012 a number of labels had been changed and some were changed back. He promised to check this issue and the letter.

The chairman thanked him for his efforts and remarked that it was just a small error, which nevertheless had to be corrected.

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5) Initiatives and priorities 2014

The chairman moved on to the next agenda point which listed the initiatives and priorities per stock foreseen for 2014.

- **Western horse mackerel**

The chairman recalled that the Pelagic RAC had recommended solving the problems related to the management plan and assessment. The only way this can be done is through financial support from the industry. He further explained that the process was still on track and that scientists were planning to have three meetings between now and June. He was hopeful that a revised plan could be discussed at the Pelagic RAC meeting in July which should then be evaluated by WG WIDE in August. However, this will require forthcoming financial support for about 126 man hours plus the three meetings mentioned. The total costs amount to approximately 83.000 EUR. The chairman understood that the Commission had some money left for this work and he was quite confident that with the scientists involved all issues can be addressed appropriately. Talking as industry representative he said that the industry was very keen on getting the work done and that he would appreciate if the Commission could let him know how much money was left from last year's contract between the EU and ICES. He also wanted to get the egg survey finalized as soon as possible.

David Miller expected the final results of the egg survey to be available at the beginning of April.

Frederik Schutyser promised to check how much was left over from last year's contract with ICES, but he was sure that it was only a small amount. He also said that there was some confusion, because ICES seemed to have been under the impression that the Pelagic RAC would cover the expenses of the work to be done. It now has been clarified that the resources will come from the industry and he wanted to know how to ensure ICES' independence.

The chairman explained that the scientists were quite willing to perform the work independent of ICES. The results will still have to be endorsed by the Pelagic RAC and subsequently be submitted to ICES. From an industry view it did not matter whether the initial work will be performed by ICES or independent scientists.

Gerard van Balsfoort understood Frederik's concern and pointed out that in the future industry might increasingly fund research. Therefore the question of scientific independence is very relevant. He did not have an answer now, but agreed that this issue will have to be dealt with in the future. In the specific case of the western horse mackerel management plan, however, he was hoping that ICES would take the lead of this project since ICES still had a job to do. If lack of financial resources is a problem, then the industry will be willing to help out.

The chairman added that the initial development of the plan was also done by a

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group of independent scientists and later the work was taken over by ICES. So, there was some precedence for this. He emphasized that he did not want to wait until July for something to happen.

Christine Absil supported the initiative of the industry, but also agreed that some infrastructure will have to be put in place to ensure that the research remains independent.

The chairman agreed, but also was very confident that ICES will deal with this issue if it has any doubts regarding the independence of the work. He also emphasized again that the Pelagic RAC does not have the funds for the revision of the management plan and hence the industry was the only party capable to support the process.

José Beltran wanted to know whether these kinds of initiatives will always have to be supported by the industry or whether there will be another channel in the future.

The chairman explained that under the new EMFF the RACs will be able to apply for funding of projects like this. At the moment, however, this was not possible and therefore the industry had to help.

Gerard van Balsfoort also mentioned that he had asked the Dutch government to contribute, because during the transition period other funds have to be found.

- **North Sea horse mackerel**

The chairman invited David Miller to give a presentation on the status of the draft management plan.

David Miller explained that at the beginning of the development process there was no abundance index available and no stock assessment. Therefore the stock scored very low (level 5) under the ICES data-limited stocks framework. The idea was to first develop a biomass index and possibly an assessment model and finally a management plan. A stepwise approach was taken to first explore available data and subsequently explore harvest strategies based on interpretation of the available information. At the same time the aim was to improve the knowledge base by identifying and prioritizing data gaps and subsequently formulate a plan to tackle the issues together with the industry. David Miller provided a brief recapitulation of the situation at the Pelagic RAC October meeting. The IBTS index from the third quarter, when the stock is abundant in the North Sea, was used. The problem is that most catches are being taken in the English Channel. However, if the assumed migration pattern is correct, then it is the same stock being considered in the catches and the IBTS. The survey area which was believed to cover the North Sea stock alone was then defined and ICES decided that the derived abundance index was a good index to be used for this stock. Only fish of 20 cm or bigger were used in the abundance index which made up 96% of the commercial catch. The result indicated that there was a period of high biomass in the late 1990ies, but recently the biomass seemed to be rather low. The spikes in the index are unrealistic, but were nevertheless used in the assessment model and presented at last year's ICES conference. It was concluded that stock biomass

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declined sharply and appropriate catch levels are required to allow stock recovery. After the Pelagic RAC October meeting the idea was to establish the index more sophisticatedly and generate the final management strategy evaluation results which should then be examined and discussed with the project partners to decide which harvest control rule to include in the long-term management plan. Ideally the management plan will be evaluated by ICES in spring 2014. The harvest control rule that was eventually proposed uses the index of abundance and looks at the slope over a number of years. The steeper the slope, the higher is the last number, and the higher the TAC. The harvest control rule also has a trigger point which compares the desired situation with the current index. This serves as a safety measure. Getting even a modest recovery of the stock will require a rather large drop in catch. The difficulty with this stock is the variable recruitment and if there was a sharper recruitment the drop in catches would not have to be so steep. MSY will probably equal a catch of around 20.000 tonnes a year. Finally, a number of suggestions were made to improve the knowledge base. Age information should be collected from horse mackerel caught in the third quarter of the IBTS in the North Sea. Furthermore, information should be obtained on potential mixing of western and North Sea horse mackerel in ICES area VIIId and the potential to utilize acoustic data from commercial vessels should be explored. The plan should then be submitted to ICES and evaluated in a workshop with reviewers and stakeholders.

Gerard van Balsfoort found it quite interesting how far the focus group has progressed with a data limited stock. He wanted to know why data from the IBTS in ICES area VIIId could not be used.

David Miller explained that area VIIId was only recently added to the IBTS and only in quarter 1 which is not at the same time as in the North Sea. Therefore these data cannot be added together.

Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn understood that in the evaluation there was some kind of assessment model used to get an idea of the stock size. He wanted to know whether the idea was to use this model also to get a real stock assessment in order to get away from the data-limited framework.

David Miller replied that this was indeed the idea, but that a lot will depend on filling the knowledge gaps. The key problem is that there is a lot of mixing with the western stock and that makes it difficult to get an assessment for the North Sea stock alone. The information currently available is enough to perform initial management evaluations.

The chairman assumed that in terms of recruitment the same applies for North Sea horse mackerel as does for western horse mackerel, i.e. indeterminate spawning. He wanted to know how the model takes this into account. He also pointed out that the management areas changed recently and he wondered how that will influence the output.

David Miller said that the recruitment issues are less extreme for the North Sea stock than they are for the Western stock. Nevertheless recruitment is tricky to deal with and one of the key issues as it does influence whether the harvest control rule works well or not. At the moment different scenarios and strategies are investigated. How well they work will ultimately depend on real recruitment. He also remarked that the catch data are not

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perfectly comparable in recent years with past years.

Aukje Coers clarified that currently the realignment does not have any effect as nothing is done with it specifically in the model at the moment. It has been discussed with the Dutch industry whether area misreporting had occurred from VIId to the North Sea. However, if both areas are part of the distribution area then it does not make a big difference. Only if there is mixing taking place in VIId then this will have implications. As far as ICES is concerned the assumption is that VII is part of the North Sea. At the moment the model is tested rather for robustness.

The chairman pointed out that the Pelagic RAC has not yet taken ownership of the plan, but he thought that the RAC was the initiator and as such it should be up to the Pelagic RAC to submit the plan to ICES.

Gerard van Balsfoort explained that the need for a North Sea horse mackerel management plan has been emphasized many times by the Pelagic RAC. The PFA together with the Danish industry and the Pelagic RAC secretariat organised funding and scientists for this project which eventually led to a presentation in WGWIDE. He thought that this was in agreement with the Pelagic RAC. Now there is a request ready to be submitted to ICES, but the Pelagic RAC cannot submit anything to ICES. Since the Pelagic RAC cannot submit the plan to ICES it has to be done either through the Commission, the Danish Member State or the Dutch Member State. Therefore he has informally approached the Dutch government to make the request. The Dutch Member State expressed its willingness to do so, but has not done it yet. Once the plan has been evaluated by ICES it should come back to the Pelagic RAC for discussion and hopefully will then be recommended by the Executive Committee. He said that the procedure was not so different from how management plans for other stocks are usually dealt with.

The chairman replied that from a Pelagic RAC point of view this management plan has not yet been seen or discussed and if it is to be submitted as a recommendation it will have to be endorsed by the Executive Committee. However, the procedure suggested by Gerard van Balsfoort involved frontloading the plan and getting the review done before the Executive Committee gets to decide on it.

Gerard van Balsfoort responded that information on how the plan was developed and what it contains was presented to the Pelagic RAC at this very moment and hence members can already think about it. Organizing an ICES review process always requires a lot of work and resources and he hoped that the Pelagic RAC members would support this process already having been initiated in order to speed it up.

Nevertheless the chairman emphasized that the Executive Committee will have the final decision at the July meeting to submit the plan to ICES for WGWIDE or not. He wanted to receive a document similar to the one for blue whiting which can be discussed at the July meeting.

Gerard van Balsfoort noted that this document has already been circulated and that members can submit any questions they have to the secretariat.

The chairman wanted everybody to understand the process and that members will

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get the opportunity to agree or disagree with the plan in July independent of whether it has gone through a review process in advance. The fact that a review is foreseen to take place before the plan is submitted to the Executive Committee is even better since it will support the decision making process.

Aukje Coers explained that it was a very unique approach to involve ICES at such an early stage, but she hoped that it will help with the entire review process.

The chairman agreed that this made sense, but also stressed that WGWIDE might still take a different view again once the group meets in August. He thanked David Miller and Aukje Coers for the presentation.

- **Southern horse mackerel**

The chairman said that the number one priority for this stock was to develop a management plan. It has already been decided how to try to get the Portuguese stakeholders involved and José Beltran will help with this. Maybe it will even be possible to present a draft management plan at the July meeting. This is one of only two stocks which do not have a management plan yet and the chairman was keen on changing that. Furthermore the discard plan will have to be finalized and a TAC recommendation for 2015 be given later in the year.

- **Blue whiting**

The chairman pointed out that the Pelagic RAC had put a lot of time and effort into developing a harvest control rule with two trigger points. Once the situation with mackerel will be solved it will therefore be a priority to ask the Commission to again put forward the Pelagic RAC management plan. This will not be an easy task and require a fair amount of work. However, the plan does not need to be evaluated by ICES again, but rather the Coastal States have to be convinced to look at the plan. Furthermore, work on recruitment and environmental factors influencing the stock should be continued, e.g. the effect of the sub polar gyre on recruitment. Also, the discard plan will have to be finalized for this stock as for all other stocks and the annual TAC recommendation should be given in October.

- **Boarfish**

The management plan for boarfish will have to be updated which can be done quite easily and will not make a difference to the scientific evaluation. Also, the closures will have to be followed up on and the Commission will find out whether this requires co-decision. In addition the Pelagic RAC should continue to ask for inclusion of the acoustic survey into the

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data collection regulation. The discard plan will have to be finalized and a TAC recommendation for 2015 be given in October.

6) AOB

There was no other business.

7) End of meeting

The chairman closed the meeting at 16.50 and thanked the participants for their attendance.

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Annex I: action list

- Informally ask Antonio Cabral to participate in the next Pelagic RAC meeting (José Beltran) ✓
- Officially invite Antonio Cabral to the next Pelagic RAC meeting (secretariat) ✓
- Participate at the GEPETO meeting in Dublin to liaise with Portuguese stakeholders (Sean O'Donoghue)
- Revisit boarfish management plan, also with regards to closures (Working Group II)
- Raise the issue again how ICES choses external reviewers in relation to the budget available (Sean O'Donoghue)
- Request Commission to follow management plan for western horse mackerel should it be deemed precautionary by ICES (WGII)
- Provide details on how the TAC for North Sea horse mackerel has been set (Commission)
- Check the status of the closures in the boarfish management plan (Commission)
- Check why the boarfish TAC in the TAC and quota regulation has been listed as precautionary even though it was an analytical TAC (Commission)
- Check how much money is left from last year's contract between the Commission and ICES regarding western horse mackerel (Commission)