

Minutes of the Pelagic RAC Working Groups meeting on Wednesday 21 June 2006 at hotel Schiphol A4 in Hoofddorp, the Netherlands

The meeting was attended by 32 people (annex A), plus 4 interpreters.

Opening

The meeting is opened at 10.00 by the chairman of Working Group I Christian Olesen.

The revised agenda is approved.

The minutes of the Working Groups meeting of 13 February 2006 Brussels are approved.

Ken Patterson (EC) outlines verbally the response from the Commission to the Pelagic RAC recommendations. The written response will be issued shortly. The Pelagic RAC will come back with a reaction.

Working Group I (chaired by Christian Olesen)

Questions on scientific methods of the herring fishery in VIId and IVc

Xavier Harlay illustrates the points outlined in the letter of Mr Grandidier concerning the Down's herring fishery in the Channel. Two issues are important: 1) the vertical opening in the demersal trawlnets used for the survey lead to inaccurate assessments, and 2) the time and place when the assessments are carried out is not consistent with the moves of the herring stocks. The wish is expressed for a more appropriate approach in the stock assessment. Additionally, since the fishery is only for human consumption, a readjustment in quota is requested.

Mark Dickey-Collas (IMARES) notes the absence of French scientists (IFRAMER) in the Herring Working Group. He further explains that Down's herring is part of the North Sea herring (spawns in south of North Sea). France developed the trawl used and was part of the consortium that instigated the IBTS in the 1970s. Other survey types are applied and the results agree. All geographical areas are covered by the surveys. The only aspect that may not be visible are changes in behavioural patterns, which are unlikely.

KFO: Also for area VIa and VIIbc the industry feels that the methodology is inappropriate and a reassessment of the stocks is required. This is, however, not the time to change the reference points (Patterson). The Pelagic RAC feels that the methodology and management plans should be discussed further at the executive committee meeting on July 5.

Patterson mentions that STECF is currently carrying out a pilot exercise.

***Recommendation*¹²:**

The executive committee of the Pelagic RAC is encouraged to discuss with the Commission and ICES if and how scientific surveys can be improved.

¹ The recommendations are summed up in annex B.

² Note that these recommendations were revised at the WG meeting of 12 September and ExeCom of 18 September 2006.

ICES/ACFM herring advice:

a) Herring Celtic Sea and Div VIIj

There is no agreed assessment; quality of the survey is doubtful. It is unclear how large the stock is and there is no effect of the management plan. Therefore for 2007 the ICES/ACFM advice is that no fishing is allowed until a rebuilding plan is in place.

The quality of the acoustic surveys is questioned. The stocks are highly fluctuating. Zero catches are unacceptable.

Even though the short-term economic impacts are strong, an ecosystem based approach should be taken into account (Seas at Risk).

Recommendation:

Ask the Commission to request STECF to review the stock and draft a rebuilding plan. The timing should be so that the plan can be assessed by ICES, and be commented by the Pelagic RAC in due time for implementation by 1 Jan 2007.

b) Herring Div VIa north

Survey is unreliable; stock is up or under Bpa.

The draft management plan of the Commission includes recommendations of the Pelagic RAC. The Butt of Lewis Closure is removed.

Question is whether the target is a prediction or the actual situation.

Draft management plan will be sent to members who can react in 2 weeks before the executive committee meeting on July 5.

Recommendations:

The TAC of 34 000 tonnes is accepted.

The Pelagic RAC recommends that the Management Plan be adopted and implemented.

However, the Pelagic RAC expresses its worries about the control measures which seem overly protective, and about the power that is allocated to STECF to thumb up or down to the execution of the Management Plan.

c) Herring subarea IV Div VIId and IIIa autumn spawners

Catches are going up. The F at present is 0.35 which is above the F proposed by the management agreement. The recruitment is low. Suggested is a substantial lower TAC. Question is if we should deviate from management plan (par. 6) and reduce TAC more than 15%.

Questioned is the quality of the science and if the suggested TAC is a 'panic reaction', especially since stable markets are important. Fishermen observe juvenile herring at various places. Bycatch and illegal landings/catches are also an issue to take into account. The socio-economic consequences of a large reduction in TAC are substantial.

Seas at Risk: The harvest control rules (HCR) do not provide for this extra-ordinary situation of consecutive years of low recruitment. The advice from ICES is that the HCR only are in accordance with the Precautionary Principle if paragraph 6 is invoked. Considering the fact that the Pelagic Freezer Association (PFA) has been rewarded an MSC label for their herring fisheries, the PFA should realise that it has committed itself to the precautionary principle (which is a requirement of the MSC label). If the PFA is choosing for the 15% TAC reduction (which is the least precautionary option as presented by ICES/ACFM) it may lose its credibility in its commitment to sustainability.

Recommendations:

The Pelagic RAC will come up with more recommendations at the executive committee meeting on July 5.

At a short notice sufficient effort and resources need to be invested to clarify the causes of the poor survival rate for larvae.

The Pelagic RAC recommends to the Commission and member states that every effort is made to protect the juvenile herring. This could – if necessary – include the introduction of a tighter bycatch rules.

In the light of the uncertainties in the scientific advice the Pelagic RAC recommends that the TAC for 2007 be set at xxx.xxx tons (a xx% reduction from 2006).

d) Irish Sea Herring

Recommendation:

The advice is adopted without comments.

e) Herring Div VIa south and VIIbc

The overall assessment is uncertain and this year's advice is a rebuilding plan or no fishing..

KFO questions the methods/assessment and is convinced the assessment is incorrect and that the stock size has increased due to management measures adopted by the local management committee and the strong year class of 2001.

Recommendations:

The Pelagic RAC urges the Commission to request STECF to draft a management plan similar to the VIa north management plan rather than a rebuilding plan.

The timing to be so that the plan can be assessed by ICES and be commented by the Pelagic RAC in due time for implementation by 1 Jan 2007.

f) Herring subdiv 22-24 and Div IIIa spring spawners

There are only recent assessments. Suggested is to keep F the same. Misreporting in North Sea and Skagerrak is taken into account.

Problem with this stock is that it is spread out over different management areas. The advice is clearer, but still difficult to comprehend for the industry and fishers.

The model is complex because of the complexity of this fishery with 4 fleets in 2 areas. There are political aspects that play a role.

Mark Dickey-Collas mentions there is a project (Norway/Denmark) to deal with this advice.

Recommendations:

The Pelagic RAC recommends that the TAC for 2007 is set at same level as in 2006. If managers find it necessary to reduce the TAC, the Pelagic RAC recommends that change is maximised to 15%.

The Pelagic RAC requests that the presentation of the advice from ACFM be two-dimensional: the stock being one, and the management areas the other.

The Pelagic RAC recommends that the model used when forecasting catches in area IIIa be given a 'service-check'.

g) Clyde herring

ICES gives no advice on this stock anymore.

Mackerel

Mark Dickey-Collas: The mackerel egg surveys have been reduced with 10% because of England and Wales pulling out. Something should be done to maintain the quality of these surveys.

Recommendation:

Reinstate funding for egg-surveys.

AOB

Derek Duthie raises issue around the Atlanto Scandic herring and 4 different TACs (EU, Norway, Iceland, and Faeroes).

Kenneth Patterson: There will be a change in timing of advice and Pelagic RAC is requested for its position. The early advice concerns, amongst others, small herring. The letter will be sent around.

Working Group II (chaired by Sean O'Donoghue)

Sprat

High stock level, but fluctuating. TAC is set lower than 2005 (244 000 tonnes).

Bycatch of juvenile herring in sprat has in recent years been around 10%, so the TAC of sprat influences the herring stocks.

Patterson: According to art 5, the Commission can amend the TAC in sprat.

Recommendations:

In light of the new scientific advice, and with the aim to protect the juvenile herring, the Pelagic RAC recommends that the TAC for 2006 is reduced.

The Pelagic RAC recommends to the Commission, that the bycatch situation is revisited to see if changes are needed for better protection of juvenile herring.

Blue Whiting

Response of Commission on suggestions the Pelagic RAC made concerning dioxin in blue whiting fishery is negative. Both letters will be circulated to be discussed at executive committee meeting on July 5.

Mark Dickey-Collas: During March 2006 the 3rd international blue whiting survey was conducted. General pattern is a 22% increase in index. Age profile: more juveniles. The report will be discussed at the Working Group in August.

Issue about review of Annex II of the Coastal States agreement.

UAPF has two concerns: 1) The fishery with mesh sizes of 16mm is negative for the stocks and 2) the stock has 2 components, which should be acknowledged. A third issue concerns the reciprocity with Norway (catching 61% of stock) which should be reconsidered.

Ken Patterson: the access agreement with Norway is based on the assumption of one single stock. The reciprocity is compensated by other access agreements which are also useful to France.

Funding can be obtained through: 1) 7th Framework programme or 2) EU funds on data collection regulation.

ICES: The blue whiting group meets again in August (assessment and management plan). If the Pelagic RAC wants to have stock components investigated it has to submit request promptly. Also, the range of measure on juvenile blue whiting could be included in the ICES working group. The Pelagic RAC has to specify these requests.

Funding for research has to be requested from member states.

It is decided to invite an expert to give a presentation on blue whiting for human consumption (prices, etc).

Recommendation:

The Pelagic RAC will request the Commission to ask STECF to draft management measures for the protection of juvenile blue whiting.

Horse Mackerel

It seems that the 2001 year class is similar to the 1982 year class. However the lack of appropriate research is making the scientific assessment extremely difficult. ICES: there are ongoing studies funded by Norway and there are no extra resources available.

Suggested is to ask STECF for a management plan. ICES: The RACs are one of the three institutions bringing out advice and therefore the Pelagic RAC can always ask input from ICES, but should come up with own advice and give direction.

Doug Wilson (IFM) has offered to organize a workshop on horse mackerel management plans next spring. The Pelagic RAC or industry could partake in this.

Recommendation:

The Pelagic RAC requests to provide the necessary funding for appropriate surveys and assessments and requests the Commission to ask STECF for draft a management plan to be considered by the Pelagic RAC.

MSY

Before the Pelagic RAC can adopt MSY, it needs a socio-economic impact assessment for individual stocks and requests the Commission to provide this information. Ken Patterson states that the Commission has resource problems but will see what is feasible.

AOB

There is no other business.

Closure

The meeting is closed at 17.15 by the chairman of Working Group II Sean O'Donoghue.

Annex A

Participants Pelagic RAC WG Meeting 21 Juni 2006		
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Draft recommendations³ Pelagic RAC Working Groups I and II June 2006

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