

Minutes of the Pelagic RAC Working Group I meeting on 24 September 2008 at the Holiday Inn Hotel in Leiden, NL

Haagse Schouwweg 10
2332 KG Leiden

1. Opening of the meeting

The meeting was opened at 13:40 by the chairman of WG I, Mr Christian Olesen. All participants were welcomed and the Spanish interpreters were unfortunately dismissed.

2. Approval of the agenda

The agenda was adopted without amendment.

3. Approval of the minutes of WG meeting held on 30 June 2008

The minutes were adopted without amendment.

4. Herring management plans

4.1 West of Scotland (Vla North)

Jan Lindemann (EC) explained that the Commission was still working on the adoption of a management plan. The French Presidency was preparing a compromise with some amendments to the proposed plan. The chairman explained that since this had not formally been confirmed yet, it was not possible for the P-RAC to deal with the compromise. He therefore proposed to continue with recommending the consideration of and proceeding with the necessary steps for implementation of the plan proposed by the P-RAC. The meeting agreed.

4.2 North Sea

ICES have proposed three options for amendment of the management plan in order to make it precautionary. These had been presented at the previous WGs meeting. Option 3 had been ruled out as an approach that could be recommended by the P-RAC during the previous WG meeting. Derek Duthie noted that the Scottish industry was of the opinion that option 2 was the best one to go with. It was simpler and allowed for further increase of exploitation levels in the future. Gerard van Balsfoort noted that there was no difference in implications on the short term between options 1 and 2. But in the future option 2 had more to offer. Stewart Harper advised that although he, somewhat reluctantly, accepted going forward with option 2, it should be kept in mind that this option led to the adoption of a higher Bpa which at the current time was somewhat illogical. We should therefore be cautious about this new reference point being viewed as "scientific" in the future. The chairman asked if the meeting agreed to go forward with recommending option 2. The meeting agreed.

4.3 IIIa area (Western Baltic)

The chairman reiterated the advice that in principle had been agreed in the previous WG meeting in June, and had been confirmed by the ExCom. It had then been decided, however, to postpone the advice to the EC, pending the possibility that more information would be available at today's meeting. Since this seemed not to be the case, the chairman proposed to go forward with the earlier agreed recommendation:

- A draft Management Plan should be prepared as soon as possible, and the following points – from the ICES-advice – should be part of the plan:
 - Target F should not be higher than 0.25;
 - A 15% limit on the year-to-year variation in TAC should be included;
 - A specific rule determining a fixed allocation between Division IIIa and Subdivisions 22-24 should be included.

The meeting agreed.

5. Herring fishing opportunities 2009

5.1 North Sea

The ICES advice, in accordance with option 2 for amendment of the management plan for this stock, was to reduce the TAC for 2009 with 15%. The chairman opened the floor for discussion. Stewart Harper noted that the industry had suffered enormous cuts in the previous years, and that it was very disappointing to be facing another. The effects of the apparent reduced recruitment of the last few years were not visible in the fisheries. In addition, over quota catches had decreased much in the last few years as well. The effects on market possibilities were becoming apparent however. He hoped that this would not prove to be an over precautionary approach. He could agree with the advice for the decrease, but pressed to keep in mind that the situation with the stock was not so bad. Derek Duthie expressed that he agreed with Stewart Harper, noting that the SSB was still over 1 million tons. At the same time he agreed to support a recommendation following the ICES advice. The chairman noted that the P-RAC usually did not advise on the B fleet TAC, other than that it should be as low as possible. He proposed to recommend this again, together with recommending to follow the ICES advice for the A fleet. The meeting agreed.

5.2 IIIa area (Western Baltic)

As with the advice on the management plan for this stock, the chairman reiterated the advice that in principle had been agreed in the previous WG meeting in June and had been confirmed by the ExCom, but had been postponed pending the possibility that more information would be available. He asked the meeting whether this was the case, or whether the meeting otherwise could agree to go forward with the earlier agreed recommendation:

- A documentation should be made, explaining the rationale behind the setting of this TAC
- In the mean time the RAC would refrain from recommending on a specific TAC for 2009.

The meeting agreed.

5.3 VIa North (West of Scotland)

The chairman gave the floor to Derek Duthie for an intervention. Derek Duthie suggested that, to be consistent, the P-RAC should recommend that the TAC should be set according to management plan developed by the P-RAC. Christine Absil responded that the NGO's were still supportive of going forward with the necessary steps that would lead to the implementation of the P-RAC plan, but that as long as it was not implemented yet, setting the TAC according to the plan was not necessarily in line with the precautionary principle. She therefore suggested to recommend to set the TAC, following the ICES advice. Derek Duthie noted that the policy statement for fishing opportunities for 2009 suggested that without a management plan in place, the TAC would likely to be set incorporating a decrease of 20%.

[WESTHER]

- Sean O'Donoghue suggested that, considering the results of the WESTHER project, it would be wise to reconsider this entire issue in general. A focus group could be set up to look into this. Gerard van Balsfoort noted that the ICES review of the WESTHER report established that there was much uncertainty around this issue and in effect, it raised more questions than it answered. He generally felt that this was a good initiative, but it required careful consideration. Especially with regard to combining management areas and resulting displacement of fishing effort. Sean O'Donoghue agreed that there were a number of difficulties and the FG would of course not be able to solve those overnight, but that did not mean that we should not try. He offered to chair the FG and Derek Duthie volunteered to take part in it. Christine Absil proposed that she would seek an NGO representative to take part. Clear terms of reference should be defined (and confirmed by the ExCom through written procedure).

A discussion then followed on the TAC recommendation for the VIa North stock, in which the possibilities of providing a majority/minority recommendation on the TAC or not giving a recommendation on the TAC at all were suggested. In the end, Derek Duthie suggested to recommend that:

- The Commission would reconsider the proposed P-RAC management plan;
- But that, in general, the P-RAC was of the opinion that a management plan should be implemented as soon as possible;
- And that the TAC for 2009 should be set according to the implemented management plan.

The chairman asked if the meeting agreed with the formulation of the recommendation put forward by Derek Duthie and with the suggestion of Sean O'Donoghue to establish a focus group to look at the issue of stock components in relation to the WESTHER project. The meeting agreed.

5.4 Via South

Sean O'Donoghue mentioned, that before deciding on a specific TAC recommendation, it should be noted that this stock was subject to the WESTHER project as well, and should thus also be considered by the focus group. Instead of providing a specific TAC recommendation, we should inform the Commission of the P-RAC's initiative to address the issues of this stock in the proposed FG and that, due to the considerable uncertainty around this stock, the P-RAC would not be in the opportunity to provide a TAC advice. Gerard van Balsfoort noted that the TAC would then probably be set according to the Policy Statement, which would mean a 15% cut. The chairman asked the meeting if they agreed to go forward as Sean O'Donoghue had suggested. The meeting agreed.

5.5 Celtic Sea

In line with the recommendations for the previous stocks, the chairman suggested not to provide an advice on the specific TAC, but to encourage the Commission to actively pursue the implementation of a rebuilding plan. John Ward informed the meeting that the Irish industry was addressing this together with scientists. The meeting agreed.

5.6 Irish sea

The chairman reiterated the recommendation that already had been agreed upon the previous meeting (and also by the ExCom) that for this stock the ICES advice should be followed, i.e. to set the TAC at 4400 t. The meeting took note of this.

6. Mackerel management options (annex 1)

The chairman noted that in order to make a recommendation on one of the management options suggested by ICES, a short questionnaire had been distributed to the members, to help them consider the options. The chairman went through the five questions and gave the meeting the opportunity to ask questions or give comments.

1. Given that the proportions of age 7+ presented by John Simmonds were all in the region 38-44% Do you agree that age structure is not an important criteria in choosing a management option to go forward with?
→ The chairman asked whether the meeting agreed with this. The meeting agreed.
2. When considering these general patterns, do you prefer the IAV-limitation to apply ALWAYS or ONLY?
→ Gerard van Balsfoort commented that, although he found this a difficult concept to understand how it worked, looking at the general patterns he had a preference for the ALWAYS rule. The chairman asked whether the meeting agreed with this. The meeting agreed.
3. In the case you chose ALWAYS: Which IAV limitation would you prefer to be set? (the year-to-year and average IAV will then always be below this)
 - 10% → (expected average CATCH 623 and average IAV 9.1)
 - 15% → (expected average CATCH 634 and average IAV 12.7)
 - 20% → (expected average CATCH 642 and average IAV 16.5)
 - 25% → (expected average CATCH 647 and average IAV 19.5)

→ Gerard van Balsfoort noted that logically, following past recommendations, the 15% restriction made most sense to propose. The chairman asked whether the meeting agreed with this. The meeting agreed.

4. This question had become irrelevant, because of the answer to question 2.
5. Once a regime with a specified variability is selected do you wish to use the method that supplies the highest catch?
→ The chairman explained that, although this maybe seemed a strange rhetoric question, John Simmonds had proposed to add this one, to enable to express a principle preference for one of the types of rules (F-rule or HCR). Despite the somewhat awkward formulation, the question basically was, whether the meeting had a preference in principle for the F-rule or for the HCR, or that they simply wanted to go with the one that would perform best (which in this case, with the answers to the previous question would imply the HCR). The chairman suggested to choose the best performing rule at all times. The meeting agreed.

The chairman suggested that the secretariat drafted a letter, setting out the choices above, to be sent to the Commission. The ExCom would need to be asked for consent through written procedure. The meeting agreed.

7. Douglas Bank closure

Derek Duthie was given the floor to inform the meeting of the proposal that was on the table on the removal of the Douglas Bank closure. He noted that Steven Beggs was present to answer any technical questions. Derek Duthie explained that this was one of the closed areas that was considered in an evaluation by a subgroup of STECF, which concluded that there was no biological basis for keeping the area closed any more. The closure had been justifiable at the time, because other control measures had not been feasible. It was considered now, however, that the closure could be removed. An observer scheme would be implemented to monitor the impact of the fisheries, which currently incorporated two vessels. The removal would furthermore be reviewed every 3 to 5 years. Derek Duthie proposed that the P-RAC would write to the Commission to support this proposal. Sean O'Donoghue expressed his support for the proposal. Christine Absil asked whether it was likely that the effort would increase due to the opening of the area. Steven Beggs responded that the level of fishing effort would be monitored. It was managed through a management plan. Sean O'Donoghue confirmed that he did not expect any extra Irish vessels to become involved. Jan Lindemann acknowledged that the control had improved, but wondered how it was currently and if it was enough. Also Christine Absil wanted to know whether the proposed monitoring would be sufficient. Steven Beggs responded that the next steps would be to determine how to do the monitoring, but that it was about two vessels, so it could not be too difficult. The chairman proposed to write a letter to the Commission to express the support for the proposal. The meeting agreed.

8. A.O.B.

8.1 Mackerel caught by Iceland

The chairman commented on the recent news that Iceland had caught 108.000t mackerel this year, which was obviously endangering the welfare of the stock. Since this stock was in the P-RAC remit, he thought it necessary to address this issue. This substantial unregulated catch on this stock that is otherwise highly regulated, is just unacceptable. He proposed that the P-RAC would send a letter to Commissioner Joe Borg to request that he would intervene and would raise the problem with Iceland in order to bring it under control. Iceland had signed up to responsible fishing practices under the UN charter for straddling stocks. Stewart Harper commented that all the fish was going to fish meal factories as well, which was a huge waste of perfectly good quality human consumption fish. The chairman asked if the meeting agreed with sending a letter to Commissioner Joe Borg. The meeting agreed.

8.2 Gravel dredging

The chairman raised the issue of gravel dredging activities near Lowesoft, UK. The P-RAC had been consulted to provide input in advance to a broad scoped 'environmental impact assessment' that would be undertaken soon. Stewart Harper took the floor since he had followed this issue for a while. Dredging

activities in the Channel had increased, and even though dredging activities were not conducted during the herring spawning season, how could we be sure that it was not affecting the herring recruitment, since also the larvae reside on gravel beds during the earliest stages of their lives? A worrying development was that new areas were sought, because older areas were becoming depleted. The question was, how much would be left in the long term? This recently started scoping project was conducted because of a new licensing method. The national marine research institute CEFAS was on top of the proceedings, but he felt that the P-RAC should be as well. Christine Absil mentioned that Seas at Risk was addressing it as well. Sean O'Donoghue expressed his concerns and agreed that the P-RAC should address it as well. ICES had produced some papers on the topic that may be worth looking into. The chairman suggested that Stewart Harper and the secretariat would follow up on the issue. The meeting agreed.

8.3 Norwegian participation

The chairman informed the meeting on the recent visit of the Management Team to Bergen to meet with the Norwegian stakeholders. Unfortunately no NGO's from either side had been able to be present, so it had been a bilateral industry meeting only. The NGO's had expressed their full support of the initiative beforehand however. It had been a very positive meeting and the Norwegian industry representatives present had expressed that they were interested to attend more P-RAC WG meetings in the future. They had promised to actively participate in discussions on management issues for joint stocks, and willing to underwrite recommendations when consensus was reached. Sean O'Donoghue noted that they had explained that reciprocity was unfortunately not possible, since they had only one industry meeting group as such, but all meetings were held in Norwegian and there were no means for interpretation. A short debate was held on how the cooperation would work in practice. Would the cooperation prove to make the P-RAC more effective? The chairman concluded that that should be discussed in due time and we would just have to wait and see. He furthermore noted that a collaboration with Norwegian research institutes was, and always had been, a possibility as well of course. The chairman noted that a few industry representatives would probably be present at the next WG meeting in October.

End of meeting

The chairman thanked the participants and the interpreters. The next WG I & II meeting would be held in Leiden on 14 October. Christine Absil notified the meeting that she would not be in the opportunity to be present, but Didier Fourgon (WWF) confirmed that he would attend, so there would be NGO representation. The chairman closed the meeting at 17:00h.