



▶ Pelagic AC

Working Group I meeting
8 July 2015
10:00-12:30
Parkhotel Den Haag, 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

Esben Sverdrup-Jensen (chairman), Alex Wiseman, Anne Mette Bæk Jespersen, Christine Absil, Claus Reedtz Sparrevohn, Eric Roeleveld, Eskild Kirkegaard, Fredrik Lindberg, Frederik Schutyser, Gary Taylor, Gerard van Balsfoort, Goncalo Carvalho, Iain MacSween, Ian Gatt, Irene Kingma, Jerome Jourdain, Jerome Nouis, Jesper Juul Larsen, John Ward, José Beltran, Kees Taal, Lesley Duthie, Lisbeth Nielsen, Martin Pastoors, Matthew Cox, Miren Garmendia, Niels Hintzen, Piebe Hotsma, Reine Johansson, Sean O'Donoghue, Sheila O'Neill, Stella Nemecky, Tony Andrews, Uwe Richter, Verena Ohms, William Stewart

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

The chairman opened the meeting at 10:00 hrs and welcomed the participants. A tour de table followed.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted without amendments.

3. Follow-up on action items

The first action item was in relation to setting up an ecosystem focus group and the chairman announced that he would deal with the issue under agenda item 6.

The second action item was to revise the long-term management strategy for blue whiting reflecting the new F_{msy} value. However, he pointed out that this work had been overtaken by the reality of Coastal States negotiations and their view of the management strategy developed by the Pelagic AC. While the Commission acknowledged that according to ICES the strategy was precautionary, the Coastal States considered it overly complicated without significant benefits compared to simpler harvest control rules. The chairman did not consider this a good argument given that the management strategies for North Sea herring and Western Baltic spring spawning herring are far more complicated. Nevertheless the Coastal States have submitted a request to ICES asking for evaluation of a management strategy that uses a traditional harvest control rule, a fishing mortality (F) value of 0.22, 0.25 and 0.3, a TAC stabilizer of 20%, an F stabilizer of 10 or 15% and an inter-annual flexibility of 10 or 20%. The chairman concluded that it would be useless to continue working on the Pelagic AC management strategy while a new Coastal States strategy is under consideration. He suggested keeping the Pelagic AC strategy as inspiration for future work.

Sean O'Donoghue was disappointed that neither the Commission nor the other Coastal States recognized the value of the management strategy provided by the Pelagic AC. He agreed using the principles of the strategy for future work.

Anne-Mette Bæk Jespersen wanted to know when ICES will evaluate the Coastal States request and Eskild Kirkegaard explained that ICES is currently discussing how to organize the process. He assumed that some work has to be carried out before WGWIDE meets and that the evaluation will be finalized during WGWIDE.

The third action item was in relation to re-using old horse mackerel samples for genetic analysis and Sean O'Donoghue explained that a study is currently ongoing which will look at both old and new samples.

In terms of calling upon Member States to set up one regional group dealing with pelagic management plans neither of the Working Group chairs has been successful thus far despite active lobbying. Sean O'Donoghue uttered worries that there will also be three separate control groups with differing rules which would not make any sense and in fact be detrimental to the fisheries. The chairman added that no information from the control groups has reached the Pelagic AC yet.

The last action item was in relation to the MYFISH work on the trade-offs between herring and sprat and the chairman decided to deal with this issue under AOB.

4. Fishing opportunities 2016: presentation of ICES advice

Eskild Kirkegaard, chair of ACOM, thanked the Pelagic AC for the opportunity to present the ICES advice on herring stocks. He started his presentation with providing some general information on how ICES produces its advice and emphasized that ICES tries to be consistent in the way it gives advice. If a management plan is available which has been recognized by the competent authorities and is in accordance with the precautionary approach, ICES bases its advice on this management plan. Otherwise ICES follows the MSY approach and if that is not available ICES follows the precautionary approach. However, all of these options are presented in the catch options table.

ICES has also developed six different stock categories depending on the knowledge and information available for each stock. For stocks with an analytical assessment and forecast for MSY or trends ICES bases its advice on the MSY approach. For stocks with survey-based assessments indicating trends and for stocks with reliable time series of catch data ICES follows the precautionary approach, but is also developing an MSY approach. For the remaining two categories, stocks with catch or landings data and stocks with landings data that are largely discarded, ICES uses the precautionary approach. In dialogue with the recipients of the advice ICES also discusses whether it should develop a risk-based approach for the stocks in categories 5 and 6. However, this issue is not really relevant for the Pelagic AC at the moment. The ICES MSY approach uses $F = F_{msy}$ as long as the spawning stock biomass (SSB) is above the MSY $B_{trigger}$. This trigger point represents the lower threshold of natural SSB fluctuations. If SSB falls below MSY $B_{trigger}$ F is being gradually reduced. For stocks in category 3 the advice is mostly based on previous advice, or recent catch or landings, and modified according to index information. It also incorporates a 20% uncertainty cap to dampen noise and a 20% precautionary buffer if stock status in relation to reference points is unknown.

Due to the introduction of the landing obligation ICES had to change its terminology. In the past catch advice was split in landings and discards. In a lot of stocks these cannot be differentiated anymore and therefore ICES now uses the terms wanted and unwanted catch. There has been a lot of criticism in this regard, but Eskild Kirkegaard pointed out that ICES took over the term unwanted catch directly from the CFP and everything that is not unwanted catch must logically be wanted catch. Whenever possible ICES now provides catch advice. In cases where discards are not

quantifiable “wanted catch” advice is provided. In the future ICES aims to provide three kinds of advice for each ecoregion: ecosystem advice (to be developed in 2016-2017), fisheries advice (to be developed in 2015-2016) and classic stock advice as already available. This also means that the classic stock advice has been reformatted to make it simpler, but without losing relevant information. Instead of including a fishery description in the stock advice this will be included in the fisheries advice.

The chairman thanked Eskild Kirkegaard for his presentation on how to read the ICES advice. He recalled that there had been some discussions in the Pelagic AC regarding WKMSYREF that changed some of the F_{msy} reference points for various stocks which are usually dealt with by the expert groups. He asked for more detail on that.

Eskild Kirkegaard replied that in most assessment models some rough ecosystem assumptions have to be made and that a number of parameters are kept constant for a period of time, among those are natural mortality and growth rates. Reference points are also kept constant in management plans and are usually being revised at benchmarks only. However, reference points are not constant, because nature changes and there are fluctuations. This has created a problem and it seems necessary to update reference points more frequently and not only at benchmarks. There has been a recent request from the Commission to define F_{msy} ranges for a number of stocks and as part of that work reference points have also been reviewed and adjusted.

To Sean O’Donoghue it seemed that ICES has changed its approach in relation to when a management plan is accepted to be agreed by all parties. He referred to Celtic Sea herring for which a management plan has been accepted by both stakeholders and Member States, but has not gone through Co-Decision yet and which ICES therefore does not use as basis for advice. He also pointed out that the definition of wanted and unwanted catch is not satisfactory, because of the way ICES defines discards. He said that before the landing obligation a situation could arise in which someone caught over quota fish. While that fish was definitely wanted, it was illegal to land whereas now it has to be landed. Finally he wanted to know what the new fisheries and ecosystem advice will look like.

Eskild Kirkegaard replied that ICES did not change the approach for the basis of the ICES advice. It had compiled a list of all management plans and strategies it was aware of and sent this list to all advice recipients, i.e. the Commission, NEAFC and the Member States and asked them which plans it should use as basis for advice. If there was no agreement on a particular plan ICES uses MSY instead. So, rather than basing the ICES advice only on plans that have been formalized, ICES asks managers directly which plans it should use. In terms of unwanted catch and over quota discards Eskild Kirkegaard said that once there is more information available on what actually happens under the landing obligation ICES will change the terminology, but for the time being this is the best definition it could come up with. Regarding fisheries and ecosystem advice he explained that this includes mostly a description of the fisheries and ecosystem as well as information and knowledge and not so much specific recommendations.

Reine Johansson pointed out that in some cases the MSY value is 20% higher than the recommended fishing opportunity and he wanted to know where these overly precautionous decisions come from and who decides that a stock should be 20% underutilized.

Eskild Kirkegaard replied that MSY is a management objective and that at the same time it has also been agreed that in achieving MSY the precautionary approach should be followed to ensure future fishing opportunities. Therefore MSY has been defined by ICES as a long-term average. He assumed that Reine Johansson was referring to the 20% precautionary buffer and he explained that applying a limit of 20% offers a lot more stability in general and that there are detailed evaluations underlying this approach.

Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn referred back to the work carried out by WKMSYREF and the changes to F_{msy} reference points. He challenged the explanation that the reason for revising reference points were changes in the ecosystem, but rather due to different people doing the work using different models. This in itself is not necessarily a problem, but it was simply wrong to claim that these revisions are due to ecosystem changes, because changes are captured due to model fluctuations and not due to ecosystem models.

Eskild Kirkegaard agreed that this was correct and that using new assessment methods lead to changes in e.g. reference points. Nevertheless, ICES still believed that it was applying the best available knowledge and that the new assessment models are considered an improvement. He said that natural mortality was revised due to changes in abundance of predator and prey species, but also due to new methods used.

Gerard van Balsfoort said that under the precautionary approach data-limited stocks used to have a 20% cut in catch opportunities, but that this year the cut has been minus 36%. He considered this a deepening of the precautionary approach. Secondly, he noticed that ICES increasingly uses forward projections over a very long term, i.e. 50 to 100 years. While he considered this scientifically sophisticated he wondered how such forward projections translate into advice for the next year since projections so far into the future are simply not reliable nor realistic.

Eskild Kirkegaard explained that ICES uses an uncertainty cap to limit variation to 20%. On top of that there is the precautionary buffer which is only applied the first time ICES provides advice on a stock which is based on most recent catches. After that ICES uses the previous advice which has already applied the precautionary buffer. In terms of forward projections he pointed out that these projections just assume constant parameters and indicate what F_{msy} would be in the long term under these constant parameters. However, these values have to be updated regularly and he said that ICES did not try to predict a situation in 20 years from now. For some short lived species like sprat ICES takes a completely different approach and uses a surplus production model, simply because variation in recruitment drives everything in this stock.

Gerard van Balsfoort responded that the underlying model assumptions were already very prudent and therefore he thought that using them for forward projections will make the results overly cautious, but Eskild Kirkegaard explained that the precautionary approach is not applied in the assessment models, only to the advice itself.

The chairman wanted to know how many different reports he will have to deal with next year when preparing this meeting to get a full picture on the herring stocks.

Eskild Kirkegaard pointed out that the single stock advice will cover fishing opportunities, that the fisheries advice will provide a description of the fishery and that the ecosystem advice will present drivers and pressures in the ecosystem.

The chairman encouraged ICES to very clearly differentiate between changes based on changes in the ecosystem or based on the assessment method since often fishermen take the blame when there is a downward revision.

- **North Sea autumn spawning herring**

Eskild Kirkegaard presented the ICES advice for North Sea herring applying to ICES areas IIIa, IV and VIIId. ICES advised on the basis of the EU-Norway management plan that catches should be no more than 555.086 tonnes including 518.242 tonnes for the A-fleet. He said that fishing mortality was reduced quite early on many herring stocks and that North Sea herring is fished below F_{msy} and that stock size has been increasing. Recruitment is reasonably constant. The assessment is an age-based

analytical assessment that uses commercial catch data and different survey indices. The diagnostics of the assessment show that it is quite stable with a slight tendency to underestimate stock size which might lead to an upwards revision next year. The target F value is 0.26, but the resulting F value is 0.24 due to a 15% TAC constraint which is further restricted by an F-constraint. Following MSY would yield a significantly higher TAC number for the A-fleet.

- **Western Baltic spring spawning herring**

The ICES advice for Western Baltic spring spawning herring is based on the MSY approach and implies catches of no more than 52.547 tonnes. Fishing mortality has decreased and the stock is now fished below F_{msy} . Stock size has increased in recent years and recruitment, although low, is constant. There is an analytical assessment which seems to be performing reasonably well. Another catch option would be the TAC setting procedure agreed by the EU and Norway. Eskild Kirkegaard explained that this was the most complicated TAC setting procedure currently available which makes it very complicated to assess what actually happens. To determine the human consumption TAC in area IIIa this procedure uses 41% of the MSY TAC for Western Baltic spring spawning herring plus 5.7% of the North Sea herring TAC and a transfer of maximal 50% into the North Sea. ICES has evaluated this procedure and concluded that it is precautionary as long as at least 10% of the TAC is transferred into the North Sea. ICES has also updated the F_{msy} value which is now estimated to be 0.32. However, the TAC setting procedure has not been evaluated with the new F_{msy} value, but ICES considered it highly likely that with the current transfer of 50% the TAC setting procedure would still be precautionary.

The chairman thanked Eskild Kirkegaard for his presentation and concluded that the blue whiting management strategy proposed by the Pelagic AC seemed dangerously simple compared to this.

Gerard van Balsfoort said that calculating 5.7% of the North Sea herring TAC equals approximately 30.000 tonnes. 41% of the MSY advice for Western Baltic spring spawning herring is approximately 22.000 tonnes. Together this equals 52.000 tonnes. At least 10% of this amount has to be taken in the North Sea, i.e. 5000 tonnes. That means that 47.000 tonnes can still be taken in area IIIa, which is more than what can be caught of Western Baltic spring spawning herring in IIIa. He wanted to know how this made sense.

Eskild Kirkegaard explained that ICES used the EU-Norway agreement as a starting point and tried to make it consistent with the precautionary approach which can only be ensured by having at least a 10% transfer. He further explained that when fishing in the Western Baltic the catch is a mix of about 58% Western Baltic spring spawning herring and 42% North Sea herring. Rather than setting a smaller limit to catches in IIIa, ICES tried to make the TAC setting procedure operational and that can only be done by not fishing the entire Western Baltic TAC in IIIa, but some of it in the North Sea.

The chairman noted that it was also important to keep in mind that the 5.7% is a way of calculating the TAC in IIIa, but that this fish is not taken away from the North Sea herring quota. He concluded that Member States and Commission have to be very clear in their request to ICES and that it would have helped the process to include the 50% transfer in the request.

Gerard van Balsfoort pointed out that the 11% share of the total North Sea TAC for the Downs component is no longer mentioned in the ICES advice. This was a sensitive political issue and the Commission has used these 11% to set the TAC in specific areas. He was worried that there will be a heavy argument on this.

Eskild Kirkegaard said that the Commission has not requested figures on the Downs component and since this was a political discussion it was not up to ICES to decide on this. However, Gerard van

Balsfoort replied that this has never been part of the Commission's request and he wondered why ICES has decided to exclude it now.

Niels Hintzen explained that the 11% made its way into the ICES advice when the Downs component was in bad shape and needed additional protection. In recent years the components further north have declined compared to the Downs component and that has led HAWG to rephrase the sentence. Now the advice recommends choosing TACs which fit all spawning components.

Eskild Kirkegaard added that if people really wanted separate advice on different spawning components this would have to be requested specifically.

Ian Gatt referred to the mapping work of herring spawning grounds carried out over the past year. He wanted to know whether anything was being formalized in regards to taking this work forward since ICES has continuously recommended limiting activities that have a negative impact on herring spawning grounds, but Eskild Kirkegaard said that unfortunately there was nothing being done on behalf of ICES.

Niels Hintzen confirmed that there are some industry initiatives to take this work further, but nothing from ICES.

Martin Pastoors pointed out that he has submitted a paper on this work for the ICES Annual Science Conference and also hoped that the results can be submitted to HAWG in 2016.

The chairman thanked Eskild Kirkegaard again for his presentation and concluded that even though the situation is very complicated there is good news for both stocks.

5. Adoption of PELAC advice

• North Sea autumn spawning herring

The chairman proposed following the management plan in 2016, but invited comments from the audience.

Gerard van Balsfoort pointed out that the 2014 year class is very big and that the stock has further increased. Applying the two stabilizers in the management plan would result in a further reduction of fishing mortality. However, the realized F has been below F_{msy} for a long time which a few years ago led to the rejection of the then implemented management plan. He saw the same danger again in the current situation with the new EU/Norway strategy while ICES has revised F_{msy} upwards. In his view a management strategy should have a target F that equals F_{msy} and there should be good reasons to deviate from it. As an example he referred to Norway which chose to deviate from F_{msy} as target F for Atlanto-Scandian herring, because Norway chose deliberately for an extra safeguard in the management of this stock in view of the problems in the past with this stock. Still, as a general rule, Gerard van Balsfoort preferred recommending MSY , but if the Pelagic AC should decide to recommend following the management plan he wanted to add to the advice that Commission and Council should change the target of the management plan to the new F_{msy} value.

The chairman remarked that the new F_{msy} value has been presented in the report of a workshop, but not as official ICES advice although it will likely be redefined at some point. He thought that this underlined again the importance of scientist and stakeholder consultation by the EU and Norway when drafting management plans, since it seemed that these parties cannot grasp the consequences a management plan can have.

Christine Absil saw this as a very typical recurring reaction by the industry to amend a management plan when a stock is doing well. She thought that the current management plan was well-functioning

and that there was no need to refer to F_{msy}. She said that F_{msy} should only be followed if no management plan was available.

Gerard van Balsfoort replied that Christine Absil's comment would be valid if the current management plan was indeed well-functioning. However, he pointed out that the Pelagic AC has not recommended this plan and that therefore he did not feel part of it. He emphasized that whenever the Pelagic AC has developed a management plan and this plan yielded lower catches than MSY he still supported the plan, but this plan was not developed by the Pelagic AC. He agreed to follow the plan, but said that the F target should be updated.

The chairman suggested recommending to follow the management plan, but also to include a comment that it is crucial to engage with the Pelagic AC throughout developing a management plan.

- **Western Baltic spring spawning herring**

The chairman announced that for the first time in the history of the Pelagic AC it was possible to provide TAC advice for this stock and he recommended following the ICES MSY advice.

Reine Johansson agreed and pointed out that the Baltic Sea AC will also recommend following the ICES advice. He added that the current model for Western Baltic spring spawning herring presents a very good way of dealing with a mixed fishery that should be used more often in the future.

6. Update on ecosystem focus group

The chairman said that work is well underway, but that the time frame proved too short for the level of ambition. While a lot of work has already been done, more has to be done still and he said that the group will continue its work over the summer and present the results in October. He furthermore announced that Stella Nemecky and Irene Kingma have kindly agreed to co-chair the ecosystem focus group given their expertise on the matter.

Ian Gatt pointed out that a good start has been made initially and that specific people have specific action points to deal with for the report. However, there was a period of about three weeks just before the current meeting during which sadly almost nothing was done. He therefore called upon the focus group members to get on with the work that they signed up for, so that it can be completed before the October meeting.

7. AOB

Martin Pastoors said that there has been a lot of work in the MYFISH project on trade-offs between herring and sprat, but that it is more difficult to pull the results together than anticipated. He promised to send out summaries of the outputs as soon as possible.

8. End of meeting

The meeting closed at 12.20.

Action items

- Finalize work on the ecosystem focus group report and present results at October meeting (Esben Sverdrup-Jensen, Stella Nemecky, Irene Kingma, Martin Pastoors, Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn, Ian Gatt, Aukje Coers, Søren Anker Pedersen, Secretariat)