



▶ Pelagic AC

Working Group I meeting
1 March 2018
10.00-12.30 hrs
Parkhotel Den Haag, Molenstraat 53
The Netherlands

Louis Braillelaan 80
2719 EK Zoetermeer
The Netherlands
Phone: +31 (0)63 375 6324
E-mail: info@pelagic-ac.org
Website: www.pelagic-ac.org

Participants

1	Esben Sverdrup-Jensen, chair	Danish Pelagic Producers Organisation
2	Alfonso Pérez-Rodríguez	Wageningen Marine Research
3	Benoit Berges	Wageningen Marine Research
4	Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn	Danish Pelagic Producers Organisation
5	Gerard van Balsfoort	Pelagic Freezer-Trawler Association
6	Gert Koster	ETF
7	Goncalo Carvalho	Sciaena
8	Guillaume Carruel	Pelagic AC
9	Jerome Jourdain	Union des armateurs a la pêche de France
10	José Beltran	Organizacion de Productores de Pesqueros de Lugo
11	Miren Garmendia	OPEGUI
12	Reine Johansson	Swedish Pelagic Federation
13	Rob Banning	Parlevliet & van der Plas
14	Romain Soisson	Compagnie des Pêches St-Malo
15	Sean O'Donoghue	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
16	Stefan Kalogirou	Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management
17	Søren Anker Pedersen	EU Fishmeal
18	Uwe Richter	Deutscher Hochseefischerei-Verband / Seefrostvertrieb
19	Verena Ohms	Pelagic AC

1. Opening of the meeting by the chairman, Esben Sverdrup-Jensen

The chairman opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. A tour de table followed.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The chairman explained that the main focus of the meeting is an evaluation of the previous year and a reflection on the TACs set by the Council as well as defining priorities for the current year. The agenda was adopted without amendments.



3. Follow-up on action items

The first action item was to circulate the report on acoustic studies in the North Sea and US demersal fisheries and has been completed.

The results of the acoustic studies in the Bay of Biscay are not yet available and it was decided to keep the item on the list.

The research plan on horse mackerel genetics has not been circulated yet, but the chairman promised to do so as soon as possible.

It had also been suggested to discuss the fisheries overview developed by ICES and to have a discussion about this. Unfortunately, there was not enough time to discuss the issue today and it had to be postponed until the April meeting. It was agreed that the chair and secretary will send out some key questions prior to the next meeting to facilitate the discussion on the relevance and usefulness of the fisheries advice.

Another action item was to ask ICES to add a column in the advice sheets to compare the current ICES advice with the ICES advice from the previous year. This issue had been addressed at the MIACO meeting.

Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn remarked that ICES has already taken the comment into account for the latest sprat advice and planned to continue doing so for other stocks as well.

The next point was to get ExCom approval for the TAC recommendations brought forward by WG I which had been dealt with at the October meeting.

No information has been received regarding the identification of sources of discards of North Sea horse mackerel. However, the chairman emphasized the importance of this issue and that it will be a priority throughout 2018.

The last action item was in relation to blue whiting. The chairman recalled that Dankert Skagen helped develop a concept that could better deal with stocks like blue whiting where recruitment shifts occur regularly. The chairman thought that there was enough information available to draft a new management strategy and he decided to come back to the issue later in the meeting.

4. Atlanto-Scandian herring

• Results 2017

The chairman summarized that the initial figure advised by ICES was based on the management plan, but that after the Pelagic AC submitted its own advice which was in line with the ICES advice, some error in the data input from Norway was discovered. This resulted in a significant downwards revision when following the management plan. As a result, the negotiations were postponed and the recommendation from the Pelagic AC was no longer relevant. In the end the Coastal States agreed on a TAC of 435.000 tonnes which is somewhere between F_{msy} and the management plan. Furthermore, work is ongoing to revise the reference points.

Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn said that there will be a meeting on 10 and 11 April 2018 in Copenhagen to further refine the assessment model and the reference points.

The chairman suggested to follow the process closely. Personally, he was disappointed that the management plan had not been followed, but he was even more disappointed that such a serious mistake could happen in the first place without being discovered early in the process. This issue had also been addressed at the MIACO meeting and it was stressed several times that ICES has to put in place quality control measures.



- **Priorities 2018**

The chairman said that it would be necessary to look at the quality of the stock assessment, even though this was mainly a Norwegian issue and to follow the work on the reference points. He also suggested encouraging the Commission and Member States to find agreement on the management and sharing arrangement since the current arrangement was not acceptable.

5. North Sea herring

- **Results 2017**

The ICES advice for North Sea herring was based on the EU-Norway management strategy which still contains the old reference points. The Pelagic AC recommended revising the plan to include the new reference points and to set the TAC accordingly. However, the EU and Norway decided to postpone the revision until the first half of 2018 and instead set the TAC at MSY.

- **Priorities 2018**

The chairman pointed out that part of the ICES advice referred to the Pelagic AC working on identifying spawning grounds. This work has started a few years ago, but not much progress has been made in recent years and the chairman was wondering whether the Pelagic AC can indeed deliver anything useful. If yes, people needed to continue working on the issue. If not, it should be removed from the work program.

Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn said that a few years ago there had been a meeting with WGMARS which also included people from the dredging industry. During that meeting people looked into potential spawning areas and started mapping them. It was a good start, but he was not sure that the work led to anything. However, he did consider the topic worth pursuing and thought it would be too early to take it off the work program. He offered to think about it in more detail and come up with an idea on how to progress.

The chairman thanked Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn for the initiative and decided to keep the topic under North Sea herring. The other priority was to engage in the revision of the management plan which has been scheduled for later this year. However, the corresponding meeting will deal with more issues than just North Sea herring and in the chairman's experience these meetings have many people participate with different expertise and different priorities. He had therefore suggested to split the meeting into separate pelagic and demersal sessions to get a better structure.

Gerard van Balsfoort said that there had been some work done on reference points and natural mortality of North Sea herring and he wondered whether ICES will publish the results.

Benoit Berges replied that natural mortality has been updated as well as some of the methodology. ICES was currently working on the report and the internal deadline was Monday, 5th of May. He was not sure when the report will be released. One of the problems is that natural mortality can change from one model run to the next. ICES came up with a solution where it takes natural mortality and scales it to the best available fit. This has been tried with different runs and it seems to provide a good consistency with different natural mortality values. Whenever the value of natural mortality changes, the consistency with the assessment remains and there are no big fluctuations.

The chairman said he was looking forward to the report. He also expected that the EU and Norway will update the management plan, but keep the general framework. Therefore, he did not expect any major changes.



6. Western Baltic spring spawning herring

- **Results 2017**

The chairman explained that the TAC for 3a herring is set in accordance with the management strategy for North Sea herring since the fishery is catching a mix of North Sea herring and Western Baltic spring spawning herring. The Pelagic AC had recommended to follow the management strategy, but to revise the TAC setting in accordance with the advice for updating the reference points in the management strategy for North Sea herring. In the end the EU and Norway agreed on a TAC for 3a herring of 48.427 tonnes including a 50% flexibility.

- **Priorities 2018**

For Western Baltic spring spawning herring the chairman suggested to make the quality of the assessment the main priority for 2018. However, he was not sure whether this has already been dealt with at the recent benchmark.

Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn said that the main priority of the benchmark was to come up with a better assessment, because the results between years were very different, even though the only thing that was updated from year to year were the survey and catch data. This was a bit worrying and people hoped to develop a better model. It also turned out at the benchmark that the stock level is more aligned with the last assessment run which implied a downward revision. Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn was not sure what will happen to reference points since there had not been enough time to look at that.

Benoit Berges said that there will be a section on reference points in the benchmark report. He has worked on the issue and the report is currently under review.

Blue whiting

- **Results 2017**

ICES based its advice for blue whiting on the MSY approach. The Pelagic AC agreed with the advice, but also encouraged the Commission to revisit the two tier management approach developed by the Pelagic AC in 2012. Managers agreed on a TAC in accordance with the ICES advice. However, no Coastal States agreement has been signed.

- **Priorities 2018**

The chairman recalled that the focus group on blue whiting did some work together with Dankert Skagen in order to develop a management strategy proposal that can better deal with recruitment shifts. He thought that the focus group was in a position to draft its own proposal before the next Coastal States negotiations will take place.

Sean O'Donoghue agreed that drafting a new management strategy should be a priority for this stock. He warned people not to underestimate the uphill battle. Even though there is no Coastal States agreement, the TAC is very high which means this is the right time to get things done. He therefore urged the focus group to continue its work immediately. He also suggested inviting the Norwegian industry to participate in the focus group since they seemed to have a particular difficulty with the previous management strategy. Furthermore, Sean O'Donoghue uttered his disappointment regarding the absence of the Commission at the current meeting. It seemed that the Commission was not very inclined to push for a new management strategy for blue whiting and he wanted the Pelagic AC to point out the urgency for a new strategy. He also remembered that Dankert Skagen had discovered



something in the ICES advice framework that was not precautionary for a stock like blue whiting. He urged the focus group to deal with this issue and to highlight it, so that the Coastal States will ask for an evaluation.

The chairman agreed that it was very disappointing that the Commission was again absent from a Pelagic AC meeting and he suggested highlighting this in the minutes of the meeting. Involving the Norwegian industry was a good suggestion he promised to follow up on. Regarding the ICES advice framework he pointed out that the issue had been flagged as an action item after the last focus group meeting.

Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn was not sure whether the problem was indeed with the ICES advice framework or rather with the CFP that specifies that F_{msy} is fixed. He said that having two F values, one for a low recruitment regime and one for a high recruitment regime, is very similar to the Norwegian harvest control rule for Barents Sea cod. ICES approved this plan to be precautionary and Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn agreed that it would be very helpful to involve the Norwegians and learn from their experience.

The chairman thought that the Commission would be open to look at new management approaches as long as they are in line with MSY. He also pointed out that the Member States and the Commission did not feel the obligation to stick to a particular management plan. However, the whole idea of having management plans is to work on a long term basis. He agreed to arrange a focus group meeting as soon as possible and to invite Norwegian stakeholders.

North Sea horse mackerel

- **Results 2017**

The ICES catch advice for 2018 was no more than 17.517 tonnes based on the precautionary approach. However, this figure included the discard estimates from the demersal fleet. The Pelagic AC instead advised a TAC of 15.179 tonnes which excluded the discard estimates. The reason is that otherwise managers would distribute the total figure to the fleets that target North Sea horse mackerel resulting in higher total catches since the demersal fleet would still have a significant amount of bycatch. The issue was also highlighted at the MIACO meeting and people pointed out that it added to the confusion of managers. Whereas last year managers set the TAC at the total catch figure, this year managers followed the Pelagic AC advice. However, this will still not solve the issue of unwanted pelagic bycatch in demersal fisheries and as of 2019 the problems might become even worse. The chairman concluded that some framework was needed to deal with these problems in the future.

- **Priorities 2018**

In terms of priorities the chairman suggested to continue focusing on the stock ID project and historical catch rates which is being led by the Dutch and Irish members. He also wanted to examine the discard data for this and other stocks, where relevant, to get an idea on the accuracy of the data. Moreover, he suggested engaging with the demersal/polyvalent sector to see whether some of the issues could be addressed together. Almost ¼ of the catch is taken as unwanted bycatch and it was urgently necessary to explore potential mitigation measures. Even though the Pelagic AC has not collaborated much with the demersal sector in previous years, he hoped that there might be a way of approaching the demersal sector.

Sean O'Donoghue said that the stock ID project is very important for both North Sea and Western horse mackerel which is why part of the industry has agreed to extend its support. However, he was looking for contributions from everyone active in these fisheries. Regarding the discard issue he



pointed out that the Pelagic AC will organize a WebEx meeting on the Landing obligation on Monday and that members of the NWWAC have also been invited to participate in the WebEx. He considered this an excellent starting point to address the issue. As far as he understood, the discard problem of North Sea horse mackerel was purely a French issue in the Channel and hence under the remit of the NWWAC. He had already raised the problem with the NWWAC. However, he also pointed out that there will likely be more problems once the Landing obligation comes into full force and there was a real urgency to resolve them.

Jerome Jourdain had tried to find out more about the discard issue. He understood that for a long time people have discarded horse mackerel due to a lack of market opportunities as well as catch composition rules in the cod recovery plan. However, since the Omnibus Regulation and a decrease in the cod catches, bycatches of horse mackerel have also decreased. Nevertheless, there was still a discard problem. He furthermore pointed out that there is a large difference between discard estimates from ICES compared to STECF. This issue has been raised at the last MIACO meeting and he hoped to have more precise estimates next year.

The chairman confirmed that the differences in the discard estimates have been addressed at the MIACO meeting. He also pointed out that the FIDES system adds further to the confusion since these data differ from the ICES and STECF data and the discrepancies are quite large in some instances.

Sean O'Donoghue suggested encouraging some French fishermen to join the WebEx meeting on the Landing obligation to explain the situation.

Jerome Jourdain explained that a representative of From Nord has already registered for the meeting.

Goncalo Carvalho was pleased that policy makers followed the Pelagic AC's advice. He also thought that it was a very good initiative to have a WebEx on the Landing obligation and he ensured his support.

The chairman recalled the worry expressed previously that the full implementation of the Landing obligation could reveal more problems that people have been unaware of. He wanted to have suggestions for how to deal with these situations beyond the use of the choke mitigation tool.

Sean O'Donoghue said that he would provide an update on the choke mitigation tool during WG II. However, unless solutions are found outside the present toolbox, there is a real risk that all pelagic fisheries will be closed early. He urged people to recognize the severity of the problem and to start identifying solutions. The pelagic stocks that will likely be affected include more than just horse mackerel and include also mackerel and herring in areas where there are zero TACs for some demersal species. While he was in favor of using the current toolbox as much as possible, he also pointed out that there will be situations when the toolbox will not be able to address all issues and the Commission and Member States had to be made aware of this. He furthermore mentioned the lack of engagement of the regional groups.

The chairman agreed that it is necessary to engage more closely with the regional groups. Stella Nemecky had participated in the last meeting of the Scheveningen Group, but that meeting had only addressed demersal fisheries and potential de minimis exemptions for pelagic bycatches in demersal fisheries. However, demersal bycatch in pelagic fisheries poses problems as well. In the past this has been addressed through footnotes, but no real solutions have been established.

Gerard van Balsfoort pointed out that this kind of collateral damage has not occurred too much in practice yet. He usually provides the example of whiting in 6a North where the TAC is set at 200 tonnes and where the PFA sometimes bycatches 25% of that TAC. Still the fishery has never been closed and he did not think that any Member State will close a big pelagic fishery due to a small demersal bycatch. He agreed to continuously making policy-makers aware of the issues, but in the end the Landing obligation had never been intended for the pelagic fisheries. It could happen of course that one day some inspector will send a vessel home, but overall he did not foresee any huge problems.



Sean O'Donoghue agreed for the current year, but he expected things to change a lot in 2019 when whiting will fall under the landing obligation as well. Until now whiting bycatch has been taken off the TAC of other species. However, that will not be an option anymore in 2019 unless some of the species will be removed from the TAC and quota regulation. This in turn is a heated debate since NGOs have their own view on this and he warned people not to become complacent. While the demersal fisheries are trying to sort out their issues, the problems for the pelagic fisheries will be even bigger if solutions in the demersal fisheries fail. He was very anxious for the Pelagic AC to continue highlighting the issue, so that there won't be chaos on the 1st of January. He also considered the choke mitigation tool very useful since it indicates that there are no solutions for some of the stocks with the current tools.

Goncalo Carvalho said that the NGOs are rather cohesively looking at the full implementation of the landing obligation and at the moment it seemed that the regulation will not be as unimplementable as people initially feared. However, there are indeed some very serious issues and the ones mentioned by Sean are among them. The NGOs are looking at tools inside the toolbox and potential options outside the toolbox, but the analysis is still very preliminary. He said that some tools will be acceptable to the NGOs while others will not be. He supported the idea of continuously raising awareness of the regional groups.

The chairman considered the current NGO position very encouraging. He also agreed with Gerard van Balsfoort, but nevertheless considered it unacceptable to move into a situation where there is no clarity and he did not want different approaches between different control authorities.

Ecosystem focus group

- **Joint workshop with the MAFMC**

The chairman explained that a joint workshop with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council was under preparation. The first part of the workshop will take place in Gloucester, Massachusetts, the second in Hirtshals, Denmark. Participation is restricted, but a group of fishermen, NGO representatives and scientists has been identified to join the workshops and the results will be communicated to everyone. The chairman hoped that it will be very useful to have this exchange with the US to learn from each other's different management approaches. In case of questions he encouraged members to contact him or the secretariat by email.

AOB

There was no other business.

End of meeting

The meeting closed at 11:20 hrs.



Action items

General

- Circulate report for acoustic studies in the Bay of Biscay once available (Jerome Jourdain)
- Circulate research plan for genetics project on horse mackerel once available (chairman)
- Discuss ICES fisheries advice at April meeting and circulate some key questions prior to the next meeting to facilitate the discussion (chairman, secretariat)

Atlanto-Scandian herring

- Encourage Commission and Member States to find agreement on the management and sharing arrangement (chairman, secretariat)

North Sea herring

- Provide suggestions for how to move forward on the herring spawning grounds (Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn)
- Follow-up on the revision of the management plan

Blue whiting

- Finalize development of a new management strategy and invite Norwegians to the next focus group meeting (focus group)
- Draft an explanation for why the ICES standard MSY rule is problematic to use for a stock like blue whiting (Dankert Skagen, focus group)

North Sea horse mackerel

- Continue genetic stock ID project and work on historical catch rates (focus group, PFA)
- Engage with demersal sector on how to reduce bycatch (Working Group members)

