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

Date: 2 July 2013

Start time: 13:30

End time: 18:00

More info: see www.pelagic-rac.org

Participants

Sean O'Donoghue (chairman), Alan McCulla, Alex Wiseman, Anne Mette Baek Jespersen, Audun Maråk, Björn Åsgård, Brian Isbister, Carmen Fernández, Christian Olesen, Christine Absil, Claus Reedtz Sparrevohn, Ciaran O'Donnell, David Miller, Eibhlin O'Sullivan, Eric Roeleveld, Esben Sverdrup, Francis O'Donnell, Frank Minck, Frederik Schutyser, Fredrik Lindberg, Gavin Power, Gerard van Balsfoort, Ian Gatt, Iain MacSween, Ignacio Fontaneda López, Jean-Marie Robert, Jerome Nouis, Jesper Juul Larsen, John Ward, José Beltran, Laura Johnston, Lotte Worsøe Clausen, Mark Dickey-Collas, Marc Ghilia, Nico Bogaard, Niels Hintzen, Nils Christian Jensen, Piebe Hotsma, Reine J. Johansson, Rob Banning, Sarunas Zableckis, Stewart Harper, Verena Ohms

(1) Opening of WG II meeting by the chairman, Sean O'Donoghue

The chairman opened the meeting at 13.35 hrs.

(2) Approval of the agenda

The agenda was approved without amendments.

(3) Follow up on previous action points

The chairman suggested going through the action points of the previous Working Group II meeting one by one to check whether everyone has done what was agreed to be done. He started with Western horse mackerel and asked Gerard van Balsfoort for an update on the genetics of that stock.

Gerard van Balsfoort replied that Stefano Mariani would be happy to continue sampling the stock under a new contract. Data collection for this would have to start in the coming season. However, Gerard van Balsfoort is still waiting to receive a quote for the sampling. He also asked for confirmation that the Irish industry will contribute resources to the genetic sampling too.

The chairman said that the Irish industry would be willing to contribute to the study, but also wanted to know how many samples will be needed exactly.

However, Gerard van Balsfoort explained that it is impossible for Stefano Mariani to say beforehand how many samples he will need to get conclusive results.

It was concluded to keep this issue on the action list and the chairman moved on to North Sea horse mackerel asking for news on the development of a long-term management plan for this stock.

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Gerard van Balsfoort informed the meeting that a focus group has been set up with the Danish and Dutch industry and scientists from CEFAS and IMARES to develop a management plan. The first meeting of that group took place in April and the next meeting is planned on 11 July 2013 for which it is expected that sufficient data will have been analysed to allow drafting a management plan. The goal is to have a full management plan ready to be presented to the Pelagic RAC at the October meeting.

The chairman thanked Gerard van Balsfoort for the update and moved on to southern horse mackerel. He wanted to know whether José Beltran has made any progress in talking to the Spanish and Portuguese administration about the data issues and the development of a management plan.

José Beltran said that he has talked to the Spanish administration about these issues and the Spanish administration has instructed the Spanish Oceanographic Institute to start working on a management plan. The institute is now busy evaluating and assessing a new system for southern horse mackerel. José Beltran also pointed out that it will be necessary to meet with other people involved in the fleet and representatives from other important sectors to ask for their opinion. After that a meeting will have to be arranged with Portugal. He concluded that more time is needed to resolve the issues related to the southern horse mackerel stock, but also pointed out that work on a long-term management plan has already been launched by the Oceanographic Institute and he promised to provide an update at the next Pelagic RAC meeting.

The chairman thanked José Beltran for his commitment and expressed hope that soon a management plan will be available. He acknowledged the difficulty related to Portugal and the lack of Portuguese representatives in the Pelagic RAC.

José Beltran added that there is also a problem with the Spanish representation since he is only representing a small part of the Spanish sector and agreement will have to be found with the entire sector.

The chairman asked Carmen Fernández whether she know if the data situation has been resolved. Carmen Fernández replied that in her understanding the situation is improving. While it is not yet perfect it is much better than last year.

The chairman then moved on to blue whiting and explained that the harvest control rule proposed by the Pelagic RAC has been evaluated by ICES and that a discussion on this would follow later. The long-term management plan has not yet been revised due to the response to the NEAFC request. He also announced that Ciaran O'Donnell will present the results of the IBTS survey later during the meeting. Regarding environmental factors driving stock recruitment not much has been done recently.

Regarding boarfish the chairman explained that the evaluation of the long-term management plan is ongoing and he hoped that the result will be available in September. The acoustic survey will continue in 2013 and start on 10 July. He asked the Commission representative if there was any news on boarfish being included in the data collection framework.

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Frederik Schutyser replied that there was some delay in getting the new program up and running and he was not sure if boarfish will be included in the data collection framework. He promised to check with his appropriate colleagues and the chairman hence concluded that this issue will have to be put on the action list again.

(4) PRAC recommendations for fishing opportunities 2014

- **Southern horse mackerel**

The chairman explained that ICES was unfortunately only at the stage of the Advice Drafting Group for the southern horse mackerel stock and therefore Carmen Fernández was not in a position to present the ICES advice as there were still a number of issues to be sorted out. The advice will be released on 12 July and the chairman proposed postponing dealing with this stock until the October meeting.

Carmen Fernández apologized for not being able to present the advice at this point. She would have liked to give some indications, but after discussing with her colleagues in ICES it was decided that presenting something preliminary would do more harm than good.

Frederik Schutyser pointed out that the Commission will likely not present a TAC proposal before the end of October and therefore postponing dealing with the stock in October was fine from the Commission's perspective.

(5) Requests to ICES presented by Carmen Fernández

The chairman informed the meeting that a number of requests relevant for the Pelagic RAC had been submitted to ICES and he invited Carmen Fernández to give an update on those.

- **Blue whiting**

Carmen Fernández presented a summary of the advice to the NEAFC request. Blim and Bpa remain unchanged, but now Flim has been set at 0.48 and Fpa at 0.32 which is consistent with the biomass reference points. There is also a new Fmsy at 0.3 and an MSYB_{trigger} at 2.25 mt. The current management plan which has a target F of 0.18 is considered precautionary as is the same harvest control rule with F up to 0.32. However, there is only a minimal mean TAC increase for $F > 0.3$. The TAC stability mechanisms (50/50 rule, 3 year average) were only tested with the current harvest control rule and turned out to be precautionary.

The harvest control rule proposed by the Pelagic RAC using two trigger points was tested to a certain extent, but the results are only considered to be preliminary since additional and more robust testing is required. The request was formulated very open and

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there are simply too many options to test. Therefore it will have to be narrowed down in the future.

Banking and borrowing up to 10% was also tested under the current harvest control rule and found to be precautionary.

Carmen Fernández also informed the audience that ICES recently received a follow-up request from NEAFC asking for confirmation of the F reference points and that the current harvest control rule with target $F = 0.22, 0.25$ or 0.3 is precautionary when including banking and borrowing of 10%. Point 3 in the follow-up request asks to investigate the new harvest control rule with two trigger points with specific settings, i.e. a lower bound of $F = 0.05$ below Blim, a standard $F = 0.1$ between trigger 1 and trigger 2 and an upper bound of $F = F_{msy}$. Furthermore the request asks for this to be tested including banking and borrowing. The work plan for this request is currently under discussion and a deliver date has not yet been set. However, the aim is to get the work done before WGWIDE meets in August in order to allow WGWIDE to provide further input.

It seemed to Claus Reedtz Sparrevohn that ICES had misunderstood the first NEAFC request which led to problems with issuing appropriate advice and he wanted to know whether ICES has considered how to improve communication in the future. Carmen Fernández replied that ICES is constantly working on improving communication, but in this case she was certain that the problem was the broad formulation of the request. Claus Reedtz Sparrevohn suggested that ICES should have said at an earlier stage that the request was too wide. However, Carmen Fernández explained that ICES probably considered this inappropriate.

The chairman uttered surprise regarding the ICES advice. He said that the Pelagic RAC has spent a lot of time discussing fishing mortality around blue whiting, but at the last benchmark an F_{pa} of 0.32 was deemed completely unacceptable. He was shocked to see that now the whole basis of the advice was thrown up in the air, because the new fishing mortality will lead to a new picture in terms of TACs. He wanted to know whether ICES was now confirming that the new F_{msy} is going to be 0.30. He pointed out that people had been convinced that fishing mortality had to be reduced whereas now it seems that it does not. He was worried that ICES was making a huge blunder for the third time for blue whiting and also other coastal states started questioning the ICES advice. He asked whether the advice could change again in WGWIDE.

Carmen Fernández explained that scientific knowledge continuously evolves and that every time ICES tries to provide the best advice available. It is quite common in benchmarks to revise reference points, but usually there is not enough time at the benchmarks and therefore the revision of reference points often happens a year later. The new request asks for a confirmation of reference points and this gives another opportunity to confirm them.

David Miller pointed out that the new MSY value has caught many people by surprise. Part of it can be explained by the new assessment model. Another reason is a change in the fishery, like selectivity. He also said that previously there was only a proxy for F_{msy} . F_{msy} might in fact even be higher than 0.30, but was brought down to that value

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due to precautionary considerations. $F = 0.25$ and 0.22 will definitely turn out to be precautionary under Dankert Skagen's framework. He thought that the management plan developed by the Pelagic RAC seemed rather sensible with increasing fishing mortality at higher biomasses.

Gerard van Balsfoort said that he had a principle problem with how this stock is being discussed at the moment. The Pelagic RAC put a huge effort into finding a way around the F of 0.18 by suggesting a second trigger point at high biomass. However, the context of this suggestion was based on assuming an F_{msy} of 0.18 . Now it seems that F_{msy} is in fact 0.30 or maybe even higher. This means that the entire context of the management plan has changed and hence the plan itself has to be reconsidered.

The chairman remarked that there has been a huge inconsistency over the years regarding the ICES advice. He understood that when reference points were looked into $F = 0.18$ was the only relevant measure. However, fishing activity has not changed over the last 2-3 years and he was concerned that there will be more massive fluctuations in TAC. The whole idea of the management plan was to provide stability and be flexible depending on the recruitment regime. NEFAC has a good reason to request confirmation of the reference points given that ICES has previously made mistakes in relation to this stock and also admitted them. The chairman was disappointed about the advice, because it said that a lot more work had to be done while Dankert Skagen already put an enormous amount of work into simulations. He wondered how likely it was that the 2nd request will be answered this time and also noted that he thought the answers were already there, but just did not find their way into ICES.

David Miller explained that part of the ICES policy is to bring in external reviewers. In the case of blue whiting one of these reviewers was not happy with the framework provided by Dankert Skagen and some of the issues could not be solved on time. Nevertheless ICES now has a good grip on those and therefore David Miller was confident that the answers to the new request will be better.

However, the chairman said that after talking to Dankert Skagen in person he got the impression that ICES simply did not take the things he suggested on board. He also pointed out that external reviewers unfamiliar with the stock discussed might come up with unrealistic ideas that delay the entire process. He wanted to know whether ICES had a proper system to choose suitable reviewers.

Carmen Fernández replied that sometimes reviewers are very favourable of a certain approach and sometimes they are not, but that ICES always tries to get balanced reviews.

Mark Dickey-Collas added that ICES always asks independent experts to perform scientific reviews as is standard all over the world. If a reviewer says that the work is not good enough and therefore provides a negative review then this is the end of that process and ICES has to accept this.

The chairman explained that he did not question the independence of the external reviewers, but wanted to know which methodology ICES follows to select appropriate reviewers.

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Mark Dickey-Collas answered that ICES always approaches the most suitable person first. Unfortunately, sometimes this person is not available and in such a case the second best person has to be approached and so on.

The chairman concluded that it was necessary to follow up on this issue at the next MIRAC meeting.

- **Western horse mackerel**

Carmen Fernández said that she could not comment a lot on this request as the workshop report was not yet available, but should be published any moment. She furthermore announced that the ADG will meet on 10-11 July and that the final advice will be released on 19 July.

The chairman pointed out that there was a communication problem regarding this request between the ICES secretariat and the Pelagic RAC, because the Pelagic RAC received information on this workshop at a very late stage even though it had sent several emails asking information. He was also very concerned about the outcome of the advice. Last year the Pelagic RAC had agreed to change its TAC advice for 2013 based on the outcome of the management plan evaluation. He suggested working closer together during the process.

Carmen Fernández replied that everyone was interested in receiving a good and clear answer to the request, but she did not want to anticipate what the advice might be, but rather wait for it to be published. In terms of communication she did not know what went wrong, because she made it very clear within ICES that the Pelagic RAC should be kept informed about the process and both she and Mark Dickey-Collas promised to check this.

The chairman wondered whether it would make sense to issue an advice in July that might be changed again in August.

However, Carmen Fernández explained that testing a management plan is a long-term exercise during which the basic principles are investigated and whether there is a good understanding of the stock.

Gerard van Balsfoort added that in his understanding the Advice Drafting Group only reviews the management plan, but does not give a TAC advice for 2014. He asked whether the Advice Drafting Group would give any advice on how to make the plan sustainable if it turned out not to be precautionary. He recalled from the workshop held in Dublin in 2011 that the constant factor in the plan was concluded to be precautionary, but Carmen Fernández could not provide any information on this as long as the workshop report was not yet available.

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- **Boarfish**

Carmen Fernandez explained that the proposed management plan for boarfish covers a wide range of situations for setting TACs depending on the available assessment. In 2012 an acoustic survey was available which provided a biomass estimate. The expert group to deal with the evaluation of the management plan will meet in advance of WGWIDE, so that WGWIDE can provide further input. The Advice Drafting Group will meet in September and the advice will be released on the 3rd of October.

Esben Sverdrup noted that the Commission has to ensure procedures being in place for the Council to adopt a new TAC if warranted and the chairman wanted to know whether the Commission had a mechanism available to change the TAC.

Frederik Schutyser explained that the Commission can always suggest an amendment. In how far this can be put in place in time remains to be seen.

The chairman expressed worries that if the October advice turns out to be positive the TAC cannot be adjusted quickly enough.

Frederik Schutyser promised to double-check with the lawyers and people working on procedural issues, but also pointed out that changing a regulation takes several weeks. He suggested answering the chairman's concerns in writing.

(6) Update on management plans

The chairman invited Ciaran O'Donnell to present the outcome of the IBTS before going into the details of the management plans.

- **Blue whiting survey**

Ciaran O'Donnell explained that there is now a 10 year data set of the IBTS and that this year the survey was again successful although Norway did not participate. It lasted 19 days and covered an area of 87.895 nautical miles. 3044 fish were aged and 7044 were measured. He further pointed out that migration was slightly delayed this year and that very deep aggregations of fish were found down to 700 meters. He concluded that the conditions were so favourable for spawning that the fish did not only spread horizontally, but also vertically. 4 and 3 year old fish were dominant in the sampling which indicates that a strong 2010 year class is now coming into the fishery. The biomass is estimated at 3.4 million tons which is a 55% increase compared to 2012. The dominant year classes are years 3, 4, 5 and 8 and the highest proportion of juveniles is found in the Shetland/Faroe region. The most productive region remains around the Hebrides containing >73% of the spawning stock biomass.

Gerard van Balsfoort asked whether the Norwegians will only be absent in 2013 or whether they dropped out of the survey for good and Ciaran O'Donnell replied that in his understanding Norway will again participate in the survey next year.

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The chairman noted that the distribution looked denser in 2012 compared to 2013 and he wanted to know whether this was related to the vertical distribution of the fish.

Ciaran O'Donnell explained that in 2012 blue whiting was more concentrated along the shelf whereas in 2013 it is more spread out.

The chairman hypothesized that the good recruitment in 2009 was correlated to the subpolar gyre and Ciaran O'Donnell informed the meeting that work is underway to study the effects of temperature, the subpolar gyre and other factors influencing the stock.

Gerard van Balsfoort noted that the gravity of the stock has moved to the North a bit, but Ciaran O'Donnell assumed that this was only because of later migration due to the cold conditions in 2013.

Jerome Nouis remarked that the 3 and 4 year old fish has been recruited in 2009 and 2010 and if there had been a good recruitment index available it would have been noted in these years that strong year classes were coming in. Instead ICES sent warning signals in these years which resulted in huge cuts in TAC. If better indices had been available these cuts could have been avoided and Jerome Nouis requested looking into this issue.

The chairman replied that this issue had been discussed at length at the benchmark. Unfortunately however, not much progress has been made in developing a recruitment index.

David Miller explained that there is a practical problem with developing a reliable recruitment index, because juveniles are all over the place which results in different kind of indices with different areas covered, different methods used and so on. Also, the importance of areas varies greatly. Therefore these indices cannot just be combined and it is a scientific challenge to develop them. He further said that the cuts would still have occurred, but they would have been less severe. At the moment the data for the assessment are of high quality and the time series is getting longer while the survey coverage has been very good in recent years. He pointed out that even though recruitment indices do not go straight into the assessment, ICES does take a look at them.

José Beltran referred to Jerome Nouis' comment and said that the cut was not applied due to a lacking index for incoming juveniles, but because there were no good survey data available.

Ciaran O'Donnell confirmed that the problem was indeed with the survey which failed due to poor weather conditions and some vessels not showing up.

The chairman suggested waiting for ICES to advise on the new NEAFC request before revisiting the Pelagic RAC's plan and decide whether it has to be adjusted or not. Some issues, e.g. reference points should be clarified in the ICES advice and the chairman did not want to spend more time on the plan without knowing what is going to happen to it in the first place.

Gerard van Balsfoort reminded the meeting that the Pelagic RAC has been working on this plan together with other coastal states. Therefore, if ICES determines the new Fmsy

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to be 0.30, there will need to be a discussion on how to proceed together with the other coastal states. He said that if it had been known previously that F_{msy} is 0.30, then maybe the idea of having two trigger points would not have been pursued, but instead people would have agreed on a standard harvest control rule. Given that a management plan can only be agreed upon every 5 years and given the amount of effort that has already been put into the plan, he was keen on doing things right.

The chairman responded that the objectives of the management plan were better stability on the one hand and higher exploitation in times of good recruitment. These two key objectives are still valid even though some of the parameters might change.

- **North Sea horse mackerel**

The chairman noted that the efforts to develop a management plan for this stock have already been discussed earlier and hoped that a draft will be available for the October meeting.

- **Western horse mackerel**

The chairman uttered worries that the management plan for this stock will have to be revisited in October. He also said that the Pelagic RAC might request a workshop dealing with this stock.

Christian Olesen suggested including the relevant RACs in the ICES stock coordinator list which would facilitate communication for both ICES and the RACs. This had been requested at the last MIRAC meeting, but he suggested requesting this again in writing.

- **Boarfish**

The chairman expressed his hopes to receive a positive advice on the proposed management plan for boarfish on the 3rd of October. If it is not considered precautionary the Pelagic RAC will have to think about the plan again, but for now he suggested waiting.

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- **Southern horse mackerel**

The chairman summarised that Jose Beltran had agreed to provide an update on this stock at the October meeting and to follow up on this issue with the Spanish administration and members of the different Spanish and Portuguese sectors.

(7) Agree list of action items and persons responsible

The chairman said that most of the action items had been agreed and will be circulated as annex to the minutes.

Carmen Fernández promised to report the relevant points mentioned at the meeting back to ICES.

(8) AOB

There was no other business.

(9) End of WG II meeting

The chairman closed the meeting at 16.15 hrs and thanked the attendants for their participation.

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Annex I: action list

General:

- Seek clarification on method ICES uses to choose external reviewers during MIRAC meeting (Sean O'Donoghue)
- Send letter to ICES suggesting including the relevant RACs in the stock coordinator list (Christian Olesen, Verena Ohms) ✓

Specific:

Western horse mackerel

- Ask quote for western horse mackerel genetics (Gerard van Balsfoort)
- Follow up with ICES secretariat why the Pelagic RAC received information regarding the western horse mackerel workshop very late (Carmen Fernández, Mark Dickey-Collas)
- Revisit management plan in October meeting based on the outcome of the special request (Working Group II)
- Possibly request a workshop dealing with this stock (Sean O'Donoghue)

North Sea horse mackerel

- Develop management plan and present draft at October meeting (Gerard van Balsfoort, Esben Sverdrup, Claus Reedtz Sparrevohn, Verena Ohms)

Southern horse mackerel

- Follow up with Spanish administration and Spanish and Portuguese sector representatives on the development of a management plan (José Beltran)

Blue whiting

- Revisit management plan after publication of ICES advice to NEAFC request (Working Group II)

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Boarfish

- Check whether boarfish will be included in the data collection framework (Frederik Schutyser)
- Revisit management plan after publication of ICES advice (Working Group II)