



Working Group I meeting

25 February 2016

12.40-15.15 hrs

Parkhotel Den Haag, Netherlands

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Participants

1	Esben Sverdrup-Jensen, chairman	Danish Pelagic Producer Organisation
2	Alan McCulla	Anglo North Irish Fish Producers Organisation
3	Anne Mette Bæk Jespersen	EU Fishmeal
4	António M P Cunha	Testa and Cunhas Fishing and Agriculture
5	Bent Pallisgaard	Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries Denmark
6	Brian Isbister	Shetland's Fishermen Association
7	Christine Absil	Seas at Risk
8	Claus Reedtz Sparrevoehn	Danish Pelagic Producer Organisation
9	Davie Hutchison	Scottish Fishermen's Federation
10	Edward Farrell	University College Dublin
11	Fredrik Lindberg	Swedish Fishermen's Federation
12	Frederik Schutyser	DG MARE
13	Gerard van Balsfoort	Pelagic Freezer Trawler Association
14	Gersom Costas	Instituto Español de Oceanografía
15	Goncalo Carvalho	Pew Charitable Trusts
16	Ian Gatt	Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association
17	Ignacio Fontaneda Lopez	Ministerio de Agricultura, Alimentación y Medio Ambiente
18	Irene Kingma	Dutch Elasmobranch Society
19	Jerome Jourdain	Coopératives Maritimes Etaploises - Organisation de Producteurs
20	Jerome Nous	From Nord
21	Jesper Raakjær	AIPCE
22	Joakim Hjelm	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
23	Johan Muller	Cornelis Vrolijk
24	John Ward	Irish Fish PO
25	José Beltran	OPLUGO
26	Justyna Zajchowska	Pew Charitable Trusts
27	Kees Taal	Van der Zwan
28	Konstantinos Kokosis	European Bureau for Conservation and Development
29	Laurent Markovic	DG MARE
30	Lesley Duthie	North Sea Women's Network
31	Manuela Azevedo	Instituto Português do Mar e da Atmosfera
32	Marco van Riel	Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs
33	Maria Aira Martin	Shetland Fishermen's Association
34	Marta Mosquera	Pelagic Freezer Trawler Association
35	Matthew Cox	National Federation of Fishermen's Organisation
36	Miguel Nuevo Alarcon	European Fisheries Control Agency

37	Patrick Murphy	Irish South & West PO
38	Reine Johansson	Swedish Fishermen's Federation
39	Rob Banning	Parlevliet & Van der Plas B.V.
40	Romain Lopez	Observer
41	Sean O'Donoghue	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
42	Søren Anker Pedersen	Marine Ingredients Denmark
43	Stella Nemecky	WWF
44	Tony Andrews	Atlantic Salmon Trust
45	Verena Ohms	Pelagic AC

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

The chairman opened the meeting at 12:40 hrs and welcomed the participants.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The chairman announced that he will raise one issue under AOB and the agenda was subsequently adopted.

3. Follow-up on action items

The first action item was in relation to formalizing stakeholder meetings prior to ICES Working Group meetings. The issue was raised at the MIACO meeting, but ICES was not so keen on formalizing this too much. It was agreed that if there are any issues raised by the Pelagic AC they can be send to the ICES secretariat in advance of benchmarks and Working Group meetings. The secretariat will then forward them to the relevant expert groups and discuss with the expert groups and the Pelagic AC how to proceed. While ICES was against establishing a strictly formal system this issue will be evaluated and further developed in the future.

The other action item was to update the draft management strategy for blue whiting. However, blue whiting will be undergoing an inter benchmark exercise which might result in revised reference points and stock status. Therefore the chairman suggested postponing this action point until ICES has completed the benchmark. He explained that the benchmark will take place through correspondence and that members of the Pelagic AC will have the opportunity to submit comments. Some members will also participate as observers. The dates had not yet been decided, but the benchmark is scheduled for the end of March.

Irene Kingma said that at the last MIACO meeting there were small break out groups focusing on specific regions, including one for pelagics, and these groups worked very well. She recommended asking ICES to take this forward at next year's MIACO meeting.

Sean O'Donoghue agreed that these break out groups were very useful and one of the recommendations from the MIACO meeting was to have these break out groups in the MIRAC meeting next year which will precede the MIACO meeting.

4. Atlanto-Scandian herring

• Results 2015

The chairman summarized that both ICES and the Pelagic AC recommended following the management plan for this stock and the TAC for 2016 was set at 316.876 tonnes accordingly.

Fortunately the stock status is also improving. Furthermore, the Pelagic AC recommended a derogation from article 20a of the Technical Measures Regulation, but the Council did not agree to this and the chairman therefore decided to keep this issue on the agenda as an action item.

- **Priorities 2016**

The chairman pointed out that a lot of work on acoustics has been carried out by the Norwegians over the past year which will probably feed into the benchmark next week.

Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn elaborated that the Norwegians carried out an acoustic survey this year and last year trying to measure stock size. This survey has also been carried out in the past, but was abandoned and has now been taken up again. The benchmark will discuss how to include this survey in the assessment. There is also a lot of discussion on natural mortality and whether that has changed. In general the Norwegians think that the stock size is much larger than what ICES estimates.

The chairman thanked Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn for this information and invited members to submit any issues they might want to bring up for the benchmark as soon as possible. He also pointed out that Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn and Martin Pastoors will participate in the benchmark.

5. North Sea herring

- **Results 2015**

The chairman summarized that ICES recommended following the management strategy agreed between the EU and Norway which implied a TAC of 518.242 tonnes for the A-fleet. The Pelagic AC supported this advice, but also uttered its dissatisfaction with the process of developing this strategy, because it was very untransparent and the Pelagic AC has not been properly consulted. The ACs have a formal status in the EU framework and policy makers are obliged to consult the ACs on relevant issues. Besides, he believed the competence within the AC to be of such character that it would be wise to listen to its recommendations.

- **Priorities 2016**

In terms of priorities the chairman explained that the mapping of spawning areas will continue and that developments in regards to age structure, infections and the discard ban will be monitored. He said that last year's outbreak of Ichthyophonus infections was probably a local issue since he has not received any more reports on this issue.

Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn added that there has been a presentation on the ongoing work of mapping herring spawning grounds in the North Sea at the ICES Annual Science Conference in 2015. He was not sure, however, how much progress has been made since then.

The chairman decided to come back to this issue before the HAWG meeting.

6. Western Baltic spring spawning herring

- **Results 2015**

Western Baltic spring spawning herring is a complicated stock due to its migratory nature and mixing with the North Sea herring stock. The Pelagic AC has been heavily involved in developing a management strategy for this stock and last year succeeded to provide advice for the first time which was subsequently adopted by the Council.

Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn said that the stock has recently been MSC certified. Biomass is also starting to increase while fishing mortality has gone down. Overall there is a very positive development for this stock.

The chairman clarified that the MSC certification process is indeed well ahead, but has not been finalized yet.

- **Priorities 2016**

Priorities in 2016 include the monitoring of mixing between Western Baltic spring spawning and North Sea herring and to provide advice to ICES on the use of the flexibility. Developments after the implementation of the discard ban will also be monitored. So far no major issues have been raised, but later in the meeting there will be a presentation on selectivity.

7. Blue whiting

- **Results 2015**

The chairman recalled that ICES had recommended following the MSY advice while the Pelagic AC encouraged Coastal States to agree on a long term management strategy and to explore the strategy developed by the Pelagic AC in 2012. Unfortunately, however, the Coastal States did not agree on a management strategy. Therefore the EU TAC has been set to 322.570 tonnes which is in line with the MSY advice. There has been a bilateral agreement with Norway on the TAC and on access, but the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Russia have set autonomous quota.

Christine Absil noted that there are a lot of management problems to be solved and she did not understand how this fishery could get MSC certification.

The chairman replied that he cannot provide any details, but he pointed out that the fishery has been certified with conditions it has to meet. One of these conditions is that the management should be improved within a certain timeframe and clients have to actively work on this. Personally he was still concerned that no management strategy has been agreed with the Coastal States, but that does not mean that the fishery is unsustainable.

Gerard van Balsfoort thought that part of the explanation for receiving MSC certification could be that it was the EU fleet that got certified and the EU fleet bases its share on the ICES advice. He confirmed that the fishery did not achieve the highest score and that there is a condition that the Coastal States have to get together and negotiate.

Sean O'Donoghue agreed that Christine Absil's question was very valid and the Pelagic AC should push for a management agreement within the Coastal States. He explained that a management strategy had been tabled, but unfortunately parties did not agree on it at the end of 2015. The Pelagic AC should actively encourage Coastal States to put this strategy in place which would then supersede the draft strategy developed by the Pelagic AC in 2012.

Laurent Markovic explained that a draft management strategy has been agreed by the Coastal States in 2015 and that this strategy has been sent to ICES for advice. John Spencer wanted to attend the Pelagic AC meeting and provide more information, but instead had to be in London at a NEAFC meeting.

The chairman was surprised to hear that a management strategy has been sent to ICES without informing Member States nor stakeholders. Until now he was under the impression that a strategy has only been drafted. He concluded to wait for the ICES advice before discussing this stock further.

Note from the Commission: members of the Pelagic AC were present at the meeting of the CS where it was agreed to send the management strategy to ICES.

- **Priorities 2016**

The chairman explained that an inter benchmark will take place from 10 March until 4 April by correspondence. He invited members to submit any relevant information to the secretariat which will then forward the information to ICES. He also concluded that the Pelagic AC will continue to push for a Coastal States agreement, possibly based on the draft management strategy developed by the Coastal States.

Sean O'Donoghue said that another thing to look at are the acoustic surveys, because in 2015 there has been again a problem with the blue whiting survey and he suggested inviting an acoustic expert to give a presentation at the next Pelagic AC meeting. He also suggested looking into genetics. Maybe some of the stock ID or recruitment issues can be addressed through genetics. He asked Ed Farrell to provide guidance.

Ed Farrell said that it depends on the question. There is the issue of southern stock versus northern stock which could be addressed through genetic analysis, but people would have to discuss what questions exactly they want to address and what the specific issues are.

The chairman asked what the scope for the inter benchmark is and Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn explained that it is relatively limited to deal with technical issues in relation to the model and assessment. There is no scope to include new data or discuss stock units.

8. North Sea horse mackerel

- **Results 2015**

ICES gave advice according to the precautionary approach and this was supported by the Pelagic AC. Furthermore it was decided to continue the collaboration between members of the Pelagic AC and IMARES. The TAC has been subsequently set to the level recommended by ICES.

- **Priorities 2016**

The chairman explained that the main priority for this stock is to continue improving the knowledge base. Unfortunately Martin Pastoors was not present to provide more information. Therefore the chairman decided to give an update on the PFA research plan at the next meeting.

9. Report from the AORAC meeting

Stella Nemecky gave a presentation on a workshop she attended on behalf of the Pelagic AC on how to make the ecosystem based management operational. This workshop was mainly attended by scientists, but also some policy makers and stakeholders which provided both advantages and disadvantages. While scientists approach the topic as a research question, stakeholders see the ecosystem approach as something they need to start applying. The workshop started by identifying the main challenges that hinder the implementation of ecosystem based management. These included cross-sectoral trade-offs, inertia in decision making processes, lack of trust and knowledge, difficulties in agreeing on priorities, lack of capacity to include social and economic analyses, lack of a common language and lack of transparency. Subsequently participants split up into breakout groups and Stella Nemecky participated in the group that tried to formulate best practices for reconciling

sectoral interests. This process should start with a scoping exercise to identify areas, objectives and activities and develop a joint vision, e.g. a healthy ecosystem or enhanced livelihoods. This can be realized through multi-stakeholder workshops at which sectoral priorities are being identified. In order to build trust Chatham House Rules should be applied and an explicit set of terms of references agreed. However, it can be difficult to identify all relevant stakeholders and to gather them around the table. Afterwards a baseline analysis of current uses should be carried out to identify impacts followed by identifying goals from development plans. It is very important to be transparent about trade-offs throughout the process and to carry out a trade-off analysis. When transposing the results of this analysis into recommendations it is important to carry out regular reviews and to keep in mind that this should be an adaptive, iterative process. Some of the pitfalls listed included a vital need for ocean literacy, enhanced linkage between policy cycles, the gap between data contributors and users and the need for an ongoing dialogue between regional and sub-regional government organizations. One of the most important conclusions of the workshop was to move forward anyway despite not having all data available and to learn while along. For Stella Nemecky it was useful to get some ideas how to proceed with the ecosystem focus group given that she is now co-chairing it and she suggested making use of the FAO toolbox to build consensus. It was also clear to her that the Pelagic AC was lacking the capacity for including economic and social issues and she therefore emphasized that economists and social scientists must join the process.

The chairman thanked Stella Nemecky for the presentation and opened the floor for questions.

Tony Andrews said that it was not enough to focus on EU waters only and that the Pelagic AC had to think about other parts of the ocean too. He suggested linking with the ocean tracking network which will help the Pelagic AC to see the bigger picture.

The chairman asked Stella Nemecky what she thought the next step should be for the ecosystem focus group, e.g. a different approach or zooming in on some aspects.

Stella Nemecky proposed going through the ecosystem focus group report and draft a plan on how to move forward. Once she has drafted this plan she will get in touch with the secretariat to set up either a WebEx meeting or a physical meeting if enough money is available.

The chairman said that it might be an option to arrange a specific workshop, but Stella Nemecky thought that it was too early to have a workshop. She first aimed at suggesting a discrete way forward at the April meeting.

Sean O'Donoghue was hoping that at the end of the process the Pelagic AC will be in a situation to perform an analysis of ecosystem based management applied to pelagics. If a workshop was being organized he would like to look specifically at the pelagic system and how it interacts with the TAC and quota system to get a good idea how ecosystem based management would work in practice. He was aware that this constituted a huge task, but thought that this was the direction people had to choose.

The chairman concluded that he and Stella Nemecky will think of the next steps and how to go ahead with the work. It was obviously a very difficult and abstract topic and there were no clear guidelines. However, the ecosystem focus group was set-up to be at the forefront of the developments and the work should continue.

Stella Nemecky remarked that one of the main conclusions from the workshop was that there must not be a one size fits all approach. The aspects mentioned by Sean O'Donoghue are very relevant and have to be answered at some point, but she also pointed out that the Pelagic AC is still very far away from providing any answers yet. Nevertheless, it is far ahead of other ACs and she advocated proceeding in a good way instead of rushing things.

10. Gear trials in Skagerrak- a new pelagic grid

The chairman invited Joakim Hjelm from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) to give a presentation on a new pelagic grid he has been trialing in the herring fisheries in Skagerrak.

Joakim Hjelm introduced himself and explained that he is the director of the institute of marine research at the SLU. The project he was going to present provided an excellent example of how the fishing industry can help develop its own gear. The problem is that during quarter 3 saithe is pelagic in the Skagerrak and hence there is a bycatch problem in the herring fisheries in August and September while there is no specific quota for saithe in the Swedish pelagic system. Therefore the SPFPO contacted the SLU asking for help to develop and test a pelagic grid that has previously been used in blue whiting and Norway pout fisheries in Norway and the Faroe Islands. This grid, however, has not been tested extensively or evaluated in other fisheries and both the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management and the Ministry supported the gear trials. Normally when performing gear experiments there are two trawls, one experimental and one control trawl. In this case, however, it was not possible to have a double trawl and instead a new kind of camera was used for observations and quantitative evaluation. At first it was necessary to find the optimal position and angle of the camera to gain good footage and to find the right position and angle for the grid to be most effective and minimize saithe bycatch on the one hand and herring loss on the other. Results show that using the grid causes loss of herring between 2.7 and 15% while saithe bycatch ranges from 4.1 to 7.9%. Before using the grid saithe bycatch was about 20% meaning that there is a 90% bycatch reduction with the grid while loss of herring is less than 15%. Another advantage of the grid is that it is very flexible which means it is no problem to shoot the trawl even with such a big grid inserted into the net. The next steps will be to look into the behavior of the fish inside the trawl and to further optimize the set-up of the grid in terms of new material, position and angle.

The chairman thanked Joakim Hjelm for his presentation and remarked that a flexi grid had also been tested in Denmark, but people found it difficult to use. He hoped that other countries could learn from the Swedish results.

Reine Johansson said that it is very important to identify the specific problems in different areas. Some problems cannot be solved by increasing selectivity, but in Skagerrak saithe always goes pelagic between August and October and the Swedish fishermen are very pleased with the trials so far and think that they can manage using the flexible grid. He said that the trials will be continued in 2017 and people believe that the grid can be improved even further. He urged people to ensure that micromanagement will not prevent fishermen from implementing this grid.

Sean O'Donoghue thought that the results look very promising and he wondered whether the grid could also be applied in situations where the bycatch quantities are smaller, e.g. in the case of cod and haddock. He wanted to know if the grid could be just as effective if the density of the bycatch species was lower than is the case for saithe bycatch in the Skagerrak.

Joakim Hjelm said that this was a good point and that it might be necessary to adjust the area of the trawl window. However, in the trials carried out in Skagerrak bycatch of cod and haddock also was reduced.

The chairman asked Joakim Hjelm to keep him updated about further developments and remarked that this work provided an excellent example of how selectivity can be increased in some cases.

Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn pointed out that part of the success is related to the fact that saithe are relatively large compared to herring and he wanted to know how large exactly.

Joakim Hjelm responded that saithe size varies between 20 and 130 cm, but he did not think that size was really an issue, because the scientists observed some large saithe going through the grid. He thought that the results had more to do with the opening in the belly of the trawl.

Gerard van Balsfoort explained that the Dutch pelagic fleet also tried grids and cameras. He wanted to know whether this was the first real trial using a camera to find out more about the behavior of the fish.

Joakim Hjelm replied that they have tried it before, but light has always been a big issue. Now, thanks to LED technology it can be done relatively easily, but of course the material is very expensive.

Goncalo Carvalho wanted to know whether the scientists have also estimated the costs of changing the gear into this new option.

Joakim Hjelm said that this would be quite expensive, but the more important aspect is that saithe bycatch can be greatly reduced and hence there is a gain in the long term.

Tony Andrews said that he had worked closely together with the Marine Institute in Bergen to devise an open cod-end with a camera in it to determine where post smolts are. They discovered the conjunction of the species and took photos of what happened. However, this was only data collection while the researchers from the SLU actually went a step further and separated out target and bycatch. He said he would like to put together a group from Aberdeen University to talk to Joakim Hjelm about how his work could fit together with the work done in Bergen. Joakim Hjelm agreed to the suggestion.

11. AOB

The chairman explained that one of the key questions under the new CFP is whether a stock is within safe biological limits or not. This issue was also raised at the MIACO meeting and he wanted to know whether the Commission will ask ICES to provide advice in this regard.

Frederik Schutyser said that in the Basic Regulation a stock is considered to be within safe biological limits if there is a high probability that SSB is higher than B_{lim} and that fishing mortality is below F_{lim} . The way the Commission determines whether this is the case is by looking at whether a stock is above B_{pa} and whether fishing mortality is below F_{pa} , because these precautionary reference points have been defined to avoid getting close to B_{lim} . This is being done consistently for all stocks and both criteria have to be met in order for a stock to be considered within safe biological limits. Of course there is a problem when reference points have not been defined. Frederik Schutyser was at a workshop in The Hague at the end of 2014 where Member States investigated whether there could be an alternative approach if not all reference points have been defined, but as far as Frederik Schutyser was aware there has not been a conclusion on this. He said that the Commission will not ask ICES for specific information other than whether a stock is below or above reference points.

The chairman encouraged the Commission to ask ICES to provide advice on the reference points. He also wanted to come back to the Commission's interpretation of safe biological limits. It was not clear to him why the Commission used F_{pa} and B_{pa} given that the Basic Regulation referred to F_{lim} and B_{lim} .

Frederik Schutyser replied that ICES uses B_{pa} and F_{pa} as a buffer against uncertainties to make sure that the in real situation SSB is above B_{lim} and F below F_{lim} . That is the reason the Commission also uses B_{pa} and F_{pa} .

Esben Sverdrup-Jensen pointed out that this is a big issue for some of the stocks. SSB of mackerel is between B_{pa} and B_{lim} although most scientists agree that mackerel is within safe biological limits.

Gerard van Balsfoort understood Frederik Schutyser's explanation, but considered it strange that the Commission deviated from its own regulation and he wondered if the Commission was allowed to do this legally.

Frederik Schutyser explained that the Commission used this strict approach to be precautionary. The Pelagic AC also advised against the use of inter-species flexibility (ISF) for this reason. He understood that this might be an issue for stocks with no reference points, but in terms of interpretation he thought that the Commission did justice to the Basic Regulation.

To Sean O'Donoghue this seemed an arbitrary way of doing things and he thought that it would have been better to ask ICES for advice in this regard.

Justyna Zajchowska said that all harvested species should be harvested in line with MSY which also has to be taken into account when talking about safe biological limits.

Gerard van Balsfoort pointed out that the Pelagic AC has issued a lot of recommendations that MS did not follow. The ISF is up to 9%, but because of the Commission's strict definition on safe biological limits MS cannot use the ISF, not even for 1%. In the TAC and Quota Regulation, however, there are many footnotes that go up to 5%. He thought that the Commission should revisit its approach. Being strict on ISF, but not on the 5% footnotes in the TAC and Quota Regulation poses a contradiction and he would like the Commission to treat ISF in the same way that it treats the 5% footnotes in the TAC and Quota Regulation.

Frederik Schutyser promised to take the message back to the Commission and discuss the approach. He nevertheless considered that the Commission has been transparent and clearly communicated the approach it would follow. He was not sure if the Commission would ask ICES to define high probability since this is an interpretation issue of a legal text.

The chairman said that the reason this issue has been raised is because the Commission has not been very clear in defining safe biological limits and in fact works with two different definitions which seems strange. He decided to come back to this issue in the future. In terms of the discard recommendations provided by the Pelagic AC he pointed out that it had been clearly communicated that this set of recommendations was a package deal. The reason the Pelagic AC advised against the use of ISF was because it considered the use of the de minimis exemption to be easier to implement and also safer for the stocks concerned. Given that MS decided not to follow the package recommendation people will have to find other ways to solve the issues.

12. End of meeting

The chairman closed the meeting at 15.15.

Action items

General

- Link with the ocean tracking network to support the work of the ecosystem focus group (Atlantic Salmon Trust)
- Draft proposal on how to move forward with the ecosystem focus group (Stella Nemecky, Esben Sverdrup-Jensen) and organize WebEx or physical meeting to discuss the draft within the focus group (secretariat)
- Take message on defining safe biological limits back to the Commission and discuss the approach, taking into consideration ISF and the 5% footnotes in the TAC and Quota Regulation (Frederik Schutyser)

Specific

Atlanto-Scandian herring

- Submit issues to be addressed by the benchmark on Atlanto-Scandian herring to the secretariat (Working Group I members)

North Sea herring

- Continue work on herring spawning grounds (Working Group I members)
- Monitor developments under the landing obligation (Working Group I members)

Western Baltic spring spawning herring

- Provide advice to ICES on the use of the flexibility (Esben Sverdrup-Jensen, Reine Johansson)
- Monitor mixing with North Sea herring (Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn)
- Monitor developments under the landing obligation (Working Group I members)

Blue whiting

- Discuss ICES advice on Coastal States management strategy once available and urge Coastal States to put a management strategy in place (Working Group I)

North Sea horse mackerel

- Continue developing the knowledge base for this stock (Martin Pastoors, Gerard van Balsfoort, scientists)
- Present update on the PFA research plan at April meeting (Martin Pastoors)