# PELAGIC ADVISORY COUNCIL

## Newsletter 2/2015

**April-June 2015**

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# PELAC MEETINGS

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING (21 APRIL 2015, BILBAO)

At the latest Executive Committee meeting the draft Memorandum of Understanding with the Member States was approved and subsequently submitted to all Member States involved in the PELAC. Responses received from the Member States will be uploaded to the PELAC website.

Steve Mackinson, the project coordinator of GAP2, gave a presentation on the final outcomes of the GAP2 project which has been running from 2011 onwards and recently finished. The central theme of the GAP2 project was participatory research going beyond consultation and data collection and rather focusing on designing research together with stakeholders and policy makers. This was explored through 13 case studies of which the deep sea red shrimp fishery co-management plan is often referred to as role model for managing fisheries in the Mediterranean. Another successful case study dealt with mixed fisheries in the North Sea and developed tools that can take into account species interactions which have been used by STECF when assessing the North Sea multi-annual plan. Most relevant for the Pelagic AC was the case study on Western Baltic spring spawning herring which informed the decision-reaching process. Furthermore, GAP2 has provided a toolbox on how to take up participatory research and published a good practice guide. Both can be accessed on the GAP2 website: http://gap2.eu/

Subsequently Pascal Savouret, executive director of the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA), presented EFCA's activities in relation to implementing the landing obligation. EFCA mostly focuses on supporting Member States to implement control measures in a cost-effective and harmonized way by developing regional risk analyses. It also stimulates data collection through joint deployment plans aiming to predict when, where and why discards take place in specific fisheries. Furthermore EFCA considers a dialogue with stakeholders, especially the Advisory Councils, as crucial to realize the goals of the landing obligation.

Following EFCA's presentation on the landing obligation the PELAC chairman provided an overview of the industry's experience with the landing obligation. In most countries the implementation is well underway and problems are predictable. However, a lot of questions remain unanswered at the moment, especially in terms of usage of exemptions such as the 9% inter-species flexibility. Other problems are of very practical nature, e.g. in relation to storage and packaging of unwanted catches and regarding safety on board freezer-trawlers when discard chutes have to be closed.

## WORKING GROUP I MEETING (21 APRIL 2015, BILBAO)

The focus of the Working Group I meeting was on multiannual management plans with several PELAC stocks requiring updated management strategies. Lotte Worsøe Clausen presented the work done in the GAP2 case study on Western Baltic spring spawning (WBSS) herring which informed the EU policy process and contributed to formulating a management strategy for this stock. She also presented the outcome of the ICES WKHerTAC meeting which evaluated a long-term management strategy for North Sea herring and a TAC setting procedure for WBSS herring. Both were found to be precautionary.

Atlanto-Scandian herring was briefly discussed and it was pointed out by the chairman that recent Norwegian acoustic surveys indicate a spawning stock biomass which is almost twice as high as calculated by WGWIDE, but it remains to be seen how robust the acoustic data are.

Another stock requiring an updated management strategy is blue whiting. The 2012 PELAC management plan had been updated with the new $F_{msy}$ value, but it was decided that more time was needed to reflect on the updated proposal.

Regarding North Sea horse mackerel Martin Pastoors presented ongoing efforts to increase the knowledge base for the stock. This included genetic and other analyses to identify stock boundaries and commercial search time indices and groundfish surveys to develop stock indicators. The first results are expected early 2016.

## WORKING GROUP II MEETING (21 APRIL 2015, BILBAO)

Besides concentrating on long-term management strategies Working Group II also dealt with the results of the recent herring benchmark in the Celtic Sea and West of Scotland. The main outcomes of the benchmark are a combined assessment for the herring stocks in areas VIa North and VIa South meaning that a new management strategy for these stocks has to be developed. The benchmark also led to a revised assessment and revised reference points for Celtic Sea herring which has changed the forecast significantly and therefore might warrant a change of the PELAC advice in regards to this stock. It was decided to discuss this issue further at the July meeting.

In regards to Western horse mackerel a lot of effort has been put into developing a new harvest control rule (HCR) and at the same time improving the knowledge base. Recent evaluations of potential HCRs turned out not to be precautionary and the stock is predicted to fall below $B_{lim}$ with a probability of more than 5% even with no fishing. It was decided to draft a new management strategy with the help of relevant scientists and to discuss this matter further at the July meeting.

The science/industry initiative to carry out a pre-egg survey for mackerel led to the recommendation that the international egg survey should start earlier and that detailed spatio-temporal information from industry catches back until 2000 should be collected. In terms of developing a new management strategy for Northeast Atlantic mackerel it was pointed out that two very different proposals had been tabled at the Coastal States meeting in March. In response to this the PELAC agreed to develop its own management strategy which hopefully could be a compromise the parties would agree to.

Detailed minutes of all meetings and background information can be downloaded from the PELAC website: http://www.pelagic-ac.org/02105/

# EXTERNAL MEETINGS

## POLSHIFT CONFERENCE (14-15 APRIL REYKJAVIK)

PELAC observer: Verena Ohms

On 14 and 15 April 2015 a conference took place at the Marine Research Institute in Iceland dealing with the impact of climate change on the distribution of pelagic species such as blue whiting, herring and mackerel in the North Atlantic. The presentations covered a broad spectrum of topics ranging from hydrographic variability, to changes in life history, distribution range and genetic structure to adaptations of the Icelandic fishing fleet to new resources. The most relevant results for the PELAC are summarized below.

Several presentations focused on the expansion of mackerel into Icelandic and Greenlandic waters in recent years. All scientists agreed that the newly observed distribution pattern clearly marks an expansion both northwards and westwards, not a distribution shift, and that major spawning areas have remained the same since the expansion began in 2006. It was argued that the expansion is largely a result of increased stock size due to exceptionally high recruitment which also led to significantly increased density. As a consequence it seems that mackerel has expanded its feeding range due to increased intra- and inter-specific competition driving the stock into new areas. At the same time, higher temperatures as observed in recent years, do not explain the westward expansion. Although temperature could have been a limiting factor in the North it did not prevent mackerel from migrating westwards prior to 2006 since before 2006 temperatures in the West had already been in a range preferred by mackerel. Another study did not find a link between mackerel distribution and hydrography, but it did find that both zooplankton biomass and mackerel biomass are low in nutrient depleted waters. It was therefore hypothesized that westward expansion after 2006 has been induced by a nutrient gradient which is high in the west and low in the east. Genetic analysis of different populations of mackerel using both microsatellites and SNPs has shown that there are significant differences between mackerel originating from the east coast of the Atlantic (European samples) compared to the west coast (Canadian samples). However, within the European samples differences can also be detected. Mackerel caught in Icelandic waters seem to be a mix of European stocks with no evidence of fish originating from Canada.

Another talk presented a newly developed swept area trawl survey to estimate mackerel abundance. This project was a cooperation between scientists, trawl designers and fishermen from Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Islands involving several vessels to standardize the methodology. This new survey provides reliable data on mackerel distribution and density when the adult stock is distributed in the surface layer during its feeding phase in the summer months. The methodology and results have been accepted by ICES in 2014 and the survey has also been successfully applied as a sampling trawl for assessment surveys of blue whiting and herring. Another method for estimating mackerel abundance is the use of radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology which has been successfully applied in a Norwegian tagging program. This new technology enables efficient, cost-effective screening of catches all over Europe, but until now uptake by other countries has been very limited.

In terms of feeding interactions between mackerel, herring and blue whiting data presented indicated that there is little to no overlap between blue whiting and the other two species. Blue whiting mainly feeds on amphipods in deeper waters whereas herring and mackerel diets consist to large parts of

copepods. However, herring begins its seasonal feeding migration a month earlier than mackerel and mackerel is a more opportunistic feeder. At the same time mackerel can be an important predator on herring larvae and potentially cause fluctuations in year class strengths of herring.

All presentations can be downloaded from the POLSHIFT website:

http://polshifts.neowordpress.fr/

### SYMPOSIUM ON THE LANDING OBLIGATION (22 APRIL 2015, BILBAO)

PELAC observers: Ian Gatt, Verena Ohms

Under the auspices of the SINAVAL congress the Spanish research institute AZTI organized a seminar on the implementation of the landing obligation featuring presentations from DG MARE, scientists and three Advisory Councils.

The seminar started with a presentation from DG MARE presenting an overview of the scope of the landing obligation and it's phasing in including explanations of exemptions, i.e. for species with high survival rates and covered by a *de minimis*. Information was also provided on the Omnibus regulation which amends five technical and the control regulation to remove contradictory legislation. This includes e.g. the removal of catch composition and bycatch rules and the change from minimum landing sizes to minimum conservation reference sizes. Afterwards a brief overview was given on the pelagic discard plans in the North Western and South Western waters followed by a number of challenges, such as a lack of clarity of rules, how to deal with choke species in the absence of multiannual plans and how to properly ensure control and compliance of the new legislation.

Subsequently the research project DISCARDLESS which had been kicked-off on the previous day was presented. This project seeks to understand the role of discards in the ecosystem and what the consequences of the landing obligation will be in terms of species abundance. It will furthermore explore fish behavior to develop more selective catch devices and promote sharing knowledge between fishermen and scientists. The project also aims at understanding human effects by mapping economic and social drivers underlying fishermen's behavior and proposing better use of unwanted catches. Finally, the project will link biology, technology and economy by developing bio-economic models that can address "what if" scenarios and visualize trade-offs and constraints.

The next presentation explored alternative uses for catches that have previously been discarded without undermining the objectives of the landing obligation. Such uses could include new fish products, the extraction of added-value compounds, ingredients for feed etc. while taking into account existing regulations, environmental prioritization as well as economic considerations. At the same time the need for rigorous control and traceability was emphasized.

Afterwards the PELAC chairman presented the PELAC's recommendation on implementing the landing obligation and feedback received from the pelagic industry in regards to practical implementation challenges in different Member States. He also emphasized the need for legal clarity and for an overhaul of the technical measures to simply and rationalize legislation. He concluded by pointing out the responsibility of the Advisory Councils to provide feedback on the implementation of the landing

obligation until 2020 and the PELAC's willingness to provide a forum for stakeholders and scientists to discuss research and ideas in this regard.

The last two presentations gave a brief update on the state of play in the North Western and South Western Waters Advisory Councils which are both facing a gradual introduction of the landing obligation. The importance of data gathering was emphasized as well as a need for real time discussions and smart solutions.

All presentations can be downloaded here:
http://www.azti.es/mailings/infoazti/sinaval2015_presentations.html

## ADVICE DRAFTING GROUP BALTIC SEA (5-8 MAY 2015, COPENHAGEN)

PELAC observers: Ian Gatt, Esben Sverdrup-Jensen, Martin Pastoors

The ICES Advice Drafting Group (ADG) on Baltic stocks deals with all the stocks in the Baltic Sea, but in addition also deals with herring in the North Sea (NSAS herring) and herring in IIIa and subdivisions 22-24 (WBSS herring). The group met from 5-8 May 2015, but herring was handled in the first two days only.

The ICES secretariat explained that a new advice template will be used for 2015 and onwards and set out the rules for drafting the advice to ADG members. In general the advice will be truncated in comparison to the old format with all duplication sections removed. All the detailed sections supporting the single stock advice will be contained in the fishery and ecosystem sections which will be updated less frequently and which will probably not be ready in 2015 yet. It was also explained that the section 'information from the industry' would no longer simply be added into the advice as was done in the past. This information will now be assessed by the ADG members. Ideally this information should be fed into the working group process (which is a strong argument of having industry participation in working groups).

### WBSS herring (IIIa and Subdivisions 22-24)

The ADG spent a lot of time discussing the value of $F_{msy}$ for this stock. During the benchmark in 2013, $F_{msy}$ was estimated at F=0.28. This value had also been used in the evaluation of the EU-Norway TAC setting arrangement (February 2015). However, another expert group in ICES (WKMSYREF) had come up with the value of F=0.32 using a slightly different methodology, but one that is supposed to be the basis of all future calculations of $F_{msy}$. That value was also part of the advice that was released in March 2015. After a long discussion, the conclusion was the $F_{msy}$=0.32 will be used for the main advice although the F=0.28 (EU-Norway TAC setting procedure) will be included as one of the catch options.

Another lengthy discussion took place on the catches by the C fleet (human consumption catches in IIIa). Under the flexibility arrangement, a part of those catches can be taken in the North Sea. Since the flexibility arrangement is not part of the TAC setting procedure between the EU and Norway, ICES was unsure what to assume for the catches of the C fleet in the prediction year.

The draft advice for WBSS herring was based on the ICES MSY approach (at F=0.32) with an overall TAC of 52,547 tonnes.

**North Sea herring**

NSAS herring was less controversial given a lot of the mixing issues had been dealt with in WBSS. NSAS herring appears to have produced a strong year class again. The strong 2014 recruitment was already observed last year but at that time it was not included in the forecast, because it was still too uncertain. However, the strong 2014 year class was again observed this year and thereby confirmed. This has boosted the forecast as these fish will be counted in the SSB next year.

The complexity of the advice between WBSS herring and NSAS herring was often discussed. For example, there was a discussion on whether the transfer of catches from IIIa to the North Sea should be included in the North Sea advice or not. In the end it was decided that including these transfers would make the advice overly complicated and very difficult to understand. The TAC advice for NSAS herring is based on the 2014 EU-Norway management strategy which delivers an overall catch of 557,860 tonnes in 2016 including 518,539 tonnes for the A-fleet. This means an F of 0.24 and not the target F of 0.26 in the management strategy. This is because the F stability clause in the strategy is triggered pegging the target F back to 0.24.

Recent advice has included a statement on the poor recruitment phase which has now been dropped. Also, specific advice on how much fish should be caught in the Downs component (usually 11%) has been dropped given that component is currently robust. Instead, managers are advised to ensure there are separate TACs for the various components to avoid overexploitation of one area.

## WORKSHOP MARINE ENVIRONMENT AND FISHERIES (21 MAY 2015, BRUSSELS)

PELAC observer: Verena Ohms

On 21 May a workshop took place organized collaboratively by DG ENVIRONMENT and DG MARE on Good Environmental Status (GES) of marine waters and the interactions with fisheries. First an update of the review of the MSFD GES decision was provided. The Commission representative explained that GES determinations between Member States are often not coherent and rather qualitative. Therefore it had been decided to review the GES decision and make things simpler, clearer and coherent with other policies and to introduce minimum standards. The technical review of the GES decision was performed by ICES and JRC whereby ICES dealt with descriptors 3 (commercial fish and shell fish), 4 (food webs) and 6 (seafloor integrity).

Subsequently ICES presented ideas on how to implement GES for state descriptors. The problem with state descriptors is that a lot of times pressure-state relationships are not obvious which makes it very difficult for scientists to define GES for them. Examples of such state descriptors are population condition, pelagic habitat condition, fish population structure and normal food webs. The proposal put forward by ICES therefore suggested establishing a monitoring framework in which an upper and a lower bound are being defined and if the value measured moves outside these boundaries action is required. However, a number of questions regarding this approach were also posed, e.g. how to define GES when pressure-state relationships are less clear, how society choses to aim for a preferred ecosystem state and whether the EU could afford to wait for better science to inform decisions. In the following discussion it was pointed out that many of the models used in fisheries science are highly uncertain and people

questioned the value of such models. However, it was also pointed out that uncertainty is not an excuse for not taking action, especially under the precautionary approach. At the same time people agreed that measures must not be carved in stone and should be reviewed and openly discussed regularly. The representative of the UK said that the UK supports the idea of using surveillance indicators in cases where it is not yet possible to determine GES and that the UK is already implementing a surveillance program.

A researcher from CEFAS gave a presentation on marine litter which is a cross border issue. Most of the litter comes from land and consists of plastic which does not degrade, but simply breaks into smaller parts. While a lot of litter originates from fishing and other vessels a lot of micro-plastics derive from facial cleaners, car tires and washing our clothes. Microbial contamination is one of the consequences, because often plastics are contaminated by microbes which get transferred from one ecosystem to another. Ingesting micro-plastics can negatively impact functioning, digestion, immunity, reproduction and growth of marine organisms. It became clear in the subsequent discussion that all people agreed on the necessity of limiting the amount of litter that enters the marine environment, but also that passive fishing for litter can help restore favorable ecosystem status and that fishermen should not be charged for disposing of marine litter. Other suggestions included banning products that contain micro-plastics and to recycle old fishing nets. In addition the fishing industry is currently exploring the development of biodegradable nets. It was also pointed out that the EMFF allows funding of projects that decrease marine litter under the Member States operational programs. However, at this stage it was not clear whether the Member States will include this topic in their operational programs or not. Furthermore, collective action between Member States appeared missing, but some Regional Sea Conventions, e.g. OSPAR are dealing with the issue.

Afterwards the links between water quality, food web productivity and catches were explored and it was concluded that the environment, including factors such as eutrophication, have a strong impact on the productivity of fish stocks. Productivity is optimal when an equilibrium is maintained, i.e. when pollution is limited and when catches are at sustainable levels. The subsequent discussion focused on spatial planning and some participants suggested to designate specific areas for specific fisheries by e.g. identifying which areas would be less sensitive to trawling etc. However, the researchers explained that spatial planning has to be done at a high resolution and that this was not possible in fisheries management, because fish stocks assessments are area-based. At the same time it was pointed out that ICES has created VMS maps on fishing by gear as requested by OSPAR and HELCOM. Other participants questioned whether there was enough knowledge available to reach GES of food webs and suggested focusing on descriptor 3 (fish stocks) instead since GES of fish stocks is an indicator of how well the food web is functioning.

The next presentation looked at cumulative effects of pressures and management measures. While fishing mortality is a key variable that can be manipulated and can have an impact on recruitment, other variables like litter and food availability can impact recruitment as well. However, the effects of these different variables are not linear, but rather cumulative and the same is believed to be true for management measures. It was explained by the scientists that the 11 MSFD descriptors cannot be managed separately, but that instead the marine system has to be managed as a whole. In order to do so it was suggested using different models under different assumptions rather than using a single model.

At the same time this means that there will be trade-offs and managers will have to make choices regarding those trade-offs.

At the subsequent round-table discussion people agreed that in recent years the collaboration between science and industry has greatly improved and that there is mutual understanding and trust. However, some people pointed out that a lot depends on the fishing industry in terms of data collection and that there is a great need for better gear development, not only to increase selectivity, but also to develop bio-degradable gear and to come up with fuel-saving solutions etc. Others pointed towards the fact that in many countries fisheries is dealt with by the economics ministry rather than the environment ministry and that there is often a lack of collaboration between these two which creates a loss for all parties involved. Another concern was to properly integrate the CFP and the MSFD and some people were worried that conflicting regulations between countries could have negative effects.

## ADVICE DRAFTING GROUP CELTIC SEA (8-12 JUNE 2015, COPENHAGEN)

PELAC observers: Eibhlin O'Sullivan, Ian Gatt

This ICES Advice Drafting Group (ADG) provides advice for Western, Celtic Sea and Irish Sea herring, all of which fall under the remit of Pelagic AC. A general text, warning against activities that have a negative impact on herring spawning grounds, has been included in the advice for all three Celtic Sea herring stocks. Advice is subject to approval by ACOM.

**Herring in Divisions VIa and VIIb,c (West of Scotland, West of Ireland)**

Headline advice

*ICES advises that when the MSY approach and precautionary approach are applied, there should be zero catch in 2016. ICES advises that a rebuilding plan be developed for this stock.*

ICES advises, under precautionary considerations, that activities that have a negative impact on the spawning habitat of herring should not occur, unless the effects of these activities have been assessed and shown not to be detrimental.

Western herring stocks had undergone a benchmark which resulted in a combined assessment of VIaN and VIaS/VIIbc. ICES scientists have combined the stocks because they find it impossible to segregate them in commercial catches or surveys, although separate stocks do exist. This is the first time since 1981 that combined advice has been given for these two stocks. There is a lot of uncertainty surrounding both the assessment and the advice.

ICES tested both ASAP and FLSAM assessment models but found the FLSAM to be more appropriate. The benchmark had to be re-opened due to an error with the natural mortality value. The combined assessment estimates the spawning stock to be higher than they were previously separately estimated. However, SSB is below MSY $B_{trigger}$ and below $B_{lim}$. Fishing mortality is below $F_{msy}$ and recruitment has been at the lowest in the series for the past three years.

**Herring in Division VIIa South of 52° 30' N and VIIg,h,j,k (Irish Sea, Celtic Sea and Southwest of Ireland)**

Headline advice

*ICES advises that when the MSY approach is applied, catches in 2016 should be no more than 23.164 tonnes. ICES advises, under precautionary considerations, that activities that have a negative impact on the spawning habitat of herring should not occur, unless the effects of these activities have been assessed and shown not to be detrimental.*

The stock was benchmarked in 2014 and 2015 with the assessment model changed during the 2015 benchmark to an ASAP assessment. Main data used is catch at age and the acoustic survey. However, the 2014 acoustic survey was excluded from the assessment, because the survey did not cover the entire stock, due to timing of the migration patterns in 2014, and the precision of the abundance estimate was very poor.

The benchmark resulted in a change in the perception of the stock with the new assessment presenting less retrospective bias compared to previous assessments.

Evaluations conducted in 2015 by ICES show that the Pelagic Advisory Council's proposed management plan is still precautionary following the 2015 benchmark.

**Herring Division VIIa North of 52º 30'N (Irish Sea)**

Headline advice

*ICES advises that when the MSY approach is applied, catches in 2016 should be no more than 4.575 tonnes. ICES advises, under precautionary considerations, that activities that have a negative impact on the spawning habitat of herring should not occur, unless the effects of these activities have been assessed and shown not to be detrimental.*

The advice is based on the MSY approach as a management plan has still to be developed for this stock. The spawning stock biomass has been above the maximum sustainable yield biomass reference point, MSY $B_{trigger}$ since 2006. Fishing mortality has decreased since 2003 to the lowest in the time series and is now around the F reference point, $F_{msy}$. Recruitment is relatively high and stable; estimated above the average of the time series since 2006.

Discard data shows that discarding does not occur. Although it's a small stock it is thoroughly sampled with catch at age data available since 1960. An acoustic survey takes place every autumn since 1994 and a larval survey is also included in the assessment. No catch at age information was included in the survey due to inaccurate age information; however, this has minimal impact. The inter-annual variation in herring migration affects the selectivity of both the survey and the fishery. There is a mixture of Celtic and Irish Sea herring in the spawning grounds and the fishery.

# EXTERNAL MEETINGS

## INTER AC (23 JUNE 2015, BRUSSELS)

PELAC participants: Ian Gatt, Verena Ohms

### 1) Commission communication for fishing opportunities 2016

A Commission representative summarized that overall there has been a positive development in the Baltic Sea and the Atlantic in terms of stock status despite a slight backwards trend in the last two years. He stressed the importance of continuing this positive development. Regarding the Mediterranean, however, there is a very strong message for the second year in a row now that the situation is particularly bad with more than 90% of the assessed stocks being considered overfished. This will make it very difficult to reach MSY soon. While he admitted the challenges posed by third countries he also pointed out that there are several purely European stocks in the Mediterranean for which there is no excuse. He therefore said that the target must be to reach MSY for these stocks by 2016 unless this is really impossible. The burden of proof, however, lies with the stakeholders who have to provide convincing information regarding why it is not possible to reach MSY. In relation to quota uplifts he said that first of all these uplifts must not stand in the way of achieving MSY and that secondly these are difficult to apply in practice for a number of stocks that are already covered by discard plans.

### 2) State of play discard plans 2016

A Commission representative presented a short overview of discard plans received from the North Western Waters, the South Western Waters and the Scheveningen group. All three plans suggested a number of de minimis and high survival exemptions which have been scrutinized by STECF. The argumentation for some of the exemptions is unclear and needs more justification. The Commission is now in the process of submitting the comments from STECF back to the Member States. Overall there are not many problems and the Commission hopes to finalize the process soon. The Commission was also under the impression that the interaction between the ACs and Member States has greatly improved. Even though not all of the ACs' recommendations haven been included in the final plans there is now a much better engagement.

### 3) State of play of technical measures framework

The Commission explained that after a number of consultations it is now clear that the basic design of the new technical measures framework will be fundamentally different and moving away from the usual descriptive details. There will be some general rules, e.g. a blanket ban on destructive fishing techniques such as dynamite fishing, but there will also be a lot of room for regionalization. Natura 2000 areas will not be changed since they fall under the responsibility of other policies, but all other closed areas will be analyzed and if they do not have a clear value for conservation will be eliminated. The idea is to simplify measures as much as possible and to base them on objectives to be achieved. Rules which are in place for no other than historical reasons will be deleted. The Commission intends to deliver a proposal before the end of the year which might prove difficult given that impact assessments have to be provided first. It was pointed out that the submission received from stakeholders are useful, but that it would help a lot if the comments were more specific.

**4) Evaluation of the Control Regulation**

The Commission explained that it had a discussion with the fisheries directors of the Member States and while they are open for change, they do not want big changes. The last control regulation was seen as a huge step forward and while it is not perfect yet, enormous progress has been made in terms of implementation. Furthermore, the zero tolerance policy is considered very important. At the same time, however, the Commission was also aware of the weaknesses of the current control regulation which is too administrative and too slow to react to technological change. It assumes that there is no culture of compliance at ground level as shown by factual information and the question was whether it would be realistic to assume that in 3-5 years there will be a culture of compliance. At the moment it seems that here and there people still tolerate illegal fishing. The new control rules could be more flexible if there was strong peer pressure on local level not to tolerate illegal behavior.

**5) Consultation on eco-labeling**

The Commission pointed to an ongoing consultation on eco-labeling which has been launched in early May and which will end on the 31st of July. People were invited to submit replies to this consultation to weigh the pros and cons for fisheries labels and ultimately whether there should be labels based on legislation. The opinions on this are very far apart between the co-legislators which triggered the Commission to launch this consultation to explore what stakeholders think and want.

**6) Administrative and financial matters**

Several AC representatives pointed out that resource constraints are a serious issue for most ACs. Especially the translation requirement puts heavy burdens on the financial resources of the ACs. Reference was made to an MRAG report which recommended increasing the ACs' budget to 300.000 euro rather than 250.000 euro. It was also suggested to review the model that funds the ACs. In the early days there were two funds, one for operation and another one for translation. These two funds have merged and it was suggested to have a look at what can be done in this regard.

It was agreed to have a technical meeting with the AC secretariats and the Commission to address specific administrative and financial issues.

## EFCA SEMINAR ON THE LANDING OBLIGATION (24 JUNE 2015, ROSKILDE)

PELAC observers: Christine Absil, Ian Gatt, Verena Ohms

On 24 June the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) hold a seminar with representatives of the ACs, Member States and the Commission on the implementation of the landings obligation. All ACs were given the possibility to present their first experiences with the landing obligation and the development of discard plans. One of the major concerns was how to ensure a level playing field between different regions and also between EU fleets and fleets from third countries. It was stressed that common rules are needed which have to be applied in a uniform manner. Another issue that was raised was reporting of under-sized catches which is impossible in on pelagic RSW vessels and it was therefore argued that reporting should be done after landing. The application of quota uplifts and flexibility provisions was

completely unclear and there was a need to come up with transparent ways of implementing them without jeopardizing the objectives of the CFP. Some ACs also felt that there was a need for a force majeure provision in cases where safety of the crew and/or vessel was at stake, e.g. in heavy weather. The lack of collaboration with the Member States control experts was highlighted by all ACs. Below is an overview of the key issues addressed during the seminar:

| **Control elements** | **TAC & Quotas** |
|---|---|
| Sorting on board, haul sampling | Zero TAC species |
| Control of third country vessels | 9% interspecies flexibility |
| Estimation and recording of discards and catches < MCRS | How to manage choke species |
| Vessel stability (force majeure): guidelines | Quota uplifts |
| | Management unit/TAC definition for some species |
| | *De minimis* monitoring |
| **Cooperation with ACs** | **Technical measures** |
| Mechanisms of cooperation: how can dialogues between ACs and MS control experts be ensured | Study selectivity, pilot projects |
| Clarity of the rules | Technical conservation measures (TCM) |
| Avoid silo mentality | MCRS |
| | Option for TCM to be in discard plans |
| | Result-based management |
| **Other points** | |
| Interregional coherence | |
| Common MCRS within and between regions | |
| Repeal of effort regime | |
| Other survivability exemptions: flatfish | |
| Best practice guidelines for handling high survivability species | |
| Risk-based approach | |

# PRACTICAL INFORMATION

## REIMBURSEMENT OF TRAVEL COSTS

Please remember that the secretariat has to receive your reimbursement claims within one month after the corresponding meeting by post or email including copies of all receipts. Reimbursement sheets received after the deadline will not be taken into account. If you cannot meet the deadline please inform us as soon as possible. To find out more about reimbursement rules please consult the Pelagic AC's "Rules of procedure" or contact the secretariat.

http://www.pelagic-ac.org/media/pdf/Rules%20of%20Procedure%20Pelagic%20AC%20-%202014%20November.pdf

# UPCOMING MEETINGS

## WORKING GROUP I AND II AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING (8-9 JULY 2015, THE HAGUE)

On 8 and 9 July the next PELAC meetings will take place in The Hague. Working Group I will focus on the ICES advice for North Sea herring and Western Baltic spring spawning herring as well as the results of the mapping exercise of the ecosystem focus group. Working Group II will deal with the ICES advice for pelagic stocks in the Celtic Sea and long-term management strategies for Western horse mackerel, Northeast Atlantic mackerel and boarfish.

During the Executive Committee meeting there will be a presentation from the Environmental Defense Fund of its recently published EU discard reduction manual with subsequent discussion. The Commission will introduce this year's policy paper and the work program and budget for the new PELAC year starting on the 17th of August 2015 will be discussed.

All meeting documents are accessible here:

http://www.pelagic-ac.org/pracmeetings/upcomingmeetings

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