



▶ Pelagic AC

Southern Horse Mackerel
Working Group
21st September 2020
13:00 – 17:00 hrs
Remote Meeting

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Participants

Sean O'Donoghue	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
Andres Garcia Bouterera	ACERGA
Aurelio Bilbao	OPESCAAYA
Cristina Perdiguero Arenas	Spanish Member State
Gersom Costas	Centro Oceanográfico de Vigo, Instituto Español de Oceanografía
Goncalo Carvalho	Sciaena
Guillaume Carruel	Pelagic AC
Hugo Mendes	IPMA
Javier Lopez	Oceana
Jorge Abrantes	ANOPCERCO
José Beltran	Organizacion de Productores de Pesqueros de Lugo
José Basilio Otero Rodríguez	Federación Nacional de Cofradía de Pescadores
Katrina Borrow	Mindfully Wired (Pelagic AC)
Nicolás Fernández Munoz	Fecopesca
Torcuato Teixeira Valoria	Pescagalicia-Arpega-Obarco

1. Opening of the meeting by the chairman, Jesper Raakjær

The Chair, Sean O'Donoghue, opened the meeting at 13:09 CET. He requested that interim Executive Secretary Guillaume Carruel provide an introduction to the remote meeting technology for participants, and this was carried out.



The Chair provided some context for the meeting, noting that the purpose of the day's session was to reconcile differences between the MSY advice for the southern horse mackerel stock and the agreed PELAC management plan (a plan which had been put forward to ICES and assessed as precautionary). The Chair hoped that specific issues in the plan could be identified and solutions enacted, asking that all stakeholders present articulate their views in full. Identified solutions would be presented at a meeting of the PELAC WGII on the 7th October, and put forward for approval at an Executive Committee on the 8th October.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted without amendments.

3. Follow-up on action items

Hugo Mendes provided further background on the PELAC management plan. He explained that the plan was developed collaboratively with a range of partners, and in close collaboration with stakeholders – both through meetings, and through gathering information in stakeholder surveys.

He noted that the plan was being developed at a time of significant progress in the scientific understanding of the stock: reference points were established and accepted by ICES, stock ID, biological and productivity parameters were produced, and assessment methods for the stock were reviewed in a WKPELA benchmark meeting. The initial evaluation, a short MSE, was developed into a full MSE.

Many meetings on the stock science and development of the plan took place between October 2014 and 2017, engaging with stakeholders from Spain and Portugal throughout. This programme of work also involved collaboration between the PELAC and the SWWAC.

Based on the science, and on stakeholder input, harvest control rules (HCRs) were developed. These include the following rules: when SSB is above $b_{trigger}$, fish at MSY; when SSB is between $blim$ and $b_{trigger}$, there is a linear reduction in the TAC according to the level of biomass present. When the fishery is at $blim$, it doesn't close: there is a small mortality allowance to permit bycatch of the species and prevent shut-down.

Mendes shared a management options table with the group, noting several scenarios in which the target is F_{MSY} , with different methods for attaining this. During the development of the management plan, these options were discussed and stakeholder questionnaire data was used to determine the best approach. It was decided that a TAC constraint of 15% should be implemented, and the F_{MSY} target should be set for 2025. This was chosen because catches are currently always below the TAC level, and stakeholders wanted some additional time to generate market opportunities for the extra level of catch – taking time to travel up towards F_{MSY} , in order not to flood the market in the short-term. A key aim behind the TAC constraint was to introduce greater stability into the fishery – evaluations of the strategy showed that the 15% cap would limit fluctuations to within 10.000t within the first 10 years of the plan, and provide greater stability beyond the decade point.



Finally, Mendes emphasised that the plan had been developed with the IEO in Spain, IPMA in Portugal and the EU Joint Research Council (JRC), it had been unanimously approved by those engaged with the process, and it had been deemed precautionary by ICES in 2018.

The Chair thanked Mendes for his presentation.

4. Presentation of ICES advice for southern horse mackerel

Hugo Mendes moved on to summarise the ICES advice for the stock.

He provided further background on the management plan, noting that Article 5 of the plan is the section where the F_{MSY} deadline of 2025 appears: *“in the case that the SSB is forecast to be above or equal to MSY trigger (equivalent to Blim) at mid-January of the year for which the TAC is to be set, the TAC shall be fixed to a catch estimated based on gradual increase of fishing towards F_{MSY} in 2025”*.

He added that ‘F’ is derived the catch in the last year with data. In the first year of enacting the plan, this is derived from the last observed F. In the first year of the plan, the 15% TAC constraint does not apply.

He showed the group a comparison of advice for SHOM and actual catches – indicating that actual catch is well below the advised TAC.

He shared the ICES stock assessment summary with the group, noting it is a mixed fishery, with the stock caught by both trawl and purse seine vessels. Since 1992, fishing has been well below MSY. SSB for the stock has shown some high recruitments recently, and is currently both increasing and at an historic high.

This year, because of the COVID19 situation, there have been some scientific issues with assessing the stock – some Portuguese surveys have not been completed (leaving only Spanish survey data). Portugal is the main fishery for SHOM, and there is a different catch profile in Spain. ICES has tried to ‘work around’ these gaps in the data, but this is challenging. This means the assessment for the stock is made through catch data and the selectivity of the fisheries. One consequence of this, as an example, is that recruitment data for the last three years have been estimate by an average of historic recruitment – this adds uncertainty to the advice. The SSB is uncertain.

Catch options for the stock in the ICES advice summary sheet are as follows: the ICES MSY approach gives a TAC in 2021 of 128.000t (resulting from the uncertain, and high, SSB); a scenario of maintaining F from 2020 to 2021 provides advice of 34.000t, and; advice based on the agreed management plan for the stock would be for 56.000t.

5. Views from stakeholders present



Aurelio Bilbao, President of the SWWAC, thanked Sean O'Donoghue for the invitation to participate in the meeting. He noted that many members of the SWWAC are also members of the PELAC, saying it is difficult to be able to attend meetings for both Advisory Councils, so he welcomed the opportunity to participate in this working group. He said that the issue had not been debated in the SWWAC, meaning it was unlikely that SWWAC members would be able to resolve issues with the management plan during the course of the meeting. He emphasized the 'huge difference' in the advice generated by the management plan and the ICES MSY advice. He asserted that ICES is known for being cautious, precautionary, and prudent – so the 'obvious response' from the catch sector to ICES advice for a TAC of 128.000 would be 'let's catch 128.000t'. Finally, he encouraged those present to bear in mind the social consequences of advice.

The Chair thanked him for his remarks, and sought to 're-set the scene', noting that when it comes to SHOM, the remit for the stock comes fully under the PELAC. Under the CFP, coordination and cooperation with other ACs is encouraged, however, ultimately the recommendation will come from the PELAC rather than the SWWAC. He urged those present to approach the issue with an open mind, and be driven by the 'science and the facts'.

Torcuato Teixeira also thanked the PELAC for arranging the meeting. As a lawyer specializing in fisheries issues, he explained he was focused on the social implications of the advice, and impacts on communities in Galicia. He said any recommendation should take into account both biology and society, and he felt that talking about stock biology on a 10-year timescale was highly ambitious, as ecosystems are continually changing, which he saw as a risk to any long-term projections within a management plan. He felt advice should follow the precautionary approach set out by ICES and said the Spanish oceanographic institute (IEO) should be involved in the development of any recommendations.

The Chair noted Teixeira's socio-economic concerns and underscored their relevance. He said the group must 'get to the bottom' of the 'serious issue of the difference between the management plan and the ICES advice'.

Javier Lopez interjected that he believed a dialogue between the two ACs is necessary, especially in light of misunderstandings in the previous year around formulating recommendations for catches. He put forward an NGO perspective, saying that environmental groups are always in favour of applying medium- and long-term strategies. The NGOs would prefer any recommendations to be delivered on a consensus basis. He thanked the PELAC for their work in leading on the management plan, and re-emphasised his desire to see a coming-together of the PELAC and SWWAC around a joint recommendation for the plan. He asked industry members of the SWWAC what their catches have been in comparison to advice issued for SHOM in previous years, suggesting that if they have not been catching 100% of the TAC when it was set at lower levels, a catch of 128.000t would not be possible. Goncalo Carvalho echoed the question of his NGO colleague Lopez, saying it was crucial to understand whether the Spanish fleet is using all of its quota, as the TAC overall is 'very much under-used'.

Gersom Costas offered a scientific perspective, noting that the plan has the support of the IEO in Spain. He said the plan had taken into account the perspectives of stakeholders during its



development, and that those involved in developing the plan had provided a number of scenarios for the industry to feed back on. Spanish and Portuguese stakeholders participated and it was established that F_{MSY} should be achieved in 2025. To attain this, there had to be a linear increase in catches.

Torcuato Teixeira responded on behalf of the industry. First, he noted that he had called for the IEO to be involved in development of future recommendations because he had met with IEO colleagues who had defended the ICES MSY advice, rather than the management plan recommendations. Regarding TAC uptake, he said that the issue was ‘more complex than it seems’, and uptake of quotas is linked to a management plan in northeast Spain, with which there are ‘internal problems’. He explained that there has recently been a policy change, meaning a higher percentage of the SHOM quotas could be used.

Javier Lopez interjected. He raised that it was ‘very kind’ of the PELAC to be considering amending the agreed plan. To the industry, he offered a note of caution, encouraging them not to ‘take advantage of the multi-annual plans – applying them when it’s convenient, but not when otherwise’. He stated he was open to exploring any new rules, or indeed to applying the MSY advice.

Representatives of the Spanish administration contributed to the conversation via the chat function of the remote meeting tool. Cristina Perdiguero Arenas stated that the Spanish position was for MSY-level exploitation of the stock, adding that less than this level was a ‘under-use of the stock which is not justified’. She confirmed that a ‘Ministerial regulation’ had been put forward which is designed to maximize the uptake of quotas within the Spanish fleet.

Jose Beltran contributed his views. He reminded those present that when the plan was first under discussion, TACs were set at around 35.000t, with consumption close to 30.000t. TACs would regularly fluctuate significantly, and exploitation rules within the plan were focused on bringing stability to the fishery. Now, he said, we are in a situation where we believe the stock has changed ‘enormously’ and ICES reports ‘go way beyond what could have been calculated at the time [of development of the plan]’. Having noted this, he agreed that the PELAC should listen to all views and if ‘things need to change, let’s change them’.

A number of stakeholders agreed that the discussion should continue along the lines of how to revise the plan.

A short break was held between 14:39-14:55.

6. Discussion of PELAC advice for 2021

The Chair explained that any outcomes from the meeting, in terms of advice and recommendations, would be discussed at the PELAC WGII meeting on October 7th, 2020, and finalized at an Executive Committee the following day. For those not familiar with the PELAC’s work, he added that ‘we put an enormous amount of time into management strategy development’.

The Chair went on to articulate that the group was at a ‘crossroads’ with the plan. Figures from ICES and advice taken from the plan are very different, and it is important to understand why. When the



management plan was being developed, there was much lower recommended TACs for the stock than in the present day. Only since the plan was adopted by ICES have 'huge increases' in MSY advice been seen (linked to strong recruitment). He said that the agreement to attain F_{MSY} in 2025 had seemed reasonable when the plan was constructed, but that this facet of the plan may now need review, along with the stability clause. The Chair called on Hugo Mendes to outline what the effect of changes these clauses within the advice might be, and also to explain the main drivers in the difference seen between the ICES and management plan advice.

Mendes explained that a driver in the difference between the two sets of advice is the fact that the management plan aimed for a linear increase towards MSY by 2025, rather than an immediate arrival at MSY. Any adjustment to that target year, to make that linear increase period shorter – eg. having 2023 or 2022 as the end-date – would reduce the difference between the two sets of advice. He reemphasized his personal caution with regards to the SSB data within the ICES assessment – he noted that the confidence intervals for the SSB estimates were extreme, making him uncertain of accepting the median value.

In response to a query from the Chair as to how any amends to the plan would be assessed by ICES, Mendes confirmed that there would be a relevant workshop in November, in which the any changes could be presented.

On the subject of the stability clause, Mendes noted that whilst a stability clause can sometimes prevent management from responding quickly to increasing trends, it has a protective function – ensuring that the stock doesn't go below Blim, even in a 'low productivity scenario'. He again highlighted that the stability clause is not applied in the first year of the plan.

The Chair explored a scenario whereby the target date for F_{MSY} was shifted to 2022. Hugo Mendes confirmed this would lessen the gap between the ICES MSY advice and the recommendation of the management plan, setting the management plan advice at roughly 85.000t. With this stated, the Chair moved that the plan should be changed in this way – saying that 'we all recognize a gap of 72.000t [in the advice] is too much'.

Aurelio Bilbao thanked Sean O'Donoghue for his willingness to adjust the plan and come to an agreement. He said 'the intention for an agreement is there' but said he would need a 'quick proposal with concrete data' to discuss separately with SWWAC colleagues before approval.

Torcuato Teixeira was still uncertain about the remaining gap between the new figure of 85.000t and the MSY advice at 128.000t. He was skeptical about the validity of preparing long-term plans, when biological conditions have been shown to be fluctuating. He characterized the new figure as still a 'drastic reduction' of the TAC.

The Chair interjected that the PELAC has made a conscious decision from its inception that it would actively pursue the development of long-term management plans, adding that this wouldn't change. He said that the proposed amend to the plan was a move 'more than halfway' towards the current MSY advice, and it would be wise to view this as a 'significant move'. He called for comment from PELAC colleagues on the proposed amend.

Jose Beltran emphasized the importance of stability within the fishery, saying 'I like to know what I will be facing next year'. He proposed a margin of a 'few days' for participants in the meeting to consider



the change to an MSY target date of 2022 and then revert back with comments. Goncalo Carvalho also contributed, saying his main concern was to ensure that fishing levels never rise above F_{MSY} , which he felt was ensured by Article 3 of the current plan. He said it was reasonable to aim for an agreement on catch figures that would bring TACs closer to MSY.

At this point, Hugo Mendes added that he has calculated the recommended TAC for 2021 if the plan were to set an F_{MSY} target in 2022, and this would be 85.642t. He said this seemed a scientifically reasonable goal. He also added that there was a chance that the perception of the stock would be revised down next year, if new recruitment data could be sourced, highlighting the importance of the stability clause – which would limit any reduction in TAC to 15% of the 85.642t figure.

On the basis of his remarks, the Chair proposed that the only change to be made to the plan should be to Article 5.1, which sets out the date for attaining fishing at MSY. This would be changed to 2022, with participants' agreement. This would then go to the ICES WKHANSA workshop in November for assessment and approval.

A brief discussion was held around how to secure approval for the proposed amend, in which a number of participants voiced that it would be vital to have the perspectives of the Spanish and Portuguese administrations before confirming. Cristina Periguero Arenas of the Spanish administration indicated that they would express their opinion in writing upon receipt of the proposal (also in writing) with precise figures, following the meeting.

Aurelio Bilbao requested that the amended plan be sent to the SWWAC. This was agreed.

7. Conclusion of the meeting

The Chair proposed that a revised version of the plan be circulated to all attendees, and the two administrations. This version of the plan would include an amend to the MSY target date from 2025 to 2022, and no other articles in the plan would be altered. The PELAC would receive written comments, and this will then be an item for discussion at the PELAC WGII and ExCom meetings, as noted at the outset of the Working Group.

At this point the meeting concluded, with thanks to all participants.

8. Actions from the meeting

- An updated draft of the SHOM management plan to be circulated to all attendees, the Spanish and Portuguese administrations, and the SWWAC for comment. This version to include an amendment to Article 5.1, reflecting a target date for fishing at F_{MSY} of 2022. (Secretariat)
- Recipients to send comments on or indicate their agreement with the change to the plan as soon as possible. (FG participants)
- PELAC WGII to discuss the revised plan in a meeting on the 7th October, and confirm a way forwards through the Executive Committee on the 8th October. (Chair, Secretariat)



- **PELAC to send the revised management plan to ICES, via the Commission, for consideration and review in the November meeting of WKHANSA. (Chair, Secretariat)**

