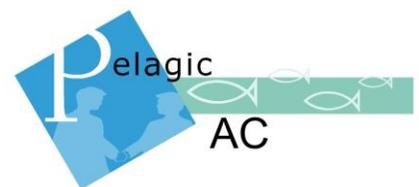




# PELAGIC ADVISORY COUNCIL

Newsletter 4/2015

October-December 2015



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# PELAC MEETINGS

## **Vla HERRING MEETING (6 OCTOBER 2015, EDINBURGH)**

On 6 October the focus group on Vla herring met in Edinburgh to discuss the basis for a rebuilding plan for the stocks in ICES area VIa and VIIb,c. The meeting was attended by members of Working Group II, members of the Irish and Scottish administration and several fisheries scientists.

Edward Farrell from University College London had re-analyzed the original WESTHER samples using new genetic techniques and unlike the WESTHER project he detected clear differences between the herring population in area VIa North and the herring population in area VIa South. More samples in these and adjacent areas are being collected. Edward Farrell also presented a project proposal to develop a genetic baseline database against which future mixed survey and fisheries samples could be compared to separate the two stocks again. At a later stage it would be tried to fully automate the analysis allowing a high throughput of samples. It was pointed out that it was difficult to get funding for this project and that it will be necessary that everybody contributes to the project, the scientific institutes, the national administrations and the fishing industry. The wide applicability of the method to other species was emphasized.

Another way of informing a rebuilding plan would be through the use of mini-surveys, carried out as a collaboration between the fishing industry and national research institutes. These surveys would provide information on minimum biomass estimates or relative abundance indices. However, it would take several years before these mini-surveys could be included in the analytical assessment since it was necessary to build up a time series first. It was decided to set up a steering group to formulate a mini-survey plan.

A project proposal that will also be relevant for herring in area VIa is the so-called NSHERRCON project which will try to identify herring larvae caught in different areas and, using flow models of ocean currents, determine which spawning grounds the larvae come from. It has not been decided yet whether the project will receive funding.

It was concluded that in order to carry out a rebuilding plan it will be necessary to support the genetic analysis and to develop a mini-survey plan. A certain amount of catches will be required to ensure scientific integrity and this can only be realized through a small commercial fishery.

## **WORKING GROUP I MEETING (7 OCTOBER 2015, EDINBURGH)**

The focus of this meeting was on the ICES advice for blue whiting, Atlanto-Scandian herring and North Sea horse mackerel.

In terms of blue whiting the meeting agreed that a management plan was urgently needed and a clear message should be sent to the Commission, Member States and Coastal States in this regard.

Atlanto-Scandian herring was covered by a well-functioning management plan and the meeting supported this plan. It was also recommended to remove an old provision in the technical measures regulation that forbids fishing for herring in a small triangle in Union waters of area IIa.

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The ICES advice for North Sea horse mackerel was supported and it was agreed that efforts to improve the knowledge base for this stock should continue.

Another issue that was discussed concerned stakeholder meetings prior to ICES working groups. Such a brief stakeholder meeting had been organized via WebEx prior to WGWIDE. ICES considered having such meetings valuable and wanted to pursue the idea. At the same time it was pointed out that these meetings need clear objectives and agendas and it was agreed to discuss the issue at the MIACO meeting in January 2016.

## **WORKING GROUP II MEETING (7 OCTOBER 2015, EDINBURGH)**

This meeting concentrated on the ICES advice for Northeast Atlantic mackerel, Western horse mackerel, Southern horse mackerel, boarfish and herring in areas VIa and VIIb,c.

Regarding Northeast Atlantic mackerel it was recommended to urge the Coastal States to agree on a long-term management plan. Should this issue not be resolved by February, then the Pelagic AC will return to its own draft management plan. Furthermore it was recommended to support the egg survey in 2016 and to pursue a number of technical issues such as the unstable assessment, the IESSNS survey, tagging studies and density dependent growth.

In terms of Western horse mackerel it was decided to follow the MSY advice and continue development of a new management plan. It was also decided to follow MSY for Southern horse mackerel.

A presentation on boarfish genetics was given which showed that there are different populations of boarfish in Northern European, Mediterranean and Western African waters. While the TAC area is not fully aligned with the population structure the match is fairly good and no population structure has been discovered within the TAC area nor immigration from southern or oceanic waters. The meeting decided to follow the ICES advice to set catch opportunities for 2016 and asked the Commission to use the revised management strategy, especially with regards to closed areas.

The steps of a rebuilding plan for herring in area VIa and VIIb,c as discussed within the focus group were presented, including the genetics proposal. Overall the initiative was supported, but it was also pointed out that funding will be difficult to obtain.

For Celtic Sea herring it was recommended to follow the revised ICES advice and to set the TAC in 2015 and 2016 according to the Pelagic AC management plan.

Regarding Irish Sea herring the meeting agreed to recommend following MSY and to try to reinvigorate efforts to develop a management plan for this stock.

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## **GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING (8 OCTOBER 2015, EDINBURGH)**

During the General Assembly meeting the final activity report and the final financial report were presented. Like every year the Pelagic AC has recommended TACs for most of the stocks in its remit as well as other short term and long term management measures. Good progress has been made on a number of issues, e.g. developing a management plan for Southern horse mackerel and Western horse mackerel, formulating a rebuilding plan for Vla herring and identifying herring spawning grounds. However, the work has not been finalized and will continue over the next year. Regarding the landing obligation there has been an open exchange with all members on implementation issues which was experienced as very useful. The Pelagic AC has also set up an ecosystem focus group to become more involved in the ecosystem approach to fisheries management. In terms of budget the Pelagic AC has remained well within its financial limitations and the same is foreseen for the coming year. In the new book year the Pelagic AC will continue its efforts regarding the development of multiannual management plans and rebuilding plans where necessary, as well as continue focusing on the implementation of the landing obligation, the revision of the technical measures and control regulation and providing yearly TAC advice.

## **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING (8 OCTOBER 2015, EDINBURGH)**

The Executive Committee meeting started with a welcome speech by Scottish Fisheries Minister Richard Lochhead who acknowledged the work done by the Pelagic AC and underlined the importance of the fishing sector for Scotland.

Afterwards the report of the ecosystem focus group was presented which has identified challenges to implementing an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management as well as a number of urgent issues to be taken into account when moving from single species to multi-species and ecosystem advice. Such issues include, among others, ETP bycatch, reference points in a multi-species context and food web interactions. It was concluded that this report provided a good foundation to continue the work of the ecosystem focus group and eventually provide a set of practical recommendations relevant for current and future policy making to the Executive Committee.

Subsequently Steve Mackinson gave a presentation on a multi-species model for the North Sea which added to the work done by the ecosystem focus group. He explained that people often confuse multi-species and mixed fisheries. While both are tightly connected, multi-species relates to food web effects, i.e. who eats what and how much. Multi-species models try to capture these effects to provide information on indirect effects and trade-offs. The new CFP requires to make the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management operational and a lot of work is ongoing in ICES in this regard. In 2013 a multi-species model has been used to give draft advice for the North Sea which illustrated the trade-offs of fishing one stock vs another. At the moment Ecopath with Ecosim is used to look at 65 different species in the North Sea. The model assesses the consequences of different harvest control rule options and provides a distribution of the likelihood of different outcomes. The key aspect of such considerations is that one scenario can be bad for a specific species, but highly beneficial for another species, i.e. there are winners (biomass increases) and losers (biomass

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decreases) of policies such as the CFP and MSFD. He also pointed out that  $F_{msy}$  estimates differ under multi-species considerations compared to single species models which has implications for  $F_{msy}$  ranges to be adopted in multiannual management plans. It will be impossible to fish all stocks at  $F_{msy}$  and some stocks will have to be fished above  $F_{msy}$ , others below. However, if  $F_{msy}$  ranges were routinely available from multi-species models, it would be possible to achieve greater congruence among species. Finally, simulations from both single species and multi-species models show that fishing between  $F_{msy}$  and the lower limit confers greater advantages for biomass, yield and reduced risk of depletion, than fishing between  $F_{msy}$  and the upper limit.

Sascha Fässler presented the outcomes of the PelAcoustic II project carried out on Dutch freezer-trawlers. The project aimed at collecting acoustic data by industry vessels, focusing on herring and blue whiting, and teaching the crew to calibrate the equipment, allowing independent data collection. This could eventually result in mini-surveys carried out by the fishing industry which could provide biomass estimates. Similar projects have already yielded successful results in other parts of the world.

Finally, the stock advice from Working Group I and II was presented to the Executive Committee and, after some discussion, was unanimously approved by the Executive Committee.

The chairman announced that he intended to set up a focus group on control and technical measures in the near future and he invited interested members to inform the secretariat about their intention to join the group.

### **WESTERN HORSE MACKEREL MEETING (10 DECEMBER 2015, SCHIPHOL AIRPORT)**

On 10 December the focus group on Western horse mackerel met to continue efforts for development of a new management plan and to start preparations for the benchmark foreseen in early 2017.

The PFA has commissioned a study aiming at providing a genetic stock identification method that will be able to discriminate North Sea and Western horse mackerel. This study is currently ongoing. Samples have been collected and genetic marker development will take place in January 2016. Discussions on how to incorporate genetic sampling in the standard sampling protocols of ICES WGMEGS are also ongoing.

A potential source of new data are groundfish surveys and a document has been circulated that provides an overview of relevant surveys. Some preliminary analysis and modelling has been carried out using data from the IBTS to calculate a juvenile index. Initial results look promising given that the model outcomes are relatively comparable to the current assessment and pick up recruitment peaks. This work will be continued and the results will be presented to WG WIDE in 2016.

Another potentially useful data source are CPR data. However, discussions on the CPR data were inconclusive and it was agreed to first assess the usefulness of CPR data before continuing to analyze them.

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Acoustic surveys carried out by the industry could also provide relevant data and it was agreed to deal with issue in more detail at the next meeting.

Regarding preparation of the benchmark there was a discussion on natural mortality and how a more accurate value for natural mortality could be derived. It was agreed to follow-up on this with the relevant scientists. Blim might also be reviewed during the benchmark unless there is another ad hoc workshop focusing on reference points. WKMSYREF4 might provide guidance on how to deal with reference points and it was decided to consult the workshop report on this issue.

In terms of developing a new harvest control rule it seemed, based on previous modelling, that a rule based on the egg survey including a protection rule would be the best option. However, depending on the results of ongoing work this perception might change in the future and therefore developing a new harvest control rule will be parked until more information becomes available.

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

# EXTERNAL MEETINGS

## **WORKSHOP ON INTERSPECIES FLEXIBILITY (4 NOVEMBER 2015, DEN HAAG)**

PELAC observer: Verena Ohms

A workshop on interspecies flexibility (ISF) was jointly held by the Scheveningen Group, BALTFISH, the North Western Waters Group and the South Western Waters Group to discuss how this tool could be utilized. An important aspect of this flexibility is that it may only be applied to stocks within safe biological limits, i.e. stocks which are above  $B_{pa}$  and below  $F_{pa}$ . However, for many stocks which will potentially become choke species reference points have not been defined and the lack of  $B_{lim}$  proxies for data-limited stocks is a major problem. Therefore, the list of species eligible for ISF is rather limited and this tool is unlikely to offer solutions in regards to choke species. It was also pointed out that there are different reasons why a stock could be a choke species, including poor state of the stock, insufficient data and insufficient quota tied to relative stability.

Two concrete examples were looked into: hake and megrim. Although hake is within safe biological limits it is not on the list of stocks eligible for ISF and will become a choke species for several fleets and Member States. Given that the 9% restriction only applies to the donor species, not the bycatch species, ISF could lead to a severe TAC overshoot. In the case of hake this overshoot could be as high as 65% of the TAC. In case of megrim it could even lead to 511% of extra landings. Two mechanisms were discussed to limit the impact of ISF on the bycatch species: conversion factors taking into account the value of the bycatch species and a ceiling of 9% on the bycatch species. While conversion factors could take away the incentive to target bycatch species, it was also pointed out by several Member States that applying conversion factors would be very complicated since the price of a species can change quickly and also varies between Member States. Setting a 9% ceiling on the bycatch species is simpler, but some Member States were worried that such a ceiling, if based on national quotas, can choke a fishery even sooner.

Overall participants agreed that ISF should be used carefully and responsibly and is a measure of last resort, to be applied after all other possibilities, e.g. de minimis, inter-annual flexibility, quota swaps etc. have been exhausted. There was a general wish for some sort of formalized agreement on the use of ISF between Member States, albeit this agreement would only be politically binding, not legally binding. Based on the outcomes of this meeting The Netherlands will develop a list of principles for the regional groups to agree on.

## **MAREFRAME ANNUAL MEETING (17-19 NOVEMBER 2015, CONSTANTA)**

PELAC observers: Verena Ohms, Emilien Segret

The MareFrame project aims to remove barriers that prevent a wider application and implementation of the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management. The project does that by developing new tools and methodologies, extending existing ecosystem models and developing a decision support tool that will illustrate trade-offs between different management choices. At the heart of the project is “co-creation”, meaning that stakeholders are consulted on both the relevant case studies in the project as well as on the decision support tool. The project is very ambitious and it might therefore not be surprising that there are a lot of delays in terms of deliverables, but there

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has also been considerable progress in many of the case studies. Different ecosystem models are up and running for almost all case studies, focussing on issues that have been identified by stakeholders during the launching events. The North Sea case study, which is the only one considering pelagic fisheries, has a full functioning ecosystem model. Two other models are currently being implemented to compare the performance of different models with each other. The main objectives of the North Sea case study are the need to achieve MSY, the implementation of the landing obligation and avoiding the risk of incompatible regulations. The decision support tool will use multi-criteria analysis to explore the potential outcome of different management decisions, both in the short term and in the long term. The first prototype of the decision support tool is almost completed and will be tested by stakeholders early next year.

For more information please visit the MareFrame website: <http://mareframe-fp7.org/>

### **WWF CONFERENCE: FISHERIES AND THE PROTECTION OF BIODIVERSITY (19 NOVEMBER 2015, GDYNIA)**

PELAC observer: Sandra Sanmartin

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of November a conference organised by WWF took place in Gdynia, Poland, on fisheries and the protection of biodiversity, where stakeholders gathered to exchange best practices in mitigating the impact of fisheries on the marine environment.

The meeting, chaired by Piotr Predki (WWF Poland) was divided in several presentations and panels for discussion, starting with a brief presentation by **Olga Sarna of WWF Poland, on the project *The campaign for the protection of biodiversity of seas and oceans*** (more information [here](#)). The project aims at raising public awareness among consumers on the impact of their decisions on biodiversity of the seas and oceans and preventing loss of biodiversity, through educational campaigns targeted at consumers.

**Rory Crawford, from The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, gave a presentation on selective gears as tools to reduce the by-catch of sea birds.** Climate change, invasive species, eutrophication and hunting are the main causes of the decline of winter birds in the Baltic. Special emphasis was given to gillnets and the difficulties to avoid bycatches with this gear, since they are specially designed to be invisible. Technical measures and operational programmes might help to tackle the problem within a regional approach. Some attendees questioned the reliability of the data shown in the presentation: on the one hand hunting has a higher impact on birds than fisheries activities and on the other the figures on bycatches are not as high as presented.

The next presentation was provided by **Grant Course, SeaScope Fisheries Research Ltd., on how to monitor the landing obligation effectively.** The specific case of the UK was explored: aerial surveillance, petrol vessels, VMS & E-logs and sea observers are the tools implemented at the moment to monitor fishing activities including discards, but they have some flaws (some of them are expensive, others are based on self-reporting or are not exhaustive enough). The Electronic Monitoring Equipment Schematic was presented as an alternative which can also be funded under the EMFF.

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**Andrzej Bialas, Oceana, gave a briefing on Marine Protected Areas as a tool to protect biodiversity of seas and oceans.** The Baltic is the only area which has 10% of areas MPAs following the 2004 Johannesburg compromise, though most of the areas are small and there is not a consistent database. In certain areas, a full ban of fishing activities is in place. The main idea is to protect nature intelligently. Discussions were held regarding the controversy of wind mills installed in MPAs where fisheries are forbidden and the insufficiencies in individual management plans of some habitats.

**The Baltic Sea Advisory Council, represented by Michael Andersen (Danish Fisherman's Association), gave a presentation on eliminating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing as a tool for limiting the loss of biodiversity of the seas and oceans.** He stated that in the Baltic Sea, IUU was not a problem as such and the relationship between biodiversity and IUU in this sea is not so clear. Nevertheless, the BSAC aims to lower the destructive practice of overfishing. The EFCA has noted a decrease in infringements, especially unreported catches. The importance of creating a level playing field and understanding the importance of compliance was stressed.

**A presentation on Automatic Identification System (AIS) as a tool to fight illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing was held by Dr. Andreas Struck, from Navama-technology for nature.** Seas are under pressure and to overcome this problem, transparency, management and communication are needed. Several tools are already in place to control and monitor fishing activities. The combination of all that data can be used for conservation purposes. Some attendees strongly disagreed with the presentation and the control systems proposed: they are too exhaustive, leave private data in public hands and are over controlling.

**Traceability systems in the fishing industry, by Olga Szulecka, Sea Fisheries Institute- National Research Institute.** Traceability is complicated since several legal acts deal with food and its traceability. The situation of the market is improving but different ways of traceability are used: uniformity in systems and standards, in numbering lots within and outside the companies and in labelling. Good traceability systems should be in place covering all the links in the production chain. These systems should also be effective and efficient, allowing the tracking of a product in mere seconds.

**The last presentation was made on Tools to promote sustainable fishing practices among society on the example of MSC, by Anna Debicka, from the Marine Stewardship Council.**

According to MSC, one third of consumers nowadays read the label of fish products before buying. MSC works together with fishermen, processors, media, NGOs and retailers and covers more than 300 fishing areas. The system works with points being given if some requirements are met. MSC also works to improve the situation of sustainable fisheries in developing countries.

### **NORTH WESTERN WATERS HLG MEETING (25 NOVEMBER 2015, DEN HAAG)**

PELAC observers: Ian Gatt, Verena Ohms

The North Western Waters regional group, which is currently chaired by The Netherlands, invited the Pelagic AC to present its response to the control recommendations provided by the regional

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control expert group as well as the industry's experience with the implementation of the landing obligation. The Member State representatives were appreciative of the advice provided by the Pelagic AC and there was an open discussion on the suggestions and issues raised by the Pelagic AC. While Member States had a lot of questions in relation to gramme sizes they did not dismiss the Pelagic AC's recommendation for mandatory collection of haul-by-haul gramme sizes, but will consider the suggestion. They also considered it very valuable that the Pelagic AC provided a list of issues that people have run into since the landing obligation entered into force. Regarding the potential conflict between the landing obligation and the animal by-product regulation most Member States advised their fleets not to label undersized fish as animal by-product, but rather as indirect human consumption product. The UK was of the opinion that labelling undersized fish as category 3 of the animal by-product regulation will allow this fish to be handled in the same premises as direct human consumption fish. There was broad agreement that article 11(4) of the Omnibus Regulation which stipulates that article 15 of the CFP shall not apply to 10% of undersized catches of anchovy, sardine, horse mackerel, mackerel and herring, requires clarification. A request has already been sent to the Commission, but no response has been received thus far. Some of the Member States also pointed out that the pelagic discard plans will have to be replaced by multiannual plans after three years and invited the Pelagic AC to start thinking about developing such multiannual plans.

Subsequently there was a discussion on interspecies flexibility (ISF) and 0 TAC species together with the North Western Waters AC. Based on the outcome of the workshop on ISF at the beginning of November the Member States have identified 7 principles of ISF:

1. ISF is a measure of last resort to be used after all other measures, e.g. quota swaps, de minimis exemptions, high survivability exemptions, inter-annual flexibility etc. have been used.
2. ISF should not be used as long as a Member State still has bycatch quota available.
3. The end of year quota is used to calculate ISF.
4. Member States should inform each other about their intention to use ISF if possible in advance, but certainly afterwards, and be transparent in its use.
5. ISF should be limited to the same sea basin with few exceptions.
6. ISF should be incorporated in the FIDES system.
7. Member States should take measures to avoid severe increase of mortality of bycatch species.

Some Member States also want to take into account the value of a fishery when calculating species conversion rates when applying ISF.

In terms of 0 TAC species different possibilities of dealing with the issue were discussed. Accidental catches of less than 50 kg per trip do not have to be registered nor counted against quota. However, 50 kg is rather limited and it is likely that there will be occasions when fishermen accidentally catch more than that. Another possibility would be to apply the de minimis exemption, but Member States have agreed to limit the use of this exemption and also felt that it might be difficult to scientifically substantiate requests for a de minimis. Installing an "others quotum" is an option that seemed to be favoured by a number of Member States and could also be applied to other choke species, not only

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0 TAC species. At the same time there were concerns that an “others quatum” might be abused. Another option would be to allow fishermen to land and sell their accidental catches of 0 TAC species, but to confiscate the revenues. This would take the incentive away to target 0 TAC species, but some Member States felt that the administrative burden would be too high to handle given the size of their artisanal fleets and the numbers of ports. It was also suggested to treat 0 TAC species in the same way as prohibited species, but at the same time it was pointed out that the reasoning behind prohibited species and 0 TAC species was different and might therefore require different management actions. It was emphasized that the ideas mentioned were just the first step in the process and that further discussion will be required before arriving at a conclusion. The chair announced that an inter-regional workshop on choke species will be organized by the UK and that it is the intention to also invite representatives of the Advisory Councils to this workshop.

## MISCELLANEOUS

### **CONTROL AND TECHNICAL MEASURES FOCUS GROUP**

The focus group on control and technical measures started its work at the end of October. Until now the focus group has met twice through WebEx and discussed the draft recommendations on control issued by the control expert group to the fisheries directors of the North Western Waters countries. It is foreseen that the focus group will continue working on these issues as well as on the revision of the technical measures. Most of the work will be carried out by email and through WebEx meetings. However, a number of physical meetings are also envisaged. If you are interested in joining the focus group please contact Verena Ohms: [v.ohms@pelagic-ac.org](mailto:v.ohms@pelagic-ac.org)

## 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>

### CHRISTMAS BREAK

The Pelagic AC secretariat will be closed from 23 December 2015 until 4 January 2016. We wish you all a Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year! We are looking forward to continue working with you in 2016!



## UPCOMING MEETINGS

### **WORKING GROUP I AND II MEETING AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING (25 FEBRUARY 2016, DEN HAAG)**

The next Working Group meetings and Executive Committee meeting will take place on 25 February at Parkhotel Den Haag. As usual this meeting will evaluate the results and efforts of the past year and discuss initiatives and priorities scheduled for the current year. A number of administrative issues will be discussed as well.

All meeting documents are accessible here:

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

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