



PELAGIC ADVISORY COUNCIL

Newsletter 3/2020

July - December 2020

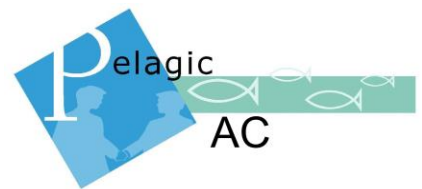


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PELAC MEETINGS

WORKING GROUP I MEETING (09-07-2020, CRN ONLINE SYSTEM)

This meeting focused on the ICES advice for North Sea autumn-spawning herring and Western Baltic spring spawning herring. In both cases the advice was based on MSY, leading to a recommended TAC of no more than **365.792 tonnes** for North Sea herring and zero tonnes for Western Baltic spring spawning herring **for 2021**.

Due to inconsistencies in both catch age data and the HERAS acoustic survey, the NS herring assessment had been exposed to retrospective bias. ICES had addressed the root of these inconsistencies, which were starting to have less of an impact in the assessment model. It was agreed that future recommendations from the PELAC on this stock should include specific numerical advice for catches. This had not been included in the 2019 recommendation, and previous catch limits had been rolled over.

Despite the zero-catch limit for Western Baltic herring, it was noted that the stock is being caught in the North Sea for part of the year. It was agreed that PELAC should reconsider its position on issuing recommendations for this stock, despite it falling under the remit of the BSAC. ICES highlighted its intention to hold rebuilding plan workshops for Western Baltic herring, among other depleted stocks.

An update on North Sea horse mackerel was provided. Advice had been issued in 2019 for this stock that covered the subsequent two years. As a result, the advice in 2021 remains the same - catches should not exceed 14.1014 tonnes.

The formulation of the recommendations on these stocks will take place at the October meeting.

The update from the Ecosystem WG outlined that it had completed its advice on seabed mining and was currently examining the impacts from seismic activity and offshore wind farms. It was agreed that the WG should also address the issue of cetacean bycatch.

WORKING GROUP II MEETING (09-07-2020, WEBEX)

Working Group II dealt primarily with the ICES advice for herring stocks in the Celtic Sea. Catches of Celtic Sea herring in 2019 had reached their lowest levels in the time series. Consequently, the advice for the stock based on MSY, is zero catches in 2021.

In a discussion around the abbreviated format of ICES advice in 2020, it was noted that up-to-date stakeholder information was lacking – and this should be given greater consideration by ICES in future, including if advice continues to be issued in abbreviated format.

For Irish sea herring, ICES advised a TAC of 7.341 tonnes in 2021, following the MSY approach. For 6a herring, ICES advised zero catches. A benchmark for herring in area 6a is planned for 2022, whereby survey and assessment data will be split into new stock definitions. ICES also intend to develop new indices to assess the stock and identify new reference points. Preliminary recommendations for Irish Sea herring, ahead of the October meeting, included:

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- That the ICES advice for 2021 be followed in full.
- That ICES consider the results of the WIKIRISH ecosystem approach work, and their applicability to this assessment.
- That the 'mixing issue' with Celtic Sea herring be addressed.

ICES provided an update on Southern horse mackerel. Advice based on MSY recommended a TAC of no more than 128.627 tonnes in 2021. The management plan for this stock developed by the PELAC is below the catches indicated in the current advice. The PELAC agreed to hold a focus group meeting within the SWWAC prior to making recommendations for this stock at the October meeting.

An update was provided on the modelling analysis undertaken as part of the Northeast Atlantic mackerel Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE). The results of the MSE are due for publication on August 3rd.

An update was provided on the Western horse mackerel Focus Group, which is now at an advanced stage with the work on a rebuilding plan for the stock. Preliminary findings indicate that the stock could be rebuilt by 2024/2025, although final checks are still required. The plan is expected to be submitted to WGWide and will serve as input for the ICES workshop on rebuilding plans.

Regarding the landing obligation, the Commission provided an explanation as to the data sources used in the calculations for horse mackerel TAC reductions, to account for de minimis exemptions. The PELAC showed interest in the advice for horse mackerel, and how the inclusion of 2019 discard data will influence TACs. It was agreed that this would be explored further at the October meeting.

All detailed meeting minutes can be downloaded from the PELAC website:
<https://www.pelagic-ac.org/2020>

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING (10-07-2020, WEBEX)

During the Executive Committee meeting, the PELAC work plan for 2020-2021 was presented. Both the work programme and the updated budget were accepted. The ensuing discussion touched on the PELAC's request for the release of additional information in relation to the EFCA joint deployment on mackerel, which had not been forthcoming from regional Member State groups. This issue will continue to be pursued by the PELAC.

The meeting went on to discuss the implications of Brexit for the functioning of the PELAC from 2021 onwards, and possible solutions. It was noted that the UK's exit of the EU will lead to a significant loss of current UK-based membership. It was widely felt that the ACs will not be able to continue in their current format post-Brexit. It was suggested that future collaborations with the UK could have the same shape as existing collaborations with Norway. Alternative suggestions included developing an umbrella organisation or taking advantage of the observer rule, whereby anyone who participates, even as an observer, can contribute at a technical level.

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The Commission presented a policy statement reporting on specific aspects of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

The advice from the working groups was subsequently presented and adopted unanimously, with one caveat that the co-signing of NWWAC advice on circularity of fishing gear and single use plastics directive, would only be accepted if no objections were registered.

WORKING GROUP II MEETING (20-07-2020, WEBEX)

A short meeting of the WHOM Focus Group was held, in order to agree and enact final changes for the PELAC WHOM rebuilding Plan.

The plan was considered on a line-by-line basis, with all edits agreed by all present on the call. The updated - final – draft of the plan was then circulated to members of the Executive Committee for an expedited approval by written procedure.

SOUTHERN HORSE MACKEREL FOCUS GROUP (21-09-2020, CRN ONLINE SYSTEM)

The goal of this focus group was to find a way forward on the TAC advice for Southern Horse Mackerel ahead of the PELAC WG and ExCom. Among the participants were members of the SWWAC and scientists that contributed at the initial elaboration of the SHM management plan. First, Hugo Mendes provided further background on the PELAC management plan noting how it was prepared in collaboration with stakeholders, at a time of significant progress in the scientific understanding of the stock. He also presented the HCR of this management plan. Hugo Mendes followed with a presentation of the ICES advice indicating that actual catch is well below the advised TAC. This year, because of the COVID19 situation, there have been some scientific issues with assessing the stock adding uncertainty to the advice. The ICES MSY approach gives a TAC in 2021 of 128.000t (resulting from the uncertain, and high, SSB); a scenario of maintaining F from 2020 to 2021 provides advice of 34.000t, and; advice based on the agreed management plan for the stock would be for 56.000t.

Second, the Chair wanted specific issues in the plan to be identified and solutions to be enacted. All stakeholders present articulated their views in full. SWWAC chair highlighted that the issue had not been debated in the SWWAC. Other SWWAC members said that any recommendation should take into account both biology and society. The importance of dialogue between the ACs was reassessed. The eNGOs said that it was crucial to understand whether the Spanish fleet is using all of its quota, as the TAC overall is ‘very much under-used’, and why. The Spanish position was for MSY-level exploitation of the stock, adding that less than this level was a ‘under-use of the stock which is not justified’. The administration confirmed that a ‘Ministerial regulation’ had been put forward which is designed to maximize the uptake of quotas within the Spanish fleet.

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The chair proposed to look at alternative target date for the Management Plan to reach FMSY level. Instead of 2025, perhaps another date could be set. The Chair explored a scenario whereby the target date for FMSY was shifted to 2022. Huge Mendes confirmed this would lessen the gap between the ICES MSY advice and the recommendation of the management plan, setting the management plan advice at roughly 85.000t. Some SWWAC members were still skeptical regarding the remaining gap. On the basis of his remarks, the Chair proposed that the only change to be made to the plan should be to Article 5.1, which sets out the date for attaining fishing at MSY. This would be changed to 2022, with participants' agreement. This would then go to the ICES WKHANSA workshop in November for assessment and approval. The Spanish administration indicated that they would express their opinion in writing upon receipt of the proposal (also in writing) with precise figures, following the meeting.

HERRING 6A, 7BC FOCUS GROUP (28-09-2020, WEBEX)

The Focus Group started by a series of presentations of scientific studies. Great progress had been made in the last years and the Chair was eager to present those. An update on the finalization of the genetic project was given by Edward Farrell. It was followed by an update on the morphometric research by Emma White. Steve Mackinson and Micheal O'Malley gave some update on the acoustic research for 6a North and 6a South-7-bc herring acoustic surveys. It was central that the herring EASME report was submitted to ICES WG by the Commission. Final recommendation on morphometrics would be taken at WGII. The splitting of historic data on herring was important and several possibilities needed to be explored. Another FG in 2021 could be held on the topic and on acoustic survey. A brief discussion was held on the consideration of the monitoring TAC proposed for 2021. Scientists explained that a key consideration was ensuring there was sufficient commercial catch data to support a Category 1 assessment for the stock, preventing a down-grading to Category 3. The FG agreed that a monitoring TAC should be maintained in 2021, the decision will be taken by the PELAC at the WGII in October.

PELAC-NWWAC SEISMIC FOCUS GROUP (29-09-2020, WEBEX)

The joint Focus Group welcomed the proposal to be joined by NSAC. The absence of answer from the Commission on the preceding advice made the exercise more complicated as participants were not sure to have met the requirements for and ICES request. The draft non-recurrent request to ICES was subsequently reviewed and discuss paragraph per paragraph. All comments were looked at. Another meeting to finalize the draft advice document would be needed. Mo would circulate the updated document and would look for comments from the group participants. The Chair agreed to all and thanked Mo. Finally, the participants also showed their interest in the idea of a multi-AC focus group on other environmental matters and the secretariats said that such reflection was welcomed and could be carried on at the respective WG of each ACs.

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CONTROL FOCUS GROUP (30-09-2020, WEBEX)

The Focus Group was the occasion to give an update to the PELAC Control advice. The issue of the Joint Deployment Plan on Mackerel report from EFCA was presented. The absence of answer from the SWW member state group was highlighted and the participants agreed that a reminder should be sent. The management team had initiated a procedure for freedom of information request in order to get the full data of the report and its methodology. The PELAC would also request a meeting with the leadership team of EFCA to discuss the issue and have broader dialogue with EFCA on future joint deployments methodology. The second point on the agenda was the update of the PELAC Control Advice. A summary of the State of play of the Control Regulation Revision was given by Ms. Sevilla Andrada, Parliamentary Advisor of MEP Clara Aguilera. The discussions triggered interest from the participants and the idea of a formal reviewing of the PELAC advice emerged. The key areas where the PELAC may wish to refine its existing recommendations on the control proposal would later be determined.

WORKING GROUP I MEETING (07-10-2020, CRN ONLINE SYSTEM)

The meeting focused on the newly released ICES advices for blue whiting and Atlanto-Scandian and the setting of TAC recommendations for 2021. ICES advice for blue whiting indicated that a weaker year class is coming into the stock, and SSB is starting to decline. F has been above the FMSY level for the past several years, and increased again in 2019. SSB is above MSY trigger and BPA, and is above the management target. A few key issues were also highlighted: the advice does not consider 'consistent deviations' from the LTMS in the form of unilateral quota-setting. In recent years, catches have been above ICES advice for this reason. He said that the current application of the LTMS may no longer be precautionary. 2020 has been an unusual year for blue whiting assessment as the internationally coordinated acoustic survey which takes place during the Spring was cancelled because of COVID19. The headline advice of ICES was to follow the LTMS. For Atlanto-Scandian herring, F has been below FMSY in the recent period but has just started to increase above FMSY. SSB for the stock peaked in 2008 at 7 million tonnes, and has been decreasing since – now coming down towards the MSY trigger level. SSB is forecast to stabilise at around 3.5 million tonnes. The advice sheet had been reduced for this stock this year because of COVID 19. The headline advice is to follow the agreed LTMS for the stock. Regarding North Sea horse mackerel, an update was provided on the genetic project for the North Sea, western, southern horse mackerel stocks. Further, large-scale analysis – with greater spatial and temporal coverage – was required. Advice for the stock is based on a two-year advice from ICES, covering 2020 and 2021. The proposed TAC for 2021 is 14.014 – it was recommended to follow this advice, as well as to highlight the 'non-negligible' discards of the stock in non-directed demersal fisheries. There was no agreed management plan in place for North Sea autumn spawning herring, so ICES advice is based on the MSY approach. The Chair noted that the stock is shared with Norway, and plans had been in place to discuss long-term management – but these had been derailed by COVID-19 and Brexit negotiations.

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The recommendation would follow the ICES advice, and include additional language on concerns around western Baltic spring spawning herring. An update was given on the Deepsea mining advice. The Commission had answered the PELAC advice. The Seismic focus group, jointly with NWWAC had already sent a request for ICES to the Commission and was in the process to prepare a second such advice. Finally, the Ecosystem Focus Group didn't reconvene yet because of the difficulties to find a date in the summer and the recent changes in the secretariat. It should reconvene in the Autumn. No recommendation was given for Western-Baltic herring.

WORKING GROUP II MEETING (07-10-2020, CRN ONLINE SYSTEM)

The meeting primarily dealt with ICES advice for NEA mackerel, Western & Southern horse mackerel, boarfish and herring 6a, 7bc, Celtic Sea herring, updates on research initiatives and the PELAC TAC recommendations for 2021. Catches for Northeast Atlantic Mackerel peaked in 2014, 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 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 FMSY. 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. Some minor adjustments had been made to Blim and Btrigger. Measures to ensure the protection of the North Sea component of the stock should remain in place for precautionary reasons, and a workshop to look into understanding the stock structure was likely in the future. They were conflicting trends between indices used in the stock assessment which affected the quality of the assessment. Finally, the distribution of catches for this stock showed a pattern over the last decade of an expansion in summer fishing activity. The Western horse mackerel ICES advice followed the MSY approach. A recovery plan prepared by the PELAC was studied by ICES. It hadn't arrived in time to be evaluated in 2020. 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 Btrigger. 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 chair noted that the PELAC will feed in the stakeholder information paragraph in the next year. There had been confusion this year with truncated advices and full advices. The Pelac recommended following ICES advice and MSY. 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. A focus group had been held on Southern Horse Mackerel. The chaired explained that PELAC should follow its commitment to pursue management strategies. He proposed a revision of the management strategy, which would allow for reaching MSY sooner, leading to a TAC of 85.642 tonnes. It was felt that the plan needed fundamentally to be revised as the gap with MSY approach was huge.

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Boarfish is a category 3 stock and as such the 2 year ICES advice was based on the precautionary approach. The meeting supported the advice, and requested a benchmark by 2021, in order to move the stock from a Category 3 to a Category 1 assessment. There were some discussions around the ICES advice for herring in area 6a, 7b, c. 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. The PELAC advice would recommend following a 0 catch. In addition, it would advise to 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. On the subject of Celtic Sea herring, the PELAC advised to follow the ICES 0 TAC while continuing the scientific sampling programme, at the appropriate times, in accordance with the ICES recommendations following a request from the European Commission. The mixing issue with Irish Sea herring needed to be addressed. Regarding Irish Sea herring it was agreed to recommend following the ICES MSY advice. The WKIRISH ecosystem approach should be incorporated into future assessment of the stock, and the mixing issue with Celtic Sea herring should be addressed.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING (08-10-2020, CRN ONLINE SYSTEM)

During the General Assembly meeting, a summary of the past year work of the PELAC was given. The final activity and financial report for 2020-2021 was presented which was subsequently approved by the meeting. The proposed date for the next Executive Committee meetings was the 2nd March 2021. The meeting would be held online. Further meetings would be held in April and July.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING (08-10-2020, CRN ONLINE SYSTEM)

The possibility to benefit from EMFF grants for research was raised. Stakeholder proposed to open collaboration with other ACs to draft a comprehensive recommendation to the Commission. The issue of the EFCA Mackerel report was highlighted again. Subsequently, participants decided that the PELAC would be pursuing the publication of the full report by addressing a letter to the commission in addition to the already decided procedure of freedom of information request. The OIG letter to the Commission was then discussed. OIG participants apologized for the fact that the chair felt blindsided by the letter and pointed at the exemplary functioning of the PELAC. The PELAC would prepare a submission to the Commission on its work practises that drove good functioning and consensus.

EXTERNAL MEETINGS

MEETING SCHEVENINGEN GROUP (16-09-2020, ONLINE)

The only issue that was relevant for pelagics was the issue on the EFCA report on mackerel control.

Scheveningen chair confirmed the line, the MS would not release the full report, but only the short summary. This was a decision agreed with Western waters members states group. PELAC complained about the decision and underlined that what MS demand from control reports in terms of transparency and quality is very far from what the system demand from science in terms of thorough documentation, transparency and quality. The situation puts industry and member states in an impossible situation, where we are unable to act on the conclusions presented, because there is no access to the background information and to the details in the report. As it stand the report summary is worthless in facilitation better practice in the sector. It is simply just allegations that we cannot address. Esben Sverdrup informed the Group that we would pursue the issue with the Commission.

NWW GROUP TECHNICAL MEETING (17 SEPTEMBER 2020, ONLINE)

Gerard van Balsfoort attended the meeting.

NWW discards plans: I had no specific comments on the exemptions being incorporated in the NWW discards plan. I highlighted the interest of PELAC in the pelagic by-catch in demersal fisheries exemptions and more in particular how these were calculated, as they have an impact on the TAC/Quota setting for the pelagic stocks in question. I referred to earlier years when PELAC had meetings with the EC on these calculations.

Cetaceans, proposal by the EC for a mitigation approach: The EC proposal came out just a few days prior to this meeting, so I informed the meeting that we would put this proposal on the agenda of the PELAC Ecosystem Focus Group.

Working programme near future: Upon request by the chair of the NWW group informed the meeting about our recent activities and the upcoming Focus Groups and ELAC meetings. The chair showed interest to receive the draft western horse mackerel management plan (incl. underpinning scientific document) – has been sent already to the Irish chair of the NWW Group.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

REIMBURSEMENT OF TRAVEL COSTS

Please remember that the secretariat has to receive your reimbursement claims within 1 month after the 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.

<https://www.pelagic-ac.org/aboutus>

CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR

The Secretariat will be open part-time between 21 and 31 December.

We wish all of you a peaceful Christmas (after this strange year). Hopefully 2021 will be a better year, we are looking forward to continue working with you!



UPCOMING MEETINGS

1 AND 2 MARCH 2021 - WORKING GROUP I AND II AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS:

These meetings will take place remotely:

- 1 March afternoon : Working Group II
- 2 March morning : Working Group I
- 2 March afternoon : Executive Committee

20 AND 21 APRIL 2021 - WORKING GROUP I AND II AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS:

These meetings will probably take place remotely. We will inform you about the details in due time.

6, 7 AND / OR 8 JULY 2021 - WORKING GROUP I AND II AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS:

Hopefully we are able to organise these meetings in the Netherlands. It still has to be decided if the meetings will take place on 6 and 7 July or on 7 and 8 July. We will inform you more about these meetings in due time.

For more information please visit our website:

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

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