



PELAGIC ADVISORY COUNCIL

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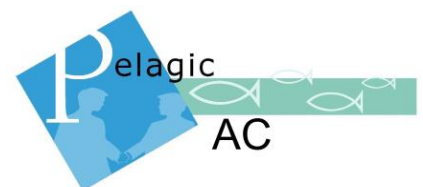


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PELAC MEETINGS

6.A, 7.B,C HERRING MEETING (27 FEBRUARY 2017, DEN HAAG)

The PELAC's focus group on herring in 6.a and 7.b,c discussed a draft rebuilding plan for the stocks as well as ongoing research. It was agreed that the objective of the plan should be to rebuild the stocks and one of the primary tools in that regard will be to split the stocks and have two separate assessments again. In order to do so the pelagic industry is currently funding a genetic stock identification project which has made a lot of progress in recent months. Genetic markers have been identified that separate herring in 6.a North from herring in 6.a South and 7.b,c. Interestingly, spawning herring in area 6.a North seems to be genetically very similar to North Sea herring.

The results of the industry acoustic surveys have also been presented and provided minimum biomass estimates in the respective areas. It has been agreed to continue the industry surveys this year.

WORKING GROUP I MEETING (28 FEBRUARY 2017, DEN HAAG)

The meeting focused on an evaluation of 2016 and agreed on the priorities for all stocks in 2017. For Atlanto-Scandian herring and blue whiting the TAC for 2017 has been set in accordance with the PELAC advice. For North Sea herring the TAC was set in accordance with MSY. For North Sea horse mackerel the PELAC advised to set the TAC at 15.200 tonnes corresponding to the wanted catch and thereby avoiding a political discussion that would lead to an increase in mortality. However, the Council decided to set the TAC at 18.247 tonnes which was the wanted catch advice plus discard estimates as provided by ICES.

The most important priorities for 2017 are to follow developments in relation to the landing obligation, continue working on the identification of herring spawning grounds and continue various scientific efforts to increase the knowledge base for the various stocks.

During the meeting a presentation was given on the final outcomes of gear trials in the Skagerrak herring fishery using a flexible grid to reduce bycatch of saithe. The final results confirmed earlier outcomes that showed that the grid is successful in reducing saithe bycatch by up to 90% while herring loss is small.

Other topics addressed were the draft recommendation on the revision of the Technical Measures Regulation and the updated Terms of Reference of the Ecosystem Focus Group.

WORKING GROUP II MEETING (28 FEBRUARY 2017, DEN HAAG)

Similar to Working Group I this meeting focused on the 2017 TACs and how they compared to the advice provided by the PELAC. In most cases the TAC for 2017 has been set in accordance with PELAC advice, but in one case, namely Western horse mackerel, the TAC has been set higher for no apparent reason.

The priorities in 2017 have been set to concentrate on the development of management plans for Southern horse mackerel and Irish Sea herring and on a rebuilding plan for herring in 6.a and 7.b,c.

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Furthermore, efforts on genetic and various other forms of research remain a high priority for the Working Group.

Finally, potential amendments to the pelagic discard plan in the North Sea were discussed.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING (28 FEBRUARY 2017, DEN HAAG)

During the Executive Committee meeting the mid-term financial and activity reports were presented. Both indicated that the implementation of the work program and the use of resources were according to plan.

There was a brief discussion on BREXIT, but people agreed that the PELAC had no role in commenting on the BREXIT negotiations, but rather should think about the post-BREXIT situation and how that will affect the PELAC. It was agreed to follow-up on this issue in July 2017.

Due to structural changes within WWF, Stella Nemecky had to step down as member of the Management Team and the Executive Committee unanimously endorsed Goncalo Carvalho to take her place.

All detailed meeting minutes can be downloaded from the PELAC website:
<http://www.pelagic-ac.org/2017>

EXTERNAL MEETINGS

MIACO MEETING (19-20 JANUARY 2017, COPENHAGEN)

PELAC participants: Esben Sverdrup-Jensen, Sean O'Donoghue, Stella Nemecky

The yearly MIACO meeting was held in Copenhagen on January 19-20 2017. The meeting was led by Eskild Kirkegaard from ICES.

As in other years ICES had arranged a pre meeting for ACs only in the morning of the 19th. The actual MIACO meeting also included participants from observers and clients. The PELAC representatives raised a number of issues for discussion. Issues identified throughout the year in WG meetings:

Raise concern about inter-benchmark procedure carried out through correspondence (access, preparation, transparency)

The PELAC raised this issue and ICES confirmed they would look again at the inter-benchmark procedures but contrary to our understanding reference points can be changed at inter-benchmarks. In addition, we raised the issue of inter-benchmarks convened at very short notice by scientists without informing the other stakeholders. ICES agreed to look at this to ensure the full participation in the future. ICES also raised the issue of preparatory meetings ahead of WGs. Meetings will be arranged on an ad hoc basis when ACs call for these. Meetings must be requested well ahead of WGs.

Raise issue of revised Fmsy reference point for North Sea herring in relation to management strategy with ICES.

The PELAC raised concern with the procedures surrounding the advice for North Sea herring in 2017 and how ICES had failed to in detail communicate to clients that reference points had been changed and the basis for the existing management strategy plan had been changed. The issue fueled a discussion on how ICES can better reflect on the balance between HCR principles, developments in advice and the MSY target. Issues regarding the advice for blue whiting for 2016 were also used as examples. The PELAC underlined the need for ICES to help clients and stakeholders navigate better in the complexities of advice.

Raise the issue of non-quantitative stakeholder information with ICES.

The PELAC had raised this issue on a number of occasions. ICES continues within its community to deal with this issue and to find a format for communicating information from stakeholders in the advice, without setting aside scientific principles. ICES was making progress on this issue and it transpired that ICES has begun using non-quantitative stakeholder information in the Ecosystem Overviews.

Raise issue of advice quality in relation to revised mackerel advice for 2016 and 2017.

The PELAC raised the issue of advice quality, following the recent error in the mackerel advice for 2016. At the meeting it came out that ICES had made another significant error again in its mackerel advice for 2017 which meant the MSY advice was 9% less than the advice issued on the 30th September 2016.

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The PELAC made a major intervention on the lack of quality control in the ICES stock assessment process and that if it was a manufacturing process it would be closed down. In addition the PELAC put forward a three point plan to ICES to address the issue.

1. Contract an outside expert to critically evaluate the ICES process system.
2. Identify the critical control points (HACCP system) with the help of the expert.
3. Put robust measures in place to control these critical points.

The issue was discussed at length. And ICES noted that although errors of this nature were rare they were working on procedures to improve quality control.

Survey quality and cost efficiency

Issues were raised in regards to the allocation of research resources between surveys and data processing. ICES informed that more than 90% of all resources go into surveys, and only 5% go into the actual processing. The mackerel egg survey was used as prime example of a very costly survey providing very limited (although) important data. ICES is in the process of developing a “pilot” study/workshop on how to cut cost on surveys and strengthen data processing capabilities. The initiative was supported by the ACs. Further to that, ICES currently provides no adequate forum for addressing survey quality and methodology.

Quota top ups – and unwanted catches

The PELAC raised concern with the lack of clarity in the ICES advice on unwanted catches. The issues with North Sea hors mackerel were used. ICES underlined the difficulties when dealing with this in a systematic manner that clients could put into practice. The PELAC warned ICES that managers and decision makers tend to only read the topline of the advice sheet. “unwanted” catches could easily be added to the TAC for wanted catch, risking steep increases in fishing mortality over time. ICES would seek dialogue with clients, especially the EU-Commission.

Overall the ACs were pleased with the collaboration with ICES and the ICES representatives participating in AC meetings.

MEETING WITH THE PECH COMMITTEE ON TECHNICAL MEASURES (25 JANUARY 2017, BRUSSELS)

PELAC representative: Esben Sverdrup-Jensen

MEP Mato had invited ACs to give a first view on challenges regarding the new proposed framework for technical measures.

Mato introduced the proposal from the Commission currently in process in the Council and the work that he as rapporteur would lead in the Parliament.

Overall the Parliament approach to the proposal was positive, but members held reservations on a number of issues, especially the possible consequences of Brexit.

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The PELAC gave a presentation (see annex 1) based on the draft technical measures position paper agreed in the PELAC FG on technical measures, and still awaiting final ExCom approval.

The PELAC focused on the mismatch between regionalization and managing straddling and migratory fish stocks, the need for a special entity dealing with pelagic cross regional issues, concern in regards to whether the regulation could stand the test of time, on issues relating to capacity and the current constraints on improving working and safety conditions onboard fishing vessels, and finally on the need to secure close consultations with stakeholders.

A number of other ACs raised concerns in regards to the timeframe of the work ahead and the issues of regionalisation.

Presentations were followed by a short round of comments from MEPs. Most focused on looking forward to the work ahead. Two MEPs picked up on the specific issues raised by the PELAC in relation to migratory fish and the issue of capacity.

Mato finished the meeting promising close collaboration with the ACs.

WKPELA BENCHMARK (6-10 FEBRUARY 2017, LISBON)

PELAC participants: José Beltran, Verena Ohms

The benchmark on southern horse mackerel resulted in no major changes to the assessment. Reference points remain unchanged as well and the stock is perceived to be in a good shape. At the benchmark ongoing efforts in relation to developing a management strategy were briefly discussed. To continue the development of a management strategy for Southern horse mackerel a questionnaire has been sent to Spanish and Portuguese stakeholders to inventory their preferences. Only very few responses have been received and it had been decided to continue simulations using the information from the responses received.

SCHEVENINGEN GROUP- TECHNICAL MEETING (1 MARCH 2017, THE HAGUE)

PELAC representatives: Stella Nemecky, Verena Ohms

The chair explained that the current discard plan will end on 31 December 2017 leading to a legal gap. The Member States have discussed the issue with the Commission and tabled the idea to formulate a new joint recommendation to fill the gap, however, the Commission was not in favor of that option and wanted to look for an alternative. According to the Commission there is no legal possibility to renew or amend the discard plan and they are looking for other solutions. The Commission promised to keep the Member States informed. Yesterday the presidency sent out a new version of the multiannual plan which contains a provision to take discards into account. However, such a plan might not be available in January. The first step will be to decide which of the provisions in the current discard plan should be kept in the future.

There was general agreement among the Member States that it was a pity that the Commission has not provided any information on their announced solution. People did not consider a provision in

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the multiannual plan to be an appropriate solution and thought that the Commission should come up with something else. They thought that the Scheveningen Group should take the lead and work on a joint solution itself. It was said that the existing provisions should continue to exist and there was a feeling of urgency to replace the existing discard plan with something else.

The PELAC referred to the Council Declaration from December 2016 and wanted to know if the Member States have followed their commitment to provide information with supporting data for scientific assessment by ICES for those species that should be covered by special by-catch provisions.

It turned out that most Member States were struggling with the commitment and only one Member State was close to submitting the required information to the Commission.

Regarding a pelagic subgroup it was pointed out that the idea has been discussed in both the Scheveningen and the North Western Waters group, but there was no support for any extra regional group given the already heavy workload. There was some support for informal contact through an email group. It had also been agreed in the regional groups that the chairs had a special responsibility to ensure optimal communication with the PELAC.

It was promised that the chairs of the regional groups will get in touch with the PELAC to discuss the merit of having an informal email group.

EFCA ADVISORY BOARD MEETING (3 MARCH 2017, BRUSSELS)

PELAC representative: José Beltran

Each AC representative presented the state of play within the respective ACs. The PELAC is well on its way with the implementation of its work program and has recently submitted its mid-term report to the Commission which has been approved. In regards to EFCA's gramme size project EFCA promised to present an update at the PELAC April meeting if so requested. In general there was good cooperation with the Member States and the industry, but there was some difficulty to get data from inspections at sea and from reference vessels.

The Aquaculture AC, which is now up and running, consists of 61 members and 3 Working Groups.

The North Sea AC announced that it will organize a conference on control and monitoring to which representatives from the Commission, the Member States control experts and EFCA will be invited. The usefulness of a multiannual plan in the North Sea was questioned once BREXIT has taken place. In regards to the draft technical measures regulation the NSAC representative thought that it was too complex.

The Commission wanted to have a general agreement on the new technical measures regulation as soon as possible and was hoping for the summer.

The representative of the BSAC said that implementing the landing obligation will take time. He explained that fishermen, who in the past were forced to discard fish, now have to learn to play by completely new rules, which is very difficult, especially when considering that some of the gears are not selective, but must be used due to regulatory reasons.

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The MAC representative said that the MAC was keen on collaborating with EFCA and the other ACs. The MAC was especially interested in IUU fishing.

The LDAC representative explained that the LDAC was collaborating with the MAC and COMHAFAT to fight IUU fishing. On the implementation of the landing obligation, he pointed out that in NEAFC and NAFO the Commission had informed people that delegated regulations on exemptions from the landing obligation are under adoption. He mentioned his concerns about by-catch and choke species.

Afterwards EFCA presented its 2016 report. The most important achievements were 19.500 inspections in which 665 suspected infringements were identified. EFCA also held 24 training events consisting of regional workshops, exchange of best practices, training the trainers, Union inspectors training, Fisheries Information System training and training for third countries.

The multiannual work program for 2017-2021 was presented. The operational activities in 2017 will focus on:

- Coordination, harmonisation and standardisation and assistance and expertise.
- The EU Coast Guard Tasks, the multipurpose operations and the Pilot project “Modernising fisheries controls and optimising vessel monitoring through the use of innovative European systems”.
- The support to the regionalisation and LO implementation.

A discussion followed on the rotation system of the Advisory Board representative to the Administrative Board. The BSAC and NSAC thought that a one year term was too short and that limiting representation to only one Advisory Board representative was inappropriate. EFCA explained that in order to change the procedure the Administrative Board would have to grant its approval. He suggested that the ACs will internally come up with a proposal to be considered by the Administrative Board.

NORTH WESTERN WATERS REGIONAL GROUP- TECHNICAL MEETING (14 MARCH 2017, GENT)

PELAC representative: Verena Ohms

Belgium pointed out that there will be no multiannual plan for pelagic stocks in the near future. Therefore, the Member States (MS) and the COM have been exchanging views on the possibility to have a second discard plan and are currently looking for a legal solution. Such a solution should enable the MS to have a joint recommendation in which they can specify the details for all relevant stocks and Belgium hoped to have a solution by the end of May. This does not provide a lot of time and therefore Belgium proposed to follow the status quo, i.e. a roll-over of all provisions that are currently in the discard plan for pelagic fisheries in the North Western Waters (NWW).

The PELAC explained that the proposal will have to be discussed by the Executive Committee (ExCom) before the PELAC can comment on it and the next ExCom meeting will only take place on 25 April. The PELAC also wanted to know what the status was of the Council Declaration was and whether the

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Member States have followed their commitment to provide information with supporting data for scientific assessment by ICES for those species that should be covered by special bycatch provisions.

The Netherlands said that the catch information is already in the system and the COM was hence aware of the situation in regards to quota issues. It was not difficult to see that there was a shortage of hake quota for the Netherlands and the question was whether the COM could provide information on the costs of swapping. The Netherlands was also conducting some tests to avoid hake bycatch and was willing to provide more information about that, but also pointed out that people were still struggling with the issue. The question was what to do once all the information is available. The Netherlands emphasized that it will try its best to help its pelagic fleet solve its bycatch issues. One possibility was the recommendation from the PELAC in regards to the footnotes.

Ireland vehemently opposed the introduction of new footnotes and wanted to do everything in its power to delete all current footnotes. The Irish representatives said that these footnotes have the potential to cause huge damage to its demersal fisheries.

The UK shared the same concerns as Ireland and was furthermore worried about the similarity between footnotes and inter-species flexibility. The UK also thought that footnotes increase mortality and undermine relative stability.

Contrary to what ICES reported during the PELAC's workshop on the landing obligation, one of the Irish representatives claimed that ICES did not take bycatches into account for stocks like mackerel, horse mackerel and herring. He said that nobody knew what the extent of bycatches were in those fisheries and that a small number in the pelagic sector was a big number in the demersal sector.

France and Spain had no comments.

Regarding the inquiry for an informal pelagic subgroup Belgium explained that the request has been discussed in the High Level Group (HLG) and that all MS agreed that it was difficult to create yet another regional group, not least for logistic reasons.

However, the NWW group was willing to consider electronic ways to solve the issue. Given that the next technical group meeting will take place on 25 April the NWW group intended to communicate with the PELAC by email and maybe invite the AC to one of the HLG meetings.

The chair asked the PELAC to provide comments on keeping the status quo in regards to the pelagic discard plan in the NWW by the end of April. The NWW group thought that in light of the legal discussions it might be best to stick with the status quo and to keep all provisions exactly as they apply in 2017. The next HLG meeting will be on the 9th of May where the PELAC's comments on the status quo proposal can be discussed.

MISCELLANEOUS

NEW MANAGEMENT TEAM MEMBER

Due to internal restructuring Stella Nemecky, WWF, is no longer able to serve on the Management Team. The Executive Committee has therefore unanimously appointed Goncalo Carvalho as her successor who will join the PELAC on behalf of Sciaena, a Portuguese-based environmental NGO.

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 PELAC'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

FOCUS GROUP MEETING ON HERRING IN 6A AND 7B,C (24 APRIL 2017, DUBLIN)

On 24 April 2017 the next focus group meeting on herring in 6.a and 7.b,c will take place prior to the PELAC meeting the following day. The main item to be discussed is the draft rebuilding plan. Kindly note that only members of the focus group are eligible to attend this meeting. If you are not a member of the focus group, but would like to participate in the meeting please contact the secretariat.

WORKING GROUP I AND II MEETING AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING (25 APRIL 2017, DUBLIN)

The next Working Group meetings and Executive Committee meeting will take place on 25 April at Dublin Castle. The focus of these meetings will be on the benchmark outcomes for North Sea horse mackerel, Western horse mackerel and Northeast Atlantic mackerel. A draft rebuilding plan for herring in area 6.a and 7.b,c will also be discussed.

All meeting documents are accessible here:

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

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