



► Pelagic AC

Working Group II
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10:00 – 18:00 (Amsterdam time)
Online platform

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Participants

Sean O'Donoghue, chairman	Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation
Esben Sverdrup-Jensen	Danish Pelagic Producers Organisation
Alice Boiffin	Ministry for Food and Agriculture
Andrés García	ACERGA
Andy Campbell	Marine Institute
Anna Gruszczyńska	Ministry of Maritime Economy and Inland Navigation
Annelie Rosell	Swedish Pelagic Federation
Anton Paulrud	Swedish Pelagic Federation
Aukje Coers	Rederij Vrolijk
Belén del Hierro	EFCA
Bent Pallisgaard	Ministry of Environment and Food
Basilio Otero	Federación Nacional de Cofradías de Pescadores & Federación Provincial de Cofradías de Pescadores de Lugo
Cannelle Beauchesne	European Commission
Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn	Danish Pelagic Producers Organisation
Colm Lordan	ICES
Cristina Perdiguero	Spanish Member State
Dirkjan van der Stelt	Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality
Ed Farrell	EDF Scientific Limited
Eric Roeleveld	Jaczon
Gerard van Balsfoort	Pelagic Freezer-Trawler Association
Geoffroy Dhellemmes	France Pélagique
Goncalo Carvalho	Sciaena



Guillaume Carruel	Pelagic AC
Jerome Jourdain	Union des Armateurs à la Peche de France
Jesper Raakjaer	University of Aalborg
John Ward	Irish Fish Producers Organisation
Jonathan Shrives	European Commission
José Beltran	Organizacion de Productores de Pesqueros de Lugo
Justyna Zajchowska	Pew charitable trusts
Laurens van Balsfoort	Pelagic Freezer-Trawler Association
Linda Planthof	North Sea Foundation
Lisbet Nielsen	Ministry of Environment and Food
Katrina Borrow	Mindfully Wired
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Mads Larsson	AIPCE
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Patrick Murphy	Irish South and West PO
Pauline Joyeux	Ministry for Food and Agriculture
Rob Banning	Parlevliet and van der Plas
Rob Pronk	Rederij van der Zwan
Romain Soisson	Compagnie des Peches St-Malo
Sheila O'Neill	National Seafood Centre
Soren Anker Pedersen	European Fishmeal and Fish Oil Producers
Stanislovas Jonusas	European Commission
Stefan Kalogirou (later)	Swedish Agency for marine and Water Management
Stella Nemecky	WWF
Steve Mackinson	Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association
Tom Pickerell	Tomolamola Consulting
Torcuato Teixeira	Pescagalicia-Arpega-Obarco
Wietze Kampen	European Transport Worker's Federation
Wim van der Zwan	Rederij van der Zwan



1. Welcome, introductions & adoption of the agenda

The Chair, Sean O'Donoghue, opened the meeting at 14:10 CET, echoing the sentiments expressed by Esben Sverdrup-Jensen in the prior WGI meeting on the passing of Reine Johansson. He expressed what a loss to the fisheries community this was, and shared his condolences.

He remarked that the Group had a long agenda with a number of significant presentations to work through, and noted his ambition to conclude on schedule.

The agenda was adopted without amend.

2. Actions arising from previous meeting

The first action has been to request a costed proposal for mackerel hind-casting analysis from Paul Fernandes at the University of Aberdeen. This was complete. Additionally, the costed proposal had been shared at the Executive Committee and the PELAC had pursued with the Commission as to whether financing this work was possible within the PELAC budget. This request had been denied.

An update on genetic, acoustic and morphometric work for 6a, 7b-c herring had been sought and delivered at a Focus Group meeting. An update on this work would also be provided during the day's WGII session. A further action was to seek a benchmark for the stock by the end of 2020. This was an ongoing action – the Chair was optimistic about the likelihood of a benchmark, adding that this would carry forwards into 2021 as necessary.

The Marine Institute was to continue work on an assessment model for boarfish. This is ongoing.

Another action that had been carried forward, and was ongoing, was to continue exploring possibilities for the inclusion of Irish western horse mackerel (WHOM) logbook data into the PFA self-sampling plan. COVID had proved a barrier to this action, and it was carried forward once more.

A speaker from the Norwegian tagging project was to be invited to the next meeting of the PELAC – this action was carried forward to WGII in 2021.

A Focus Group on southern horse mackerel (SHOM) management plan revisions had been held.

The Control Focus Group had been reconvened, to examine the new Control Regulation proposal.

An action to convey to ICES the need to retain up-to-date stakeholder information within truncated advice was also complete.

Work to address the 'mixing issue' with Celtic Sea herring was ongoing.

Andy Campbell was to attend the WGII October meeting and present on – and discuss – the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for north east Atlantic mackerel. This action was complete, as Campbell was due to present later in the meeting.

A draft WHOM rebuilding plan had been circulated to members, an expedited approval procedure had been set (and completed) and a request regarding the WHOM rebuilding plan had been passed onwards to the Commission.

The PELAC had commented on horse mackerel TACs, and links to 2019 discards data – this action was both done and ongoing (recommendations to be sent to the Commission following the October Executive Committee).



Finally, PELAC was to discuss the implications of denying requested Landing Obligation exemptions within the Joint Recommendations for Discard Plans. This discussion was scheduled for the day's session.

In concluding his update on the Group's actions, Sean O'Donoghue commented on how busy WGII has been. He additionally extended thanks for the Secretariat and interim Secretariat team for their work and support.

3. Presentation of ICES advice – Colm Lordan

The Chair welcomed Colm Lordan to present the ICES advice for stocks under WGII.

North East Atlantic mackerel

Lordan highlighted the distribution of catches for this stock, noting a pattern over the last decade of an expansion in summer fishing activity. In 2019, around 42% of catches for the stock came from the summer fishery in the Norwegian sea, in the third quarter (Q3) of the year. In Q1, the fishery is focused around the west of Scotland and Ireland, in Q2 the fish begin a migration northwards, and by Q4 the mackerel are migrating south again and aggregate around the Shetland Islands.

In 2019, mackerel catches were 840.000 tonnes, with around 8.000 tonnes of discards. (Although Lordan noted that discards are only quantified for part of the fishery for this stock).

Catches for mackerel peaked in 2014, at 1,4 million tonnes, declining since that point to the levels seen in 2019. In terms of recruitment, from 1980-2000 this was at a lower level, but since the early 2000s and increase in recruitment has been seen, with some strong recruitment years in the recent past.

Mortality for the stock peaked in 2005 and has decreased since – it is now estimated to be below the FMSY estimate. SSB has increased to over 4 million tonnes, and is now decreasing in the recent period.

In terms of ICES' assessment of the stock status, F is below FMSY, and biomass is above the MSY btrigger and bpa, and the stock is considered to be harvested sustainably.

Advice for the stock is based on the ICES advice rule: when SSB is above btrigger, the advice is based on FMSY, currently produced an F of 0.26.

The headline advice for the stock is as follows: ICES advises catches in 2021 of 852.284 tonnes, representing a 22% reduction in advice relative to catches in 2020, and an 8% reduction in advice in comparison to last year. SSB will decrease slightly in 2022.

Lordan highlighted that there had been a new Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for the stock, meaning that reference points had been revisited. The results of the MSE provided a slightly higher FMSY value, up from 0.23. Some minor adjustments had been made to blim and btrigger. He added that existing measures to ensure the protection of the North Sea component of the stock should remain in place for precautionary reasons, and that a workshop to look into understanding the stock structure was likely in the future.

Commenting on the quality of the assessment, Lordan said there were some conflicting trends between some indices: the swept area survey shows stocks at a high level, and fluctuating, but the mackerel egg survey shows the stock in a declining trend since 2013. These two conflicting time



series are both used within the stock assessment. Some of the times series are short – as they increase there is a risk it will lead to changes in the stock assessment.

The floor was opened to questions or comments on north east Atlantic mackerel. Linda Planthof asked for further clarity on the existing management measures in place to protect the North Sea component of the stock. Colm Lordan responded that this referred to, for instance, measures such as a ban on mackerel fishing in areas 3a and 4b-c except by Norway, with a limited TAC in place for 3a. A further measure was no mackerel fishery in 4a between 15th February and 31st July each year, plus a 30cm MCRS for the stock.

Sean O'Donoghue inquired whether a benchmark is needed to resolve concerns around conflicting signals in the two surveys, detailed by Lordan in his presentation. Lordan responded that neither of the two surveys' time series contain the full distribution of the stock in its entirety. Both have potential issues, but he added that there is a process to examine and quality assure them before conducting the full assessment. The process to resolve any further concerns would be a benchmark, but a benchmark had been held last year and led to the conclusion that both survey series should be included in the assessment.

Whenever the next benchmark takes place that conclusion can be revisited. Process will be in next benchmark. The Chair reiterated his concern about the conflicting signals from the survey.

Gerard Van Balsfoort interjected that the scientists who had conducted the summer survey were 'quite jubilant' in statements issued to the press, saying that the stock had never been in such a good condition. He remarked that this had 'put some industry people on the wrong foot' and that 'with mackerel, you have to be cautious about what is made public'. He went on to note that, in the retrospective analysis of the mackerel assessments, normally the F has been scaled down and SSB has been scaled up. He saw that, this year, both had been scaled down and requested an explanation. Colm Lordan said the 'only explanation' was that this must be linked to the 'way the assessment is modifying the population numbers back in time'. At this point, Andy Campbell joined the discussion to note that this year's assessment is very consistent with the previous year's, with less retrospective bias. He added that the SSB shown is in line with the previous year's assessment, and said that the revisions seen are linked to individual year class data 'making its way into the data'. He elaborated that the 'main driver' for the assessment is catch-at-age information – the fish aren't seen until they are 3-4 years old, or older. There is information on younger fish within the recruitment index, and then a significant gap – hence the tendency for revision.

Western horse mackerel

Colm Lordan moved on to present on western horse mackerel. He noted it had been a 'busy year' for the stock, with a recovery plan evaluation that PELAC had been involved in. The Chair had indicated that this plan was 'making its way through the ICES system at the moment'. Lordan said it hadn't arrived in time to be evaluated in 2020, but added that ICES had written to the Commission to say they have capacity to take on a special request to work on this in Q1 and Q2 of 2021. This would complete work on the recovery plan ahead of WGWIDE next year.

Catches of the stock in 2019 were estimated to be 124.947 tonnes, of which 3.141 tonnes were discards. Catches of western horse mackerel peaked in the mid-90s at 500.000 tonnes and have decreased since – staying at around 100.000 tonnes in the last decade.

The F for the stock has increased over time, and is now above the FMSY value. SSB peaked in the early 1990s and has since decreased. It is now close to the blim level. Fishing is above FMSY and SSB is below the MSY trigger.



Advice for 2021 is for catches of 81.376 tonnes, based on the MSY approach, with a low F of 0.061. Applying that F value, SSB is expected to increase by 8% in 2022. This level of catch represents a 3% reduction in comparison to last year's advice.

We have also included in the advice sheet the PELAC proposed HCR based on rebuilding plan, which would result in total catches of 52.503 tonnes, a 38% reduction on the advice given in last year – resulting in an SSB change of 10.7%.

In terms of quality of the assessment, Lordan noted there are quality issues for this stock, which show through variable assessments of SSB. Both SSB and F have been revised up in comparison to last year, and there have been some changes in the estimates of recruitment.

The floor was opened to questions and comments.

The Chair thanked Lordan and was grateful for his clarification on the status of the western horse mackerel rebuilding plan developed by the PELAC.

The Chair went on to raise the issue of stakeholder information. He understood this had been excluded due to the truncated format of the advice, but he queried why stakeholder information was missing from advice – such as for mackerel – where it was delivered in its usual, full, format. Colm Lordan explained that a list of stock for which abbreviated advice would be produced was issued in April (2020). For stocks with full advice sheets, stakeholder information could still be included. This needed to go through a process via the ICES expert group and ACOM. He added that ICES ACOM are discussing a template or guide for the type of stakeholder information that can be included within advice sheets in future. This will be an agenda item at the MIACO meeting in 2021. Lordan asked for the PELAC's feedback on the abbreviated advice sheet structure, noting a PELAC comment from the July WGII meeting, that inclusion of stakeholder advice should be prioritise within even truncated advice.

The Chair thanked Lordan for the clarification, noting the PELAC had not been aware that their stakeholder information could have been included within the mackerel advice. Understanding the situation fully, he remarked that the PELAC would make recommendations in this area.

Gerard Van Balsfoort thanked the Chair for his 'determination' to develop a management plan for the western horse mackerel stock. He extended further thanks to the scientists who had collaborated with the PELAC to produce the draft plan, and he looked forward to ICES' approval of the plan in future.

Jerome Jourdain commented that the assessment for western horse mackerel is based solely on *trachurus trachurus*, not reflecting the different components of the stock. He suggested this may be a subject for consideration in a future PELAC focus group. The Chair thanked him for this comment, and noted this was a particular issue in relation to mixing with southern horse mackerel (in 9a). Colm Lordan said that the majority of the fishery for western horse mackerel takes place off the west coast of Ireland, and in this area it is mainly only *trachurus trachurus*. The Chair noted that this mixing issue would be kept 'part and parcel' of recommendations pertaining to southern horse mackerel.

Jose Beltran also intervened on southern and western horse mackerel, asking Colm Lordan what would happen if ICES decided to differentiate between the stocks – dividing catches by *trachurus trachurus* and other species, with the *trachurus trachurus* subject to management by TAC. He inquired how the other stocks would then be managed. Lordan responded that ICES would try to carry out assessments on the individual species. This would require survey and catch information, as well as biological data separated out for the different species. Then ICES would consider what kind of stock assessment could be generated on an individual species basis. The nature of the assessment that can be produced would then affect the management recommendations for the stock.



Lordan emphasised it would be a complex process: not an easy conundrum to solve from a scientific and management perspective.

Goncalo Carvalho highlighted that PELAC has advised on the need to get the mixed stock issue with southern horse mackerel sorted, and said it should do so again. The Chair concurred.

4. Mackerel management strategy evaluation – Andy Campbell

The Chair welcomed Andy Campbell, Chair of the benchmark for the MSE for north east Atlantic mackerel.

Campbell explained that the MSE was the result of a request from the EU, Norway and the Faroes, to evaluate the Harvest Control Rule (HCR) within the management plan for mackerel. ICES had been asked to evaluate certain possible trigger points – which would instigate a change in F within the plan – between two million and five million tonnes of mackerel biomass. The MSE also investigated the impacts of possible TAC stabilizers and banking and borrowing schemes (set at different levels) within the context of the plan, both individually and in-combination.

The MSE used a ‘full feedback methodology’, which Campbell explained was different to any previous MSEs run for mackerel: within each model run, a full assessment and forecast is produced for the stock. Within this process, ICES uses ‘iterations’ (or projected populations) of the stock to run through the models produced. For mackerel, 2,000 iterations were tested. Under the full-feedback methodology, this leads to 40,000 assessments produced per simulation for the MSE. Campbell said this was highly computer-intensive and requires cluster-computing in order to process the volume of data.

This modelling then covers various time-periods, to test the strength of the plan (and the HCRs and other measures) into the future. The MSE assesses performance in five years for the short-term, the next ten years for the medium-term, and a further 15 years for the long-term. This allows scientists to see at what point the management plan produces a ‘stable state’ for the stock.

Touching on mackerel recruitment, Campbell noted this was one of the most ‘important assumptions’ made within the MSE. With mackerel, there has been highly variable recruitment, and scientists are uncertain about the precise relationship between recruitment data and the overall size of the stock. There is no clear trend, and this provides a challenge in terms of modelling recruitment and stock size into the future.

The main conclusions of the MSE were that the HCR in place performs broadly in line with previous evaluations, essentially producing a trade-off between the target fishing mortality and the trigger biomass. Campbell summarised: ‘if you want the same risk, and you want to increase your target, you need to increase your trigger’.

The MSE showed there are a range of target mortalities and trigger points associated with a similar long-term yield (around 970,000 tonnes), all of which also have a similar risk profile. He went on to highlight that the highest yields ‘are not limited by precautionary considerations’, explaining that this is a key difference to previous evaluations and is a result of ICES using more recent recruitment data for the stock to parameterise the MSE – effectively based the evaluation on a more productive stock. Linked to this, the risk projections for the management of the stock generally increase over-time, due to this healthy starting point for the stock. With this, Campbell noted that the ‘choice of recruitment period’ used, is very important.

Finally, on TAC stability, he said that without stability mechanisms, the variability of the TAC is only 15-20%. Therefore, the impact of TAC stabilisers is limited, but they still have utility within the plan.



5. PELAC recommendations for mackerel in 2021

The Chair moved on to discuss advice for mackerel in 2021. As detailed by Colm Lordan earlier in the meeting, the proposed TAC under the ICES MSY approach is 852.284 tonnes, with an F value of 0.26. This represents an advice change of -8%.

The Chair proposed that the PELAC should recommend that the ICES advice be followed for the stock. In addition, it was recommended that the PELAC request the Commission and ICES to examine the differences in stock perception produced by the results from the IESSN survey and the egg survey.

It was further recommended that the agreed Three Parties management strategy be revised in accordance with the revised MSE limit reference points. Assuming this is done, the PELAC would then call on the EU and Coastal States to adopt that amended LTMS, deemed precautionary by ICES.

A recommendation to reinstate stakeholder information into ICES advice was removed from this section and shifted to a later point in the discussion – with the intention that this point be included in overarching remarks for all stocks.

A further request to ICES, via the Commission, would be sent – asking to review mackerel stock components and protection measures.

The floor was opened to questions and comments.

Justyna Zajchowska agreed with the recommendations. She remarked that in 2019, PELAC advice on mackerel had included some additional language around sustainability, not only asking that the management plan for the stock was precautionary, but also that it took into account international agreements around fishing at levels that can produce FMSY. She asked that this text be reinstated, and the Chair agreed to this.

Gerard Van Balsfoort interjected to note he would examine the text from the previous year and respond to the Chair, having done so, on whether he concurs with including the same wording in 2020 recommendations.

The Chair tasked Justyna Zajchowska with examining the previous year's text and supplying this for inclusion in 2020's recommendations.

Aukje Coers also agreed with the draft recommendations. She queried whether the PELAC should supply the specific reference points it would like to see within a revised LTMS for the stock, based on the ICES MSE just presented. The Chair felt the text should be kept in its presented form, as the key message was to highlight that the existing plan is no longer fit-for-purpose and needs revising. Van Balsfoort also agreed that the PELAC should not comment on the specific combination of reference points for use in the revised LTMS for mackerel, emphasising that the level the PELAC should engage at would be to say it must be one of the several combinations that have been shown to be precautionary.

Aukje Coers responded to Van Balsfoort, disagreeing that selecting specific reference points would be outside the remit of the PELAC.

The Chair suggested that this be put on the agenda for the February WGII meeting. With the help of ICES scientists, he felt the PELAC could look at the various options and see if there was an agreed reference point combination amongst members.

6. PELAC recommendations for western horse mackerel in 2021

This agenda item was prefaced by a brief update on the western horse mackerel (WHOM) rebuilding plan from the Chair. He noted the amount of work that had gone on within the WHOM FG, and thanked the scientists involved in the development of the rebuilding plan, including Andy Campbell.



The proposed rebuilding plan had been presented to ExCom on the 27th July, and sent off to the Commission on the 28th July. Unfortunately, the plan had not been received by ICES in time to be evaluated in 2020. This would be done within Q1 or Q2 of 2021, and the plan would then be considered by WGWIDE.

The PELAC recommends a TAC of 81.376 tonnes in 2021, in line with ICES MSY advice. It was additionally recommended that the evaluation of the rebuilding plan for the stock by ICES be expedited, and the genetics stock identification project for the stock be continued.

Martin Pastoors mentioned that the rebuilding plan had been evaluated by scientists in the FG, but not yet reviewed by ICES. The Chair said he was aware of this, but given that the plan had not been through an ICES evaluation this year, and found to be precautionary, it was not included as the basis for a PELAC recommendation at this stage. He hoped it would be fully evaluated and in place in time for the PELAC WGII meeting in October 2021.

7. PELAC recommendations for southern horse mackerel in 2021

The Chair provided an update on latest discussions regarding southern horse mackerel. Providing background to the Group, he explained how questions had been raised around PELAC advice for this stock in 2019 when there was a significant gap between the ICES MSY advice and advice based on the agreed management plan. He noted that the remit for southern horse mackerel sits with the PELAC, and the PELAC aims to work closely with the SWWAC to develop advice on this stock.

A Focus Group had been held to discuss the gap in tonnage between the MSY and management plan advice, identifying that the central issue with the management plan lay in Article 5.1, describing the target of hitting FMSY for the stock in 2025. From a PELAC point of view, the Chair elaborated, it was recognised that measures needed to be considered that would close the gap between MSY and management plan advice, and the Focus Group explored the option of bringing the MSY target date within the plan forwards to 2022. This would provide a recommended TAC of 85.642 in 2021.

The Chair re-capped headline figures for the stock: the TAC in 2020 was 116.871 tonnes, and catches were just over 34.000 tonnes. ICES advice for 2021 was for a TAC of 128.627 tonnes, and the management plan TAC was 55.938.

The Chair added that the COVID situation has affected assessment for this stock, and that there is uncertainty around the level of SSB for southern horse mackerel.

Finally, the Chair shared draft recommendations for the stock: that the PELAC continues to pursue the development of a management strategy; that the evaluation of a revised management strategy be expedited, and should take place as part of WKHANSE in November 2020; the PELAC should await the outcome of the evaluation, and if it is deemed precautionary, the PELAC should recommend a TAC based on shifting the MSY deadline to 2022. This would produce a TAC, as noted above, of 85.642 tonnes.

Torcuato Teixeira intervened, saying the management plan was completed in 2017 and that, in revising it, the PELAC and other partners should take a calm and considered approach, looking at data from 2017, 2018 and 2019, and engaging more meaningfully with Member States, and scientists from both Spanish and Portuguese Institutes. He wanted to see a review of the socio-economic impacts of the plan, and felt the plan should be considered alongside information on local (Member



States) management of quotas, to generate a full picture. He agreed to a review of the plan, but wanted to see fishing opportunities greater than 87.000 tonnes in 2021.

Andrés García concurred with Teixeira, emphasising the ‘enormous economic impact’ of any reduction of quotas in the fishery.

Jose Beltran also commented, emphasising his desire to see a management strategy that prioritises stability. He recognised there was a range of positions in the room, and was keen to find a resolution – recommending that the PELAC communicate to the Commission that there is a desire to manage the stock based on an agreed strategy, and requesting an immediate review of the parameters of the plan. The Chair thanked Beltran, and suggested wording could be found to this effect.

Both Torcuato Teixeira and Andrés García formally registered at this juncture that they opposed the proposed recommendations put forward by the Chair, stating that they wished to see a review of the management plan across 2020-2021, and to see it raised again as an agenda item – once revised – for the year 2022.

Goncalo Carvalho said that for NGO members, any fluctuation and instability ‘must happen below MSY’. He emphasised that in the development of the existing plan, the ‘main quota user was highly engaged in the process’ and lamented that this was no longer the case. He felt the recommendations proposed were ‘a missed opportunity to be more progressive’ and wanted to see a plan that was ‘more precautionary, managing below FMSY as much as possible’.

Gerard Van Balsfoort expressed that the gap between the management plan advice and the MSY advice was ‘huge’ and that he had ‘never seen a stock so steeply increasing and so high above btrigger’. He felt it was fundamentally important that the plan was revisited to address this, suggesting that PELAC request that ICES consider a one-year step-up to MSY – ie. hitting the target in 2021.

At this point, Chair concluded that he would keep the recommendation that PELAC continue to pursue the development of management strategies. For the second recommendation, he would broaden the text to ‘expedite the evaluation of the management strategy’, and he added that the request to ICES need not be limited to looking at 2022 as the FMSY deadline. Colm Lordan clarified that the request to ICES would ask for TAC outcomes for deadlines of 2021, 2022 and 2023, and the Chair confirmed this.

8. PELAC recommendations for boarfish in 2021

Boarfish was under a two-year advice, meaning the recommendations for 2021 were the same as in 2020: follow the ICES advice for catches of 19.152 tonnes and request a benchmark by 2021, in order to move the stock from a Category 3 to a Category 1 assessment.

9. PELAC recommendations for herring in 6a and 7b-c

Ed Farrell provided a brief update on the EASME-funded genetics and morphometrics work carried out for herring, noting that a fuller break-down of the work and its findings had been provided at PELAC Focus Group on the subject. A headline conclusion of the study is that the current assessment for herring does not accurately reflect the distribution of the fish themselves against ICES areas. The



study had used techniques to identify a range of new genetic markers, to identify individual populations within the stock. This showed the following: 6a south and 6a north autumn-spawning herring are two different populations; there is little, if any, genetic difference between 6a north autumn-spawners and North Sea autumn-spawners; a spring-spawning population is also present in 6a north, in the Minch; 6a south herring has more variability than other populations and spawns over a longer period.

The project had developed an assignment approach to accurately identify fish from these different populations, and this was undergoing continued refinement as the project rapidly approached its conclusion. A final report would be produced in December. Ed Farrell noted there were some plans in place to continue the project into 2021, with the aim of a benchmark for the stock within that year.

Update on herring FG

The Chair provided an update on the herring FG that had met in September. A key takeaway from the FG had been the importance of getting the genetic research outcomes reviewed through ICES stock identification methods working group. The FG had also discussed the importance of maintaining the monitoring TAC for the stock, to avoid data gaps and avoid a down-grading of the assessment.

He explained that the FG had examined several options in terms of a monitoring TAC for herring, in lieu of zero-catch advice. Two scenarios had been tested: a monitoring TAC of 4.840 tonnes and one of 3.100 tonnes. Both scenarios showed an increase in SSB in 2021 – 9% and 12% respectively. A stable situation, or small increase, in SSB was projected in 2022 – 0% and 2%, respectively. As a Category 3 stock, the Chair explained these possibilities are not provided in the catch options table for herring.

Recommendations

The last several years advice for this stock have been for zero catch. The Chair explained that the PELAC had focused attention on ‘trying to split the stock’ because this had not been achieved at the last benchmark for herring.

He proposed that the PELAC seek an urgent review of the EASME genetics project, and request a benchmark for the stock in 2021. Additionally, he proposed that the scientific sampling programme should be continued.

Further draft recommendations covered: a decision on a funding mechanism to continue the genetic sampling project; a decision on whether to proceed with morphometrics work; and seeking solutions to be able to split historical data series for the stock.

Ed Farrel interjected that the morphometrics-based approach to splitting the stock samples was not effective – the condition of the fish and different maturity stages making this too difficult to achieve. The Chair thanked him, and said this concluded that the PELAC would not financially pursue this work.

Linda Planthof asked if the recommendations could be prefaced by text saying that ICES advice for zero catches should be followed, the Chair agreed to this. Gerard Van Balsfoort indicated his agreement with all points discussed.

10. PELAC recommendations for Celtic Sea herring



The Group discussed PELAC recommendations for Celtic Sea herring. The Chair proposed the following: the zero-catch advice from ICES should be followed; the monitoring TAC should be maintained at 869 tonnes, and; the mixing issue with Irish Sea herring needs to be addressed.

Goncalo Carvalho commented that he supported the 0 TAC recommendation for both Celtic herring 6a, 7 bc. He asked whether additional text could be added to ask ICES, via the Commission, what the minimum level of monitoring TAC catch needed to maintain scientific data would be. The Chair noted this had been touched upon in the previous year's recommendations, and suggested the use of the 2019 text, which Carvalho agreed to.

Steve Mackinson interjected that ICES had supplied advice on the minimum tonnage required for the monitoring TAC to go ahead – adding that 'the whole survey in 6a north and south is defined around those values' and 'the Celtic Sea has followed the same principle'. He added that in 2020 the industry had agreed not to take any monitoring TAC from 6a north – there were no commercial catches from that area, only samples amounting to a total of around 11 tonnes.

11. PELAC recommendations for Irish Sea herring

This stock had been covered in the July WGII meeting, so recommendations were displayed for endorsement.

It was recommended that the ICES advice for 7.341 tonnes be followed. The WKIRISH ecosystem approach should be incorporated into future assessment of the stock, and the mixing issue with Celtic Sea herring should be addressed.

12. Control Focus Group update

The Chair provided an update on the Control Focus Group, saying a very positive meeting had been held with a representative from Clara Aguilera's office (Rapporteur to the PECH Committee on the Control Regulation), who was very familiar with PELAC's recommendations and praised their quality.

A number of actions resulted from the FG meeting:

- Request an answer from the SWW Member State Group on the EFCA mackerel summary report, following responses from the NWW Member State Group and the Scheveningen Group;
- Commence a Freedom of Information procedure around the mackerel summary report data;
- Request a meeting with EFCA leadership and the PELAC Management Team, including Jose Beltran, to discuss the report;
- Initiate a long-term dialogue with EFCA on future joint deployments;
- Look at the possibility of identifying key issues in the agreed PELAC position on the Control Regulation that were not in line with European Parliament and Council amendments, and see if PELAC can re-assert its recommendations;
- Organise another Control FG in late November, with Clara Aguilera present and interpretation available.

13. Brexit

The Chair moved on to discuss Brexit. He explained that a Brexit Focus Group would be set up under WGII, to look at how the PELAC can operate in the 'new environment' from January 1st 2021. He



stated there some certainties: i) UK colleagues will no longer be part of the Pelagic AC, irrespective of whether there is a deal or no deal on trade, ii) the PELAC will have a much smaller area of jurisdiction in terms of its remit going forward. He said it would be important to try and hold a FG meeting before the end of the year.

14. Landing Obligation

Jonathan Shrives from the European Commission had been due to present on Discard Plans, but was unfortunately unavailable to address the meeting due to connection difficulties. The Chair covered the item in brief, noting that the main agenda item for discussion under the LO was pursuing further clarification around the calculations used behind *de minimis* exemptions for pelagic species in demersal discard plans. The Chair said a written request would be sent to Jonathan Shrives, in lieu of the planned discussion during the meeting.

15. AOB

The Chair thanked members for their time and patience, and said he felt the PELAC should consider whether ‘it makes sense to have such long days if we’re using virtual means’ for meetings. Goncalo Carvalho commended the Chair for his endurance and timeliness with the meeting, and recommended that in future WGI and WGII should be held on different days. The Chair noted this recommendation, saying it would be considered by the Management Team.

As a ‘parting thought’ the Chair asked those involved in discussions around the southern horse mackerel management strategy to ‘seriously consider the proposal’ put forwards during the meeting, emphasising the importance of working together towards consensus.

The Chair thanked interpreters and wished members a pleasant evening.

16. Action Items

Action #	What	Who
1	Seek benchmark for 6a 7b-c herring following the October meeting and during 2021	Chair, secretariat
2	Explore possibilities for inclusion of Irish WHOM logbook data to the PFA self-sampling plan – <i>carried forward</i>	Chairman, Martin Pastoors
3	Invite a speaker from the Norwegian tagging project to the next PELAC meeting – <i>carried forward</i>	Secretariat, Claus Reedtz-Sparrevohn
4	Address the ‘mixing issue’ with Celtic Sea herring – <i>carried forward</i>	Colm Lordan, Chairman
5	PELAC to give feedback on the abbreviated ICES advice sheet structure, including how to incorporate stakeholder information into this.	Secretariat
6	Reiterate the need to address the different species of the southern horse mackerel stock within advice for this species.	Secretariat, Chair
7	Amend text within recommendations on mackerel advice to reflect additional sustainability language, used in 2019.	Justyna Zajchowska, Secretariat
8	Examine the possible reference point combinations delineated within the MSE for mackerel, and consider whether the PELAC	Chair, Secretariat



	can make a recommendation as to a preferred combination of F and btrigger, at the next WGII meeting in 2021.	
9	Amend SHOM recommendation by broadening the text to 'expedite the evaluation of the management strategy'. Following on from SHOM management plan discussions, consider a broader conversation on management plan development.	Chair, Secretariat
10	Preface herring in 6a, 7b-c recommendations with note indicating that ICES advice zero-catch advice should be followed.	Chair, Secretariat
11	Organise another Control FG in late November, with Clara Aguilera present and interpretation available.	Chair, Secretariat
12	Organise a Brexit Focus Group meeting before the end of 2020.	Management Team, Secretariat
13	Send a written request to Jonathan Shrives to present on Discard Plans, and data informing <i>de minimis</i> exemptions, in lieu of the planned discussion during the meeting.	Secretariat

