



PELAGIC ADVISORY COUNCIL

Newsletter 3/2014

October-December 2014

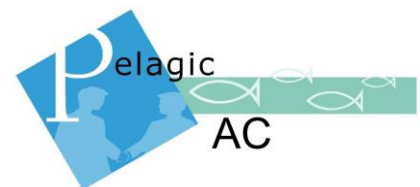


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PELAC MEETINGS

WORKING GROUP I AND II MEETING (1 OCTOBER 2014, THE HAGUE)

On 1 October the yearly Working Group meetings dealing with widely distributed stocks took place in The Hague. John Simmonds, vice-chair of ACOM, presented the ICES advice for Northeast Atlantic mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring, blue whiting, western horse mackerel, North Sea horse mackerel, southern horse mackerel and boarfish. After thorough discussion the Working Group members agreed on a set of recommendations, including TAC advice for most stocks, to be presented to the Executive Committee on the following day. John Simmonds also provided a summary of the special request ICES received to evaluate the management plan for North Sea horse mackerel. Unfortunately ICES concluded that this plan was not precautionary due to the current poor state of the stock and that the immediate concern is to reduce fishing mortality and rebuild the stock. David Miller gave a presentation on management and potential TAC setting options for herring in ICES area IIIa. As part of the GAP2 case study on Western Baltic herring he will be performing different management strategy evaluations taking into account the mixing of North Sea autumn spawning and Western Baltic spring spawning herring. He will do so in close collaboration with stakeholders from the Pelagic and Baltic Sea AC. Ciaran Kelly presented an update on the management plan for Western horse mackerel. The pelagic industry is funding the necessary scientific work to fix the current management plan which is no longer considered precautionary and Ciaran Kelly explained that since the initial simulations in 2006 the perception of the stock has changed, but also the minimum conditioning criteria for harvest control rule simulations. The plan has to be updated taking into account the most recent understanding of stock dynamics and a protection rule has to be added. Furthermore, scientists are trying to model the recruitment spikes typical for this stock in order to narrow down the confidence intervals. He expected that the new plan will be ready in April 2015.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING (2 OCTOBER 2014, THE HAGUE)

This year's General Assembly meeting was marked by the election of new chairmen and Executive Committee members. After nine years Iain MacSween retired from his role as chairman of the Pelagic AC and the General Assembly unanimously voted for Ian Gatt from the Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association to become the new Pelagic AC chairman. Esben Sverdrup-Jensen and Sean O'Donoghue were reelected as chairmen of Working Group I and II respectively. The Executive Committee has gained a new member, namely the Atlantic Salmon Trust, as part of the "other interests" group. Furthermore the final report for the year 2013-2014 was approved as well as the work program for the new Pelagic AC year. The necessary changes to the Articles of Association to comply with the new CFP have been approved by the Commission and the Member States. Finally, Philip McGinnity from the University College Cork presented some work he has done on genetic stock identification of salmon and its implications for pelagic fisheries.

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING (2 OCTOBER 2014, THE HAGUE)

During the Executive Committee meeting the Working Group chairmen presented the stock advice as agreed on by the Working Groups which was unanimously endorsed by the Executive Committee. Subsequently Pew Charitable Trusts introduced a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Member States. This initiative followed from discussions in the North Western Waters AC where it has been decided to draft an MoU setting out the relationship between the ACs and the regional Member State groups. Since the issues are generic and apply to all ACs the draft MoU has been distributed to all ACs for discussion. In principle members felt that such an MoU might be valuable, but that it needed some further refinement. It was agreed that members should submit their comments in writing to the secretariat.

FOCUS GROUP MEETING SOUTHERN HORSE MACKEREL (9 OCTOBER 2014, MADRID)

A small group of stakeholders and scientists from Spain and Portugal met at the Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries in Madrid to discuss the development of a multiannual management plan for southern horse mackerel. Marie Benatre, student intern at the Pelagic AC secretariat, provided an overview of the history of fisheries management plans, their creation process and the concrete application of these plans. Afterwards scientists from Spain and Portugal presented the latest ICES advice from which it was obvious that the stock is in a very good shape. A general discussion on the stock and the fisheries followed and several harvest control rule options were discussed. It was agreed to prepare a stakeholder questionnaire to inventory stakeholder's needs and wishes in regards to managing the stock. Once replies to the questionnaire have been received the results will be summarized and presented in a webex meeting. It was also concluded that funding the simulation work will be an issue and that funding possibilities have to be identified.

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ICES WORKSHOP ON MSFD DESCRIPTOR 3: COMMERCIAL FISH STOCKS (4-5 SEPTEMBER 2014, COPENHAGEN)

ICES has been asked to review the 2010 Commission Decision on criteria and methodological standards on Good Environmental Status (GES) of marine waters. Therefore a number of workshops was organized, two of which were relevant for pelagic fisheries, i.e. on descriptor 4 (food webs) and descriptor 3 (commercially exploited fish and shellfish). Descriptor 3 is considered to be at GES when *“populations of all commercially exploited fish and shellfish are within safe biological limits and exhibit a population age and size distribution that is indicative of a healthy stock.”* Three criteria have been formulated to assess whether this is case. Criterion 3.1 deals with the level of fishing pressure which is indicated by $F < F_{msy}$ or, in case F reference points are lacking, by the catch/biomass ratio. Criterion 3.2 assesses whether a stock is at its full reproductive capacity by having a spawning stock biomass that is bigger than the MSY $B_{trigger}$. In the absence of a defined MSY $B_{trigger}$ biomass indices should be used as surveillance indicators comparing the current value to a long-term historic average. The workshop considered the indicators under criteria 3.1 and 3.2 as operational and recommended that they can be implemented. During the workshop there was a discussion on whether SSB_{msy} should be used as indicator for criterion 3.2 instead of MSY $B_{trigger}$. However, biomass depends on many different factors and fishing mortality is only one of these factors. Unlike fishing mortality other variables cannot be controlled by fisheries management measures and therefore ICES considered that it does not make sense to use SSB_{msy} as a specific target or limit for policy and instead recommended using MSY $B_{trigger}$. For criterion 3.3 (healthy population age and size distribution) three primary and one secondary indicator were initially defined:

- Proportion of fish larger than the mean size of first sexual maturation (primary)
- Mean maximum length across all species found in research vessel surveys (primary)
- 95% percentile of the fish length distribution observed in research vessel surveys (primary)
- Size at first sexual maturation, which may reflect the extent of undesirable genetic effects of exploitation (secondary)

However, the workshop recommended that these indicators should be revised as they either fit better under descriptor 1 (biodiversity) or because no clear targets can be set, trends are not linked to clear consequences or benefits or management responses to achieve targets are not defined. Instead it was suggested that the new indicators should capture three relevant properties of criterion 3.3, namely:

- The size distribution of the species
- The selectivity pattern of the fishery exploiting the species
- The genetic effects of exploitation on the species.

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Appropriate indicators for these properties have not been defined yet, but some of the previously suggested indicators could be used, e.g. the proportion of fish larger than the mean size of first sexual maturation could serve as an indicator for the size distribution of a species. The other two properties need new indicators, e.g. first fully fished age class as an indicator for the selectivity pattern of a fishery and the probabilistic maturation reaction norm for genetic effects of exploitation.

EFCA ADVISORY BOARD MEETING (17 SEPTEMBER 2014, VIGO)

José Beltrán participated in the EFCA Advisory Board meeting on behalf of the Pelagic AC. The first part of the meeting was characterized by a discussion on the upcoming landing obligation. Several AC representatives voiced their concerns regarding the lack of communication between Member States, the Commission and the industry. With January quickly approaching it is of the utmost importance to clearly explain to fishermen what the rules will be as of the 1st of January. It was also pointed out that the control of the landing obligation is a top priority and requires a mechanism, which has not been built yet. EFCA offered to organize a number of regional workshops with the ACs to promote a constructive dialogue on enforceable rules. It was also mentioned that the EU fleets fishing in international waters will be subject to RFMO regulations which in some cases might not be compatible with the new CFP. Therefore the Commission is empowered to adopt delegated acts specifying which RFMO species will fall under the landing obligation and which will not. Unfair competition with third countries was another worry mentioned. EFCA explained that it is developing a tool box for fisheries inspectors to identify where discards are expected in a certain fishery. A project on monitoring compliance of the landing obligation and identifying information gaps is also ongoing. During the second part of the meeting the annual work program for 2015 and the multiannual work program for 2015-2019 was presented. Some AC representatives said that EFCA should explain to the national administrations that building trust and getting the industry on-board will be crucial if the landing obligation is to be successfully implemented. Fishermen have a right to be informed and need to feel involved.

SEMINAR ON THE STATE OF THE FISH STOCKS (26 SEPTEMBER 2014, BRUSSELS)

This annual seminar was an opportunity to discuss issues relating to the status of EU fish stocks and their management. The meeting was well attended by representatives from the Advisory Councils, NGOs, attachés and Commission staff. Following an introduction by the Commission the Advisory Councils were given five minutes each to highlight issues of importance. At the end there was a general discussion on a number of issues, mainly focusing on the Mediterranean.

Esben Sverdrup-Jensen attended the meeting as Pelagic AC representative and highlighted that maintaining and strengthening the dialogue between stakeholders, science and managers is key

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to sustainably managing marine resources. The role of the Advisory Councils in bringing together the catching sector, NGOs and the processing sector must therefore not be underestimated. He also pointed out that the Pelagic AC has a long tradition of providing consensus advice. In this regard he mentioned the ambitious set of guidelines for implementing the landing obligation in pelagic fisheries developed by the Working Groups of the Pelagic AC and unanimously endorsed by the Executive Committee. Unfortunately the Member States dismissed these recommendations almost entirely.

Another fundamental part of the CFP is the introduction of multiannual management plans for all stocks. The Pelagic AC has built strong relations with the scientific communities in Member States and in ICES. Through these collaborations the Pelagic AC holds a long proven record of developing sustainable multiannual management plans and, had it not been for the institutional deadlock in Brussels, several of these plans would have been integrated in EU legislation by now. He encouraged the Commission to put the Advisory Councils at the forefront of developing future multiannual management plans in line with the new CFP.

Finally, he emphasized the importance of sound science in guaranteeing the sustainable exploitation of marine resources and the necessity to secure adequate data collection and processing. However, Member States are cutting spending on science while raising the bar on scientific advice. This leaves scientists with the impossible task of delivering more science with fewer resources posing threats to the trustworthiness of scientific advice and potentially leading to mismanagement of fish stocks. In this regard the reform of the Data Collection Framework provides a valuable opportunity to focus efforts on collecting data that is urgently needed in order to provide reliable stock advice and get rid of costly, outdated and flawed procedures.

EAPo ANNUAL MEETING (3 OCTOBER 2014, WESTPORT)

Verena Ohms had been invited to present the Pelagic AC recommendations on the implementation of the landing obligation at the annual meeting of the European Association of Fish Producers Organization. A copy of the presentation can be requested from the Secretariat.

INTER AC MEETING (30 OCTOBER 2014, BRUSSELS)

During the Inter AC meeting a number of administrative issues as well as technical measures, the Omnibus regulation and discard plans were discussed. Firstly, the Commission presented the delegated act on the functioning of the ACs. Several AC representatives felt that the delegated act did not provide enough detail on e.g. the procedure to increase the number of ExCom seats from 25 to 30 and the amount of additional reimbursement for small-scale fishermen. Other AC representatives were of the opinion that the delegated act provided too much detail and pointed out that most ACs are quite comfortable managing themselves. One issue that was especially addressed concerns funding from Member States. According to the

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delegated act Member States may provide funding for the ACs, but are not obliged to do so and many people fear that Member States might reduce their commitment as a consequence and that a decrease in resources will jeopardize the 10% co-financing requirement. The Commission explained that it had tried to provide guidance for the ACs with the delegated act, while at the same time making sure not to overstep its competence and not to micro-manage ACs. The Commission also considered it likely that neither Parliament nor Council will object the delegated act and that hence it will be approved in December.

In terms of financial issues the Commission pointed out that a couple of things have changed under the new framework agreement. As of now the Commission payment will always be done in three instalments which makes a financial guarantee redundant. The deadlines for reporting obligations have been shortened as have payment procedures. Following a suggestion from the NWWAC it was agreed that in a few months the Commission will provide a training session to the AC secretariats regarding EU financial regulations and exchange information on best practices. This was highly welcomed by all ACs.

Afterwards the Commission presented a consultation paper on revising the technical measures framework. In general the aim is to reduce micro-management and complexities. The two main issues the Commission seeks advice for are in relation to mesh size and catch composition rules and closed areas. Different approaches to meet selectivity objectives are thinkable and one possibility would be to set a target and leave it to the fishermen how to achieve this target. In that case the focus would be mainly on monitoring and control. In terms of closed areas the Commission would like to receive stakeholder feedback on the functionality of closed areas as many have been in place for a long time with very little effect.

The Commission subsequently explained that the Omnibus proposal has been discussed by the PECH Committee and that the rapporteur's report contains a large number of amendments which have to be discussed by the MEPs in the coming weeks. The Commission was still hoping that political agreement can be reached in December and that hence the Commission will be able to provide clear indications on what the rules will be as of January. Otherwise there will be creative chaos and the Commission did not have a plan B. The idea was raised to split up the Omnibus proposal into controversial and non-controversial parts in the hope that pelagic and industrial fisheries are non-controversial, so that at least agreement can be reached on those fisheries before the landing obligation enters into force. The Commission considered this a valid possibility and emphasized that legal chaos must be prevented under all circumstances and that operators have a right to know which rules to follow.

Finally, the Commission pointed out that several delegated acts have been adopted for various discard plans. In this regard the issue was raised to establish a monitoring forum consisting of a small group of people from the Commission, Member States, EFCA, STECF and ACs to look into practical problems as they will be arising once the landing obligation has entered into force to

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provide pragmatic solutions. The Commission reacted positive to this idea and promised to consider it further.

WKWEST DATA COMPILATION WORKSHOP (18-20 NOVEMBER 2014, DUBLIN)

Sean O'Donoghue attended the ICES WKWEST Benchmark Data Preparatory Workshop in Dublin, Ireland, on behalf of the Pelagic AC. WKWEST is dealing with three herring stocks namely herring in VIa north, herring in VIa south & VIIb,c and Celtic Sea herring. This meeting on a data preparatory workshop was in preparation for a benchmark workshop on herring west of Scotland, in February 2015. The meeting was chaired by Dr. R.D.M. Nash, of IMR, Bergen. Present were scientists from Ireland and Scotland who will be participating in the stock assessments. Also present was the ICES staff member dealing with the matter. Sean O'Donoghue was the only industry participant until Eibhlin O Sullivan joined the meeting for the Celtic Sea herring. Also present was a marine mammal expert.

At the beginning of the meeting Sean O'Donoghue was asked to go through the Pelagic AC submission¹ in some details and a very full discussion took place on each of the issues. He outlined the main concerns of the Pelagic AC for the assessment as being: the appropriateness and timing of the herring acoustic surveys, the stock components identities, development of robust recruitment indices, the lack of full precautionary reference points for VIaN herring, the incorporation of industry information into the assessments, the contribution of seal predation to total herring mortality. ICES has identified that this may be significant, but data are limited and the impact on the stock cannot be estimated accurately.

The Chairman undertook to do a draft reply to the Pelagic AC questions which would be tabled at the benchmark in February. He also requested that Sean O'Donoghue would assist him in compiling this draft which he duly agreed.

The benchmark will deal with producing new assessments for herring in VIaN and in VIaS. A main consideration of the benchmark is to ask whether separation at the 56 degree line is still valid for assessing these stocks. A considerable amount of time at this meeting was devoted to identifying the different data sets and who was going to compile these over the next two months.

It was obvious from the meeting that intensive work is going on to attempt to split the acoustic survey index between VIaS and VIaN herring. The current procedure of assuming that all fish acoustically recorded in the survey north of the 56th parallel belong to VIaN has been shown to be inappropriate. The meeting considered what basis there should be to split the acoustic survey. The matter of changes in natural mortality over time was also considered. The current

¹ (<http://www.pelagic-ac.org/media/pdf/1415PAC23%20Herring%20benchmark%202015.pdf>)

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assessments assume a very low level of natural mortality. The meeting considered that this may no longer be valid particularly as it has been changed for the North, Irish Sea and Celtic Sea herring stocks.

The meeting concluded with the Chairman identifying all the tasks (which were numerous) that had to be completed in advance of the Benchmark in February and who was responsible for each task. A series of WebEx meetings were also agreed to keep track of progress.

SOCIOEC WORKSHOP (21 NOVEMBER 2014, PARIS)

The intention of this workshop was to arrive at “a consensus (as far as possible) on how in practice to introduce genuine co-management or self-management in EU fisheries”. Although no consensus was arrived at as such, the following appears to be at the core of the recommendations, which found broad support among the participants of the event. Art. 18 basically outlines a ‘soft’, voluntary process of regionalization, which has in most cases been framed as also involving a co-management element at the regional level. Importantly, however, the legal provisions for this co-management element of regionalization are weak in Article 18 of the CFP. One of the issues that this event highlighted is how such a voluntary process is highly reliant on the presence of a ‘spirit of co-management’. Much of the ‘best practice’ of co-management is not hardwired in legislation, which for instance means that the success of co-management (as part of regionalization) is much more reliant on specific persons and attitudes than it would be if the process was hardwired in the legislation. In this way the voluntary approach puts much higher requirements on the different actors in the process to act in the ‘spirit of the regulations’. Potentially, the new Article 18 regulations opens up for a variety of co-management developments, not least in respect to the more open Articles 18(7) and 18(8), but for this to materialize a shift of attitude on behalf of involved parties, including parts of the Commission and Member State administrations, is required. However, early indications are unfortunately that the implementation of Article 18 has not gotten off to a good start and there appears already to be some mending to do between the involved actors. Likely much will depend on what will happen in 2015 when the landing obligation is intended to enter into force. The question is if a solution can be made so that stakeholders can still see themselves as partners to a co-management process under development. If the current fears of a completely unmanageable landing obligation system materialize, it appears that it will be an uphill battle to get the industry committed to future processes of co-management as a part of regionalization.

HERRING MAPPING WORKSHOP (3 DECEMBER 2014, COPENHAGEN)

ICES has advised in recent years that activities which have an impact on the seabed, e.g. due to the expansion of the offshore renewable energy sector, should not occur on herring spawning grounds. At the same time it has been noted that the exact location of herring spawning grounds

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has yet to be determined. Following an initiative of the Pelagic AC offering help to identify herring spawning grounds, a first meeting has been organized under the auspices of WGMARS bringing together relevant stakeholders from the pelagic industry, the gravel extraction industry and scientists. The interaction with the dredging companies was highly interesting since they had detailed maps of the sea bottom at their disposal which were useful to identify potential spawning areas. Combined with information received from Dutch and Scottish skippers a first rough map of herring spawning sites in the North Sea was drawn. This map will need further refinement integrating geological information with fisheries information and biological information from larval surveys. Within each spawning area there are discrete spawning beds which should be identified with the help of Dutch, Scottish, French and Danish fishermen. It was also mentioned that there are inshore data gaps due to restrictions in the International Herring Larval Survey which could be filled by information from certain coastal fisheries in the UK. Furthermore it was pointed out that other bottom-contacting activities such as bottom-trawling and windmill construction could also have an impact on herring spawning grounds and that the group should therefore be expanded to stakeholders from other relevant industries.

COMMISSION MEETING ON LANDING OBLIGATION (12 DECEMBER 2014, BRUSSELS)

Sean O'Donoghue attended a meeting with the Commission on behalf of the chairman, Ian Gatt, dealing with the implementation of the landing obligation and the rules applicable as of 1 January 2015. The Commission explained at the outset that the Trilogue discussions on the day before had not reached agreement on two issues (i) splitting the regulation into two parts and only deciding on the 2015 fisheries now and (ii) the allowance for selling for human consumption up to 30 kg of undersized fish for smaller vessels, but that all the other issues were agreed. The Commission did not know when the discussions would re-commence, but was confident that an agreement would be reached. It was emphasised that the landing obligation comes into force on 1 January and that this was a very clear mandate from both the Council and Parliament. The enforcement of the landing obligation, however, was not clear and required a common sense approach particularly as the Omnibus regulation was not in place. The Commission said it fully supported the pelagic industry request to set up as a matter of urgency a forum to address the practical problems on the ground. Furthermore the Commission made it very clear that the penalty point system did not apply to the landing obligation on 1 January as it was not listed as a major offence under the control regulation. This may change in the Omnibus regulation. Sean O'Donoghue made a number of interventions on seeking clarity on what rules would be enforced on the pelagic fishing grounds on 1 January, the need for a level playing field on control issues across the different control agencies and the urgency for the Commission to immediately set up the forum advocated by the pelagic industry. In addition he covered a number of specific issues such as the de minimis (different regional approach), high survivability, electronic logbook and animal by-products regulations in relation to damaged and

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broken fish. The Commission reacted very positively to the issues he raised and the action points listed below reflect this.

The Commission summed up the meeting by setting out five action points it would commit to doing:

- a. Produce a Commission non paper as soon as possible covering all the questions and the Commission's replies.
- b. Set up the forum immediately as requested by the pelagic industry.
- c. Set out Guidelines for the inspection services in the Member States on the enforcement issues with the assistance of EFCA to try to ensure a uniform approach on control and enforcement. It was very obvious without actually saying it that the Commission considered that a common sense approach should be adopted in the initial period and that vessels should not be detained.
- d. Learn the lessons from the present experience for the future.
- e. The Commission will actively engage with both institutions to try to reach an agreement on the Omnibus regulation.

PELAC RECOMMENDATIONS

FISHING OPPORTUNITIES 2015

Like each year the Working Groups discussed annual fishing opportunities for all stocks in the remit of the Pelagic AC and subsequently submitted their conclusions to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee unanimously endorsed the recommendations by the Working Groups. Besides providing TAC advice the Pelagic AC also requested information from the Commission on how to access funding to carry out a mapping exercise of herring spawning grounds along the EU coasts in collaboration with HAWG.

CONSULTATION ON TECHNICAL MEASURES

The Executive Committee submitted a recommendation dealing with the revision of the technical measures framework, which emphasized the importance of removing the current level of detail and prescriptive rules and welcomed the logic of results-based management. Furthermore it was argued that catch metrics and selectivity profiles are mostly irrelevant in pelagic fisheries and that technical measures should be reduced as much as possible. Instead the focus should be on strict control of the landing obligation. Furthermore the usefulness of several closed areas should be reviewed while there was agreement that other closed areas should be maintained.

All Pelagic AC recommendations and Commission replies can be downloaded from the website: <http://www.pelagic-ac.org/recommendations>

SCIENTIFIC PROJECTS

GAP 2

David Miller from IMARES has been contracted to perform management strategy evaluations for the case study on Western Baltic spring spawning herring in which the Pelagic AC is heavily involved. Together with stakeholders from the Baltic Sea AC important aspects of stock mixing with the North Sea herring stock, TAC uptake by the different fleets and stability mechanisms have been identified and will be addressed during the simulations. The results are expected to be available in late December and will be presented at a GAP2 case study meeting.

MAREFRAME

In the second week of December the annual MareFrame meeting took place at the University of Aberdeen. One year into the project a lot of progress has been made and the central idea of developing a decision support framework for applying the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management is slowly taking shape. All case studies have been launched in close cooperation with relevant stakeholders from the corresponding regions. The case study relevant for the Pelagic AC concerns multispecies management in the North Sea with a specific focus on the pelagic complex (see newsletter 1/2014). A first model is up and running and will shortly be presented to interested stakeholders in a webex meeting. A second model will be developed over the next months, so that the performance of both models can be compared with each other. A first prototype for a visual interface of the decision support framework should become available by June 2015 and be presented to stakeholders in a number of workshops in summer and early fall. For more information about the project please visit the following website: <http://www.mareframe-fp7.org/>

INVOLVED

We have been informed that the project proposal “INVOLVED” for which the Pelagic AC signed up as partner and which aimed at reducing unwanted catches in light of the upcoming landing obligation has unfortunately not received funding.

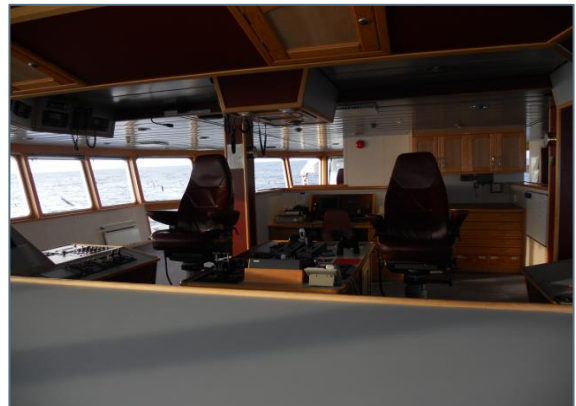
FISHING FOR MACKEREL

When I started working for the Pelagic AC in May 2012 I did not know anything about fisheries. As a biologist, I had a good ecological background and during my Master studies I also took classes in marine biology and even did a short internship on a marine biological research station in Scotland, but fishing was never even mentioned as part of the curriculum. It was thus a steep learning curve when I started my new job and I quickly learned about the differences between trawl and purse-seine fisheries, gillnet and handline fisheries, pelagic and demersal. I even visited a freezer-trawler while it was laying in the harbor of IJmuiden for maintenance and got a tour through this impressive structure. However, neither books nor tours can provide a clear enough insight into a fishing operation. If you really want to understand the processes, challenges and by times dangers of fishing, the only way is to join a fishing trip and to see for yourself how it works. Even after such a trip you are by far no expert, but it does provide you with a better understanding of what is really going on at sea. Therefore I approached one of the Pelagic AC members, Alex Wiseman, who is an active trawl fisherman in Scotland and I felt giddy with excitement when he agreed to taking me along on his vessel. It took several months before we could find a week which was not occupied by meetings, deadlines or other obstacles and fell within the fishing season, but at the beginning of November 2014 the moment had finally arrived. I travelled to Aberdeen on a Sunday afternoon where I was picked up by our new chairman (and his dog Charley) who drove me to Banff where I met with Alex. Later that night we drove to Fraserburgh, the home port of Alex's vessel, the Kings Cross, and boarded the ship at around 9.30 pm. I got my own cabin with bathroom and flat screen TV and I was impressed how clean the inside of the vessel was. Alex insists that you take off your wet suit and boots in the changing area, store them securely in a locker and put on slippers before entering the inside of the vessel. As soon as the crew had boarded, everyone got ready to leave Fraserburgh. It required excellent skills to navigate the vessel out of the harbor with only a meter between the dock and the vessel flanks on each side at the narrowest point, but once this was mastered and the boat was on open water, a course of 2° North was programmed into the autopilot and slowly the lights of Fraserburgh disappeared. Every once in a while the radar indicated other vessels in the vicinity, but overall there was not much to see and a dark, quiet journey lay ahead of us.

The total number of crew members including Alex was ten and he explained to me that this was the minimum number of people required to operate a vessel the size of the Kings Cross. Normally he would sail with 12-13 people, but for various reasons there were only ten available this time. Throughout the night people were working shifts as there had to be at least two people on the bridge at any time to monitor that everything was functioning properly and going according to plan. The sea was calm and the weather forecast had predicted favorable conditions for the next day. It took getting a bit used to the movements of the ship and

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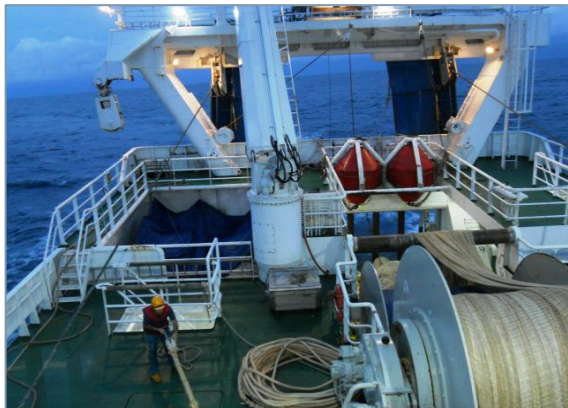
throughout the night the waves were getting higher. Involuntarily I was rolling back and forth in my bunk, but luckily this did not really affect me and I never got seasick throughout the journey.



The next morning I woke up a little before 6 and went up to the bridge. Alex' son Adam and one of the crew members, Andrew, were quietly monitoring a large amount of different screens. There were electronic maps indicating the position of the vessel, the radar displaying other ships and little islands and of course the sonar which was scanning both the sea bottom and the water column around the vessel at a range of a few hundred meters. Depending on the settings of the sonar it detects different fish species. Mackerel for example does not have a swim bladder and is therefore difficult to detect with low frequency sonar. For finding mackerel it is best to use high frequency sonar above 85 kHz. Shortly after I had walked up the bridge, Alex joined us and explained the function of the different monitors to me. He played around with the sonar settings to show me the difference between low and high frequency and it did not take long until a large red blob entered into the visible range: the first shoal of mackerel. It was big and densely packed as indicated by the deep red color, but Alex decided to keep sailing north for a while until reaching one of the better known fishing grounds at the island Foula, west of the Shetland Isles.

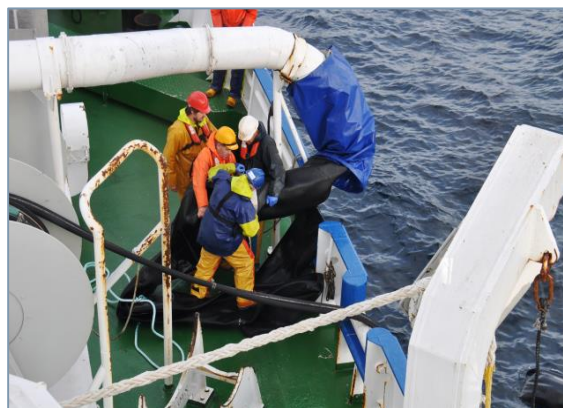
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Another half hour or so passed when gradually the screen filled up with deep red signals all around and underneath the vessel. Red was now the dominating color and there was hardly any spot on the sonar that was not signaling mackerel. The fish was everywhere. Alex was unsure, however, about the size of the fish and therefore doubted whether to engage in a fishing operation or not when suddenly a crackling voice came from one of the audio transmitters which turned out to belong to another skipper, John, who had just been fishing in the area. John informed us that his catch consisted of good-sized individuals, no juveniles, and hence Alex decided to start the fishing operation. The crew was getting ready to launch the net into the water and it was impressive to witness how they were working as one entity. Everyone knew exactly what to do, which was important since the mistake of one person could be fatal for another. The net was enormous and consisted of several parts. The cod-end, which is the part that actually holds the fish was relatively short compared to the remaining parts of the net. When the net was being let into the water two large, heavy metal plates were attached to the trawl lines on each side of the mouth of the net. These trawl doors tend to float apart and by that keep the net open in the water.



MISCELLANEOUS

Six catch sensors were attached in equal distance to the cod-end to provide information on the filling rate of the trawl and indicate when the cod-end is full. Four of those sensors transmitted signals to a “black box” which was also attached to the net while the remaining two sensors transmitted information directly to the bridge. These catch sensors are the skipper’s eyes underwater and besides his experience the only indication regarding the amount of fish that has already entered the net. They are essential in determining when to haul in the net, ensuring not only a better quality catch, but also that the net is hauled in before it gets too full and bursts. Alex explained to me that if the catch sensors are not working, engaging in a fishing operation is an absolute no-go. Instead he would return to port right away to get them replaced. Only minutes after he had emphasized the importance of the catch sensors the worst case scenario became reality: the sensors stopped working and the signal was lost. Completely blind Alex had no way of telling when the net would be full and a difficult choice had to be made. If he decided to haul the net too early all the work would have been for nothing. If he waited too long the net could burst and the entire catch would be lost. Just as he decided to haul the net the last catch sensor suddenly transmitted a signal and the fishing operation was being terminated not a second too early. The net was subsequently hoisted to the side of the boat where the pump was attached to a hose which was lowered into the cod-end of the net.



MISCELLANEOUS

The fish were being pumped on-board directly into the tanks filled with refrigerated seawater. It was a large catch of approximately 600-700 tonnes. Normally Alex would not take such a large catch as the quality of smaller catches is usually better, but he did not have much choice today. While the fish was being pumped on-board one of the crew members collected baskets of fish to take weight samples. After he weighed each individual fish in the basket they went to the others in the tanks. Per haul several of those baskets were sampled to provide a good indication of the average size of the fish. The data was automatically saved and sent to a fax on the bridge. When the fax started rattling and produced a sheet of paper Alex nervously ran towards it and said: "Pray, pray for a good size." After examining the numbers he became all the more excited, patted me on the back and exclaimed: "This is a very good catch!" The average weight of the mackerel was 395 grams which was definitely at the higher end of what is normally caught.



While the net was in the water, flocks of seabirds had arrived hoping for an easy catch and their squeaking calls filled the air around the vessel. Gannets were shooting into the water like sharp arrows. The seabirds, however, weren't the only creatures that were attracted by the fishing

MISCELLANEOUS

boat. Slowly, carefully at first black fins started rising from the sea only to disappear whenever I tried to take a snapshot. The orcas Alex had promised I would see during the trip appeared at last. Initially only a handful of them were swimming at a considerable distance to the vessel, but soon after more and more black fins showed up and occasionally a few of these majestic animals would stick their heads out of the water to inspect what was going on. I tried counting how many individuals there were, but I lost track when I hit twenty something while their numbers were still increasing. There were orcas of all different sizes including calves. As the crew continued pumping the catch onboard, the orcas started swimming around the vessel drawing ever narrower circles. When finally the net was empty and being coiled up on the giant heaver the orcas lined up behind the boat as if awaiting what would happen next.



MISCELLANEOUS



Alex was doubting whether to call it a day or whether to launch the net again. In the meanwhile the crew had checked the catch sensors and it seemed that the sensors were working fine, but that the “black box” had a problem. Luckily, they had another “black box” on-board and replaced the broken one with the functioning one. The first catch was large, but it was not large enough to fully fill the tanks. However, a second haul might not completely fit anymore. Again Alex had to carefully consider what to do next when another fishing vessel showed up. This one, the Lunar Bow, had not engaged in a fishing operation yet and hence its tanks were empty. Alex contacted the skipper of the Lunar Bow, explained the situation and asked whether he would be willing to take the remaining catch on-board. The other skipper agreed to the proposal and the net was launched a second time. This time the catch sensors were sending perfect signals and the fishing operation took place in a much more controlled way. After the tanks of the Kings Cross had been filled the hose was transferred to the Lunar Bow using a large crane and the bulk of the catch was pumped on-board this vessel. Again it was impressive to see how both crews operated and knew exactly what to do. After that, the net was coiled up and cleaned and some individuals of broken mackerel had to be removed. Overall the fishing trip had been very successful and the crew and I enjoyed a large bowl of hot mushroom soup, freshly prepared by the vessel’s cook. Finally Alex set course to slowly sail back to Fraserburgh.



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The next morning at around 8 the Kings Cross arrived at Fraserburgh harbor. Two inspection officers entered the vessel to accurately measure the size of the catch. Afterwards, a part of the catch was pumped into lorries which were driven to a fish factory in Peterhead. The rest of the catch was directly transferred to a weighing belt which was part of the fish factory in Fraserburgh, but which is under full control by the Scottish authorities. Here the catch was weighed again, noticing exactly how much fish went into the factory. I was lucky enough that Alex arranged a tour for me through the factory although pictures were not allowed to be taken. After the weighing belt, the fish went through a sorting machine where it was sorted depending on its size. Subsequently, it was cleaned and either frozen whole or decapitated, gutted and frozen afterwards in packs of 20 kg. The remains were collected for processing into fishmeal. Throughout the factory there were several check points at which broken fish or fish of other species were sorted out manually. I spent considerable time in the factory listening to my guide explaining to me the different processing steps, but during my entire stay I had not seen any other species besides mackerel in the catch and only a few damaged individuals. Overall the catch was of a high quality and virtually bycatch free.



MISCELLANEOUS

I am grateful that I got the chance to join Alex on one of his fishing trips. Although this certainly does not make me an expert, it does give me a better understanding of what it means to be a fisherman.



Verena Ohms, Pelagic AC

ICES TRAINING COURSE TO DG MARE STAFF AND OTHERS (11-12 DECEMBER 2014, BRUSSELS)

ICES held its introductory course for Members of DG Mare on stock assessment in Brussels on the 11th and 12th of December 2014. Topics included the genesis of the scientific and advisory process, an introduction to the advice sheets, population and recruitment models, as well as reference points. It was also explained how ICES assesses data limited stocks. Different aspects of ecosystem based fisheries management and mixed fisheries advice were also elaborated. The course gave a good introduction into the use of the ICES advice sheets, which was supported by an exercise on data collection and stock assessment based on existing ICES advice. Both were well presented and helpful to consolidate the understanding of stock assessment and how to read the advice sheets. Personally I found the presentation on reference points and data limited stocks especially interesting. This course is helpful and especially designed for those who do not look into the advice sheets on a regular basis. It gives a good overview on how ICES works and helps to review given advice critically. It is a good and very open forum for questions to ICES scientists. People with background knowledge and interested in a more in depth insight and scientific background of stock assessment will want to attend a longer course, though even then it would be a helpful fresh-up. Especially interesting were the discussions around the presentations and questions asked by the various stakeholders and DG Mare members, which gave some insight into Commission rationale.

Stella Nemecky, WWF

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Please note that the Pelagic AC secretariat has moved to a new address. You can now find us at:

Louis Braillelaan 80

2719 EK Zoetermeer

The Netherlands

We are looking forward to welcoming you!

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.

CHRISTMAS BREAK

The Pelagic AC secretariat will be closed from 23 December 2014 until 5 January 2015. 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 2015!

UPCOMING MEETINGS

WORKING GROUP I AND II AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING (19 FEBRUARY 2015, THE HAGUE)

On 19 February 2015 the next Pelagic AC meetings will take place at Parkhotel Den Haag. The focus will be on the evaluation of efforts and results in 2014 and upcoming initiatives in 2015. Furthermore Tim Peute will present his report on the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and Mark Dickey-Collas from ICES will share his view on how ACs can become better involved in the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management.

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