

**Minutes of the meeting of Working Groups 1 and 2 of the Pelagic RAC on Friday
November 4th 2005 in Dorint Novotel Hotel (Badhoevedorp, the Netherlands).**

WG chairmen: Christian Olesen and Sean O'Donoghue

Secretariat Pelagic RAC: Ingvild Harkes

PVis secretary: Babette van Krevelen

The meeting was attended by 29 people of which 3 ACFM/ICES scientists, plus 4 interpreters (see annex 1).

Opening of the meeting

The meeting is opened at 10.00 by Christian Olesen who explains how the Working Groups form the backbone of the RACs and give the industry and other interest groups a chance to supply biological advice, knowledge and experience to the administrators.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda is adopted with three changes: 1) the advice on Icelandic herring will not be dealt with by this working group, 2) the discussion of the non-paper on technical measures will take place at the end of the meeting, and 3) the discussion on the appropriate RAC for anchovy and sardine is right after the lunch break.

Working Group 1 Herring and Mackerel (chaired by Christian Olesen)

1. Clyde herring (Division VIa)¹

Clyde herring is not used by commercial fishermen.

Recommendation:

- Advice is adopted without alterations, resulting in a status quo TAC.

2. Celtic Sea and Division VIIj herring

The stock may be in a bad state but there is a large degree of uncertainty. As there will be a large evaluation in March, it is suggested to have an interim TAC until the new data is available.

Recommendation:

- The TAC to be reviewed before the end of 2006 in the light of new scientific advice from ICES.

3. Herring (Division VIa South and VIIb,c)

The state of the stocks is largely unknown. Fishers perceive an increase in the stocks due to the management plan and request an increase in the quota (also because low quotas will lead to discards).

¹ The ICES/ACFM scientific advices were illustrated by respectively: Mark Dickey-Collas (MDC), Asta Gudmundsdottir (AG) and Ciaran Kelly (CK).

Recommendation:

- Request that a higher TAC than the status quo should be considered for next year based on the implementation of an industry management plan over the last five years (as outlined in the ACFM advice) and also on the views expressed at the meeting on the abundance of the stock. It was also agreed that the management targets should be reviewed.

4. Irish Sea herring (Division VIIa)

This is a small stock only used by Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The advice is non-committal.

Recommendation:

- Advice is adopted without alterations.

5. Herring in Division VIa (North)

This is a robust stock and the field data match the model data. The stock has full reproductive capacity. As there is no misreporting anymore and F has decreased, there is a request for an increase in TAC.

It is suggested for the RAC to devise a management plan consistent with the harvest control rules and in accordance with the ACFM advice. The plan should include a maximum rise or fall of the TAC of 15%, plus a year to year flexibility of 10% over 2 years. This “bank and borrow” system will lead to more flexibility and allows for fishing at the correct time without losing quota. It also allows for fishers to deal with increased fuel prices by being able to delay catches.

Recommendations:

- The drafting of a management plan based on the harvest control rule that is put forward by ACFM, and which includes a TAC constraint of $\pm 15\%$, and with a flexibility of $\pm 10\%$ over 2 years. This is a general requirement and should be included for all the stocks where there is a management plan.
- The TAC for 2006 should be set in accordance with the new management plan.

6. Herring in Subdivisions 22-24 and Division III a (Spring Spawners)

The stock is mixed with North Sea herring, there are no long time series of data, and the F is ‘noisy’. All in all the trend is down.

There is a concern about the industrial bycatch of juvenile herring. ICES/ACFM, however, notes that the industrial fishery is not causing the decline in recruitment. The problem might possibly solve itself as many industrial fishers are on the verge of bankruptcy.

Recommendations:

- Advice is adopted without alterations.
- However, there is great uncertainty about the transformation from advice to fishing opportunities, and it is recommended to ACFM to help clarify.
- The industry requests clear information on advised TAC.

7. Herring in Subarea IV, Division VIIId and Division IIIa (Autumn Spawners)

Both the stocks and the larvae are increasing, but there are low year classes over the past three years. The stock is still above precautionary level, but there is a need for cuts. The question is how large these should be and when. Modest cuts may lead to substantial cuts in 2007 and 2008. There is already a +/- 15%-rule in the management plan.

ICES/ACFM, however, would like to see the rationale for the 15% if this becomes the ruling force.

Industrial fishing is not causing the dying larvae. Possible causes are pollution, oil exploration (seismic surveys) and climate change. Herring has a high variability and it is crucial for the scientists to find the causes for the decline in larvae. Until then, it is suggested to adapt the fishing pressure to lower levels. Others, however, are hesitant to cut quota as to not influence the market mechanisms and create "stress".

As long as there are no answers, we can present tables and let the managers decide. The 15% rule could be applied, but this could also cause, if the situation gets worse, the stocks to fall under Bpa.

Recommendations:

- Set the TAC at -15% compared to 2005, with the provision that the EC looks into the causes of the fluctuations and development of the stocks.
- The management plan should be amended to include a year-to-year flexibility of +/-10% with a maximum of 2 years.
- The EC is requested to seek clarification of the relationship between paragraphs 5 and 6 in the advice.

8. Norwegian Spring-Spawning herring (Atlantoscandian Herring)

The stocks are harvested sustainably and are expected to improve. Caution is required as there are changes, e.g. the spawning area of some Norwegian stocks.

The current management plan has a positive effect on the stocks. It is not advisable to have an ad-hoc decision and deviate from the management plan. The TAC also has an international dimension as Russia, Iceland and other countries also use the stock. It is suggested to maintain the status quo.

Different data sets and the exclusion of some year classes have led to different TACs. In Copenhagen a Russian scientific presentation recommended a TAC at 1,077,000 tonnes, while the ACFM advice is 732,000 tonnes. The outcome depends on the model used.

Recommendations:

- TAC based on 2005 advice (890,000 tonnes).
- The management plan should be amended to include:
 - o A TAC constraint of +/- 15% and,
 - o A year-to-year flexibility of +/-10% with a maximum of 2 years.
- The objectives in the management plan should be reviewed, as they seem overly conservative.

9. Northeast Atlantic Mackerel (combined Southern, Western and North Sea spawning components)

There is limited information (only landing data) about the stocks and a great uncertainty. Before, the dynamics of the stocks were stable, but since 2000 there is concern about the fluctuations in recruitment.

Coastal States have already decided on the TAC. ICES presented 373,000 tonnes as the lower bound and 478,000 tonnes as the upper bound. The coastal states set a TAC of 442,000 tonnes with an F of 0,18.

Recommendations:

- The TAC is already agreed by the Coastal States and the working group expressed its disappointment at the outcome.
- The Group recommended that the management plan should be amended to include:
 - A +/- 15% TAC restraint and,
 - A year-to-year flexibility of +/- 10% with a maximum of two years (this should be included in the TAC and quotas regulation for 2006).
- The management plan should be reviewed to prioritise the different decision rules.
- The Group recommended that in the future consultations between the Coastal States on TACs should not take place before the Pelagic RAC has been heard.

10. Mackerel Action Plan

It is suggested to ask the coastal states to include in the management plan the +/- 15% TAC restraint and the year-to-year flexibility of 10% with a maximum of 2 years. The Working Group also likes clarifications on the decision rule (F Biomass) in the management plan in the context of poor stock conditions.

It is further suggested for the Working Group of the Pelagic RAC to have input in setting the TACs for 2007), and that all parties actively improve research on the 3 points (suggested in Annex III of the Coastal States Agreement) which have in reality never been acted upon.

Ciaran Kelly confirms the necessity for improved statistics. Right now there is only 1 index point. An extra egg survey, however, is a huge effort and requires a cooperative approach. Recruitment surveys will be produced.

The action plan is endorsed by the EC and RAC.

ICES response to the pelagic industries of the EU, Norway and the Faroe Islands on its agreed mackerel action plan was noted and in particular the changes adopted in the research annex of the Coastal States agreement as a result of this advice.

Working Group 2 Blue Whiting, Horse Mackerel and other species (Chaired by Sean O'Donoghue)

1. Discussion on appropriate RAC for Anchovy (IXa and VIII) and Sardines (VIIIc and IXa).

The Spanish delegation explained how the fishermen are managing the anchovy fishery by closures and that the situation is even more difficult now that the fuel prices have gone up. It is therefore important to take the fishermen's voices into account in order to determine what is feasible in terms of recommendations.

It was recommended by the Spanish delegation and agreed by the Working Group the anchovy and sardine fishery would be better presented in the South Western Waters RAC (SWWRAC). If in the future the fisheries on anchovies or sardines in the Channel develops, there will be a need for collaboration between the RACs.

Since this leaves only horse mackerel as the main reason for the Spanish and Portuguese to attend the Working Group meetings of the Pelagic RAC, it was agreed that they would be notified well in advance if horse mackerel was on the agenda.

2. Blue Whiting Combined Stock (sub areas I-IX, XII and XIV)

The blue whiting fishery has been an unregulated fishery at Coastal States level with catches of approximately 2.4 million tonnes in 2003 and 2004.

At the end of October, in Copenhagen, the Coastal States have finally come to an agreement about a management plan. Agreement provides for a 2006 TAC of 2 mln tonnes. It also provides for a 5-year plan with an annual reduction of 150,000 tonnes provided that no steeper course of action is required by the scientists.

The delegate from France notes that the advice is based on one stock, while blue whiting seems to consist of different components various stocks and he proposes to have more than one TAC. ICES/ACFM explains that even though the stocks may look different, however since there is no conclusive information about whether they are real distinct stocks, therefore the stock is defined as one.

The French delegation are not in agreement with the fishing industries of the EU (Northern Pelagic Working Group of EAPO) Iceland, Faroes proposals on the % share out of blue whiting which gives the EU 30%. They consider a more appropriate figure is 40%. The chairman understands this position, but does not agree with it and states that the discussion on the share out is now agreed and there is little point in discussing it at the Working Group.

The Spanish delegation are concerned about the measures to protect blue whiting particularly in the Southern Area and suggested that SWWRAC should deal with blue whiting in Area VIII. The Chairman states that blue whiting comes within the remit of the Pelagic RAC.

Recommendations:

- Accept the industry's (EU, Norway and Iceland) management plan for blue whiting with a TAC of 2 million tonnes for 2006 and progressively decreasing to 1.5 million tonnes over

five years if required, with a +/- 15% TAC restraint and a year-to-year flexibility of +/- 10% with a maximum of 2 years.

- Encourage the Coastal States to agree on access before January 2006².
- Call for additional scientific research to improve the data set and the reliability of the assessment (in order to avoid massive fluctuations), including different components of the stock, population dynamics and management areas.
- Set up a working group of stakeholders and scientists as part of the Coastal States agreement to address the issue and protection of juvenile blue whiting.
- To discuss the dioxins and PCB issues at a future Working Group meeting.

3. Blue Whiting Industry Management plan.

A discussion took place on one specific item the blue whiting industry management plan relating to 2 million tonnes TAC. The environmental NGO delegate noted that the 2 million TAC was not in line with the ICES advice. The Chairman explained the genesis of the 2 million TAC against a background of an unregulated fishery with a catch of 2.4 million in 2003 and 2004 and that the management plan recommended an annual decrease over the five years if necessary to a line the management plan with the scientific advice recognising that the management was a step the first direction the NGO delegate was prepared to accept the 2 million tonnes TAC for 2006 as a starting point. There was a discussion on the endorsement of the management plan as the environmental NGOs note that it is not in line with the ICES advice. The question is what TAC should we agree upon? The endorsement of the management plan was a huge effort (shared stocks) and the TAC of 2 million tonnes was a political decision. As over time reductions and other measures will be part of the plan the proposed TAC is accepted.

The issue of Russian catches as a non Coastal State was discussed and it was considered that this issue needed to be addressed at NEAFC.

The French delegation explains that they favour the catching of large fish and want to increase mesh sizes. The fishmeal industry, however, is more interested in juvenile blue whiting as it contains less toxic substances and legislation limits the allowed amount of PCBs in food.

At this point Helge Korsager said he was prepared to give a presentation on the dioxin issue at a next Working Group meeting and the Working Group agreed to this suggestion.

Working Group 2 will deal with technical issues, mesh size, and juvenile blue whiting.

The recommendations are captured under the blue whiting combined stock recommendations.

4. Blue Whiting Coastal States Meeting & NEAFC meeting London (14-18 November).

This was not dealt with as a separate agenda point.

5. North Sea Horse Mackerel (IIIa, IVbc, VIId).

The state of the stock is unclear due to a lack of data. The TACs have been unchanged since 2003.

² This recommendation was deleted as during the revision process, the French delegation could not agree with this recommendation.

The environmental NGOs mention that the catches are way above advice and that scientific assessments need to be improved.

Others mention that the fishery seems sustainable, and so the suggestion is to increase research and improve data and in the mean time keep the TAC as it is.

Mark Dickey-Collas suggests approaching this fishery as a mixed fishery. But the WG participants do not agree with this idea.

Recommendations:

- Maintain status quo of TAC until data issue is resolved.
- Set up a working group to improve research.
- Set up a working group to address the bycatch in horse mackerel fishery.
- Create correspondence between stock areas and management areas.

6. Southern Horse Mackerel (VIIIc and IXa)

The nature of this fishery is different: there are no separate assessments and the fishery is related to hake and sardines. Catches have decreased. The ICES advice is the same as last year.

Recommendation:

- Advice is adopted without alterations. Southern Horse Mackerel to remain within the remit of the Pelagic RAC.

7. Western Horse Mackerel (II a, IVa,Vb, VIa,VIIa-c,e-k, VIIIa,b,d,e)

There is hardly any information on these stocks, only from egg surveys. There is a high level of uncertainty. ICES advice is to maintain the stock size.

The Portuguese note that area VIIIc should be included in the advice because that is where Portugal fishes.

Recommendations:

- Recommend a TAC for 2006 of 150,000 tonnes (137,000 tonnes in 2005). It was noted that the 2001 year class seems to be large and maybe similar to 1982 year class.
- Improve scientific advice (daily egg productivity in relation to fecundity).
- Set up working groups to:
 - o examine the utility of egg surveys.
 - o establish a recruitment index for horse mackerel (juvenile survey).
 - o address the bycatch in horse mackerel fishery.
 - o examine the possibilities and the timing for closures to protect juvenile horse mackerel.

8. Horse Mackerel Scientific Research.

In 2002 research has been carried out, but according to ICES/ACFM fecundity is indeterminate. There is a 2-year cycle egg survey, but the relation between eggs and fish is unclear.

Horse mackerel has a different spawning area than mackerel. It is long-lived (12 years) so effort should not be increased and should be balanced with the needs of the fishery. The research suggested in the management plan horse mackerel (point 4 – study bycatch) is being carried out.

The recommendations are captured under Western Horse Mackerel recommendations.

9. Horse Mackerel Management Plan

The aspects mentioned under point 1 in the management plan for horse mackerel (improving scientific advice) need to be revised.

The French delegation has no recommendations on the stock level of exploitation in the management plan.

The Spanish delegation explains that horse mackerel is valuable and that more resources should go into research.

The TAC is the lowest in the past 20 years, which leaves room for an increase to 250,000 tonnes (now 137,5000 excl. VIIIc). The suggested TAC is 150,000 tonnes. Question is how the stocks are harvested, i.e. juvenile or large fish. Recommended is for this WG to endeavour to draw up harvest control rules according to the management objectives.

Suggested is to protect juvenile horse mackerel through the establishment of a closed area (area VIIIa). This would not hamper the artisanal fishery as it excludes vessels <20m and would exclude the 12mile limit. Provision should be that the number of vessels having access to the area is limited.

There is a question from the Spanish delegation why area VII is not included. But the way to go is to start with one area and expand later to other areas.

The Spanish delegation argues that a closure should be based on decent research and in collaboration with SWW RAC as it concerns the same species. However, horse mackerel will be dealt with by the Pelagic RAC alone. The SWW RAC may be consulted and they can state concerns.

The recommendation is to further examine time and closure by a new working group before actual implementation.

Other recommendations are captured under Western Horse Mackerel recommendations.

10. Sustainable EU Fisheries / MSY

The Working Group proposes for the executive committee to write to the EC that the document is important and that the Pelagic RAC needs more time to think about the way forward. The Working Group will come up with a standpoint by the end of January. For a next meeting a number of experts have to go through the proposals and present different alternatives. Both suggestions are accepted.

11. Technical Measures

The paper contains 10 questions that need to be formally answered. Perhaps the document is not as important as for the demersal fishery, but the Pelagic RAC wants to reflect upon the document in detail. The Working Group will therefore ask for a draft response from the participants. This is not in accordance with the EC timeframe, but a two-month delay should not be a problem. This will be discussed again at the next Working Group meeting at the end of January.

AOB

Discussion whether sprat should be included in Pelagic RAC

According to the ecosystem approach, all species are important and sprat is an important species. The stocks seem healthy however little scientific advice is available. It is present in the North Sea and in the waters in west and south of Ireland. The NGO delegate adds that consumers want to know more about the sustainability of fish, including sprat. It is in the spotlight now and more insight into the state of the stock would be welcome. It is agreed that sprat will be discussed at future Working Group meetings, but with a lower priority than the other species.

Closing words

The meeting is closed at 17.00 by Sean O'Donoghue who thanks the participants and the secretariat and suggests that the next meeting is likely to take place at the end of January 2006.