



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR  
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES  
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN  
WATERS  
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA  
LAS AGUAS  
NOROCCIDENTALES

## MINUTES

### WORKING GROUP 1 (Irish Sea)

Gent | 01 July 2024

#### 1 Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed all participants. No apologies were received prior to the meeting. The agenda was adopted.

Actions points from the last meeting

1	The Chair will propose a candidate vice-chair to be elected at the next WG meeting in July. <a href="#">Agenda item 2</a>
2	The Chair will look for further information on a previously discussed proposal on a de minimis for haddock. <a href="#">Chair needs to check with the Irish Department – fisheries are very similar in Irish and Celtic Sea</a>
3	It is proposed that a recommendation is made to the Commission for the EU to develop techniques for socio-economic assessments of ORE developments. <a href="#">A DG MARE advice request is in progress on the economic and social impacts of ORE on fisheries and methodologies to assess impacts in the Celtic Seas, Greater North Sea and Baltic Sea. Delivery is expected for Q1/2 2025.</a>
4	The Secretariat will share the written stakeholder input submitted to STECF following EWG 15-23 on Technical Measures and will share the EWG report once available. <a href="#">Shared on 11 June</a>

#### 2 Election of Vicechair

The Chair proposed Aodh O'Donnell for the position of Vicechair of this Working Group. O'Donnell was appointed unanimously.

#### 3 ICES advice – Joanne Morgan, ICES

The Chair welcomed Joanne Morgan to the meeting and invited her to present the latest advice.

List of acronyms

DLS	data limited stocks
-----	---------------------



CHR	constant harvest rate
Rfb	Equation: $r$ = biomass ratio (survey trend), $f$ = fishing proxy (length data, target), $b$ = biomass safeguard
CAA	catch at age
SAA	survey at age
SR	Stock recruit
B	biomass
BMSY	biomass at maximum sustainable yield
XSA	Extended survivor analysis
SAM	Stock assessment model
SCAA	statistical catch at age
SPiCT	Surplus production in continuous time
SS	stock synthesis
SSB	spawning stock biomass
Blim	Limit reference point for spawning stock biomass (SSB)
Btrigger	Value of spawning stock biomass (SSB) that triggers a specific management action
F	Instantaneous Rate of Fishing Mortality
AAP	Aarts and Poos assessment

- Guide to ICES advisory framework and principles ([link](#))
- List of ICES acronyms and terminology ([link](#))
- ICES fisheries management reference points for category 1 and 2 stocks ([link](#))
- ICES technical guidance for harvest control rules and stock assessments for stocks in categories 2 and 3 ([link](#))
- ICES reference points for stocks in categories 3 and 4 ([link](#))

Links to all ICES technical guidelines can be found [here](#).

Morgan explained that ICES had been subject to a cyber attack a week previously and certain aspects may not yet be fully updated following this incident.

#### Cod 7a

- Advice for 2025, MSY: catch 0 t no change
- Some corrections were made to the model in 2023
- F below FMSY
- SSB below Blim – 2023 estimate revised downwards
- No catch option that will bring SSB above Blim



### Haddock 7a

- Advice for 2025, MSY: catch  $\leq$  1893t (-16.4%)
- SSB declining but above MSY Btrigger
- F below FMSY
- SSB revised downwards, low recent recruitment
- Assessment uses ASAP model developed by NOAA

### Plaice 7a

- Advice for 2025, MSY: catch  $\leq$  1504t (-21%)
- SSB below MSY Btrigger
- F below FMSY
- Recruitment lower since 2016
- Discarding high and variable, 40% assumed to survive
- Downward revision of SSB (retrospective), SSB below trigger so target F reduced
- SAM assessment used

### Sole 7a

- Advice for 2025, MSY:  $\leq$  609t, (-2.6%)
- 2024 advice revised after benchmark 2024- 625 t
- F below FMSY
- SSB above MSY btrigger
- New model (SAM), revised data – including catch

### Seabass in divisions 4.b-c, 7.a, and 7.d-h

- Advice for 2025, MSY: catch  $\leq$  2776t, (+14.1%)
- SSB below MSYBtrigger
- F below FMSY
- Higher recruitment, SSB now closer to the trigger so adjustment to F is less
- Work being carried out on recreational data

### Whiting 7a (advice from 2023)

- Advice for 2024 and 2025: MSY, catch = 0, no change
- Stock size is extremely low
- Spawning stock biomass well below Blim since the mid-1990s
- Recruitment has been low since the early 1990s
- Fishing pressure (F) above FMSY and Flim.
- Discarding high; 97% in 2020 on catches of 1118 t
- No NIMIK survey data and low discard sampling 2022 – minimal impact



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR  
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES  
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN  
WATERS  
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA  
LAS AGUAS  
NOROCCIDENTALES

Publication in autumn: Nephrops, skates & rays, spurdog

Patrick Murphy thanked Morgan for joining the group in person and expressed his concern regarding fishermen reducing their effort yet stocks seemingly not improving according to ICES advice. He felt a discussion was needed to ensure management measures being put in place in addition to simply advice being put in place.

Morgan agreed that this was an important issue and explained that ICES is working on adding new aspects into the advice. However, climate change impacts are bigger than anything that ICES can advise on as there is also nothing actionable that can be put forward within ICES remit, but work is ongoing to include it in the fishing opportunities advice. She agreed that for many stocks catch is going down and fishing mortality is low which is taken into account in the assessment. Impacts of climate change can be seen in stock productivity, i.e. growth, age and size at maturity, number of eggs produced, and natural mortality which change over time and therefore are partially accounted for already in the assessments. She explained that FECO was brought in following WKIRISH though this has not yet been fully included in the advisory process. Discussions are in progress internally on how to make the advice more climate aware.

Murphy felt that the ICES advice is the basis for political decisions, and it does not seem to assist in stock recovery to the extent expected. He saw a need for inclusion of additional aspects to ensure sustainability in the future.

Morgan responded that some management measures other than TAC may be useful in the face of climate change impacts, but this also depends on what they have been asked by the advice requesters.

The Chair agreed that if the stock biomass is down, the reason does not always matter, but fishing effort will be reduced. He felt the bigger issue was if the biomass is there but not recognized.

Emiel Brouckaert added that it might be useful to look at plaice in the Irish Sea as an example where fishermen report a different scenario at sea that does not relate to the 21% reduction seen in the advice. He wondered if Morgan could provide an explanation for this.

Morgan explained that the assessors pointed to several issues, one that the SSB is lower than estimated in the previous year. It is important to not fall below Blim and if a certain trigger is reached, the advice is decreased and the FMSY is reduced by the proportion below the trigger. The idea is that this will bring the stock back to a healthy level and to avoid issuing 0 advice. This stock is below Btrigger. She agreed that the fishermen have been doing what they are meant to be doing. She added that there had been a long period of higher recruitment and this needs to be reached again.

Brouckaert wondered as to why such a high reduction was put in place and if there was a principle behind this.

Morgan commented that this is based on the SSB going down and being below the MSY Btrigger. There are no stability clauses built into Category 1 assessments.

Brouckaert felt that stability clauses are very limited at the moment, and it would be interesting to



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR  
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES  
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN  
WATERS  
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA  
LAS AGUAS  
NOROCCIDENTALES

see if any progress had been made within ICES on this.

Murphy raised the issue of retrospective bias and was wondering how it was decided that the SSB had been wrong in the previous years. He felt that if an anomaly was seen, a detailed explanation would need to be provided to understand why large reductions such as the 21% cut in plaice is being made.

Morgan looked at the retrospective in the advice sheet which showed a bad retrospective pattern over recent years, specifically in the SSB. She added that for plaice the SSB has been revised downward substantially every year which leads to the drop in advice. She was unsure if this was part of the benchmarks for this coming year but felt that it would need to be addressed depending on available information.

Murphy asked how many years the retrospective was going back over.

Morgan stated that five years are plotted, and the last four assessments reduced the SSB considerably. She explained that the previous years' advice sheets are available in the ICES library.

The Chair asked if the 539t catch includes the discards minus the 40% survival.

Morgan explained that if 100 t were discarded, 60t were dead and counted in the 539.

In relation to whiting, the Chair was wondering if rebuilding the stock was realistic.

Morgan felt that this was a difficult question. ICES held a preliminary workshop on rebuilding plans which also looked at the timeframes involved when discussing rebuilding plans and would reference points need to be added or changed. She added that this was Dorleta Garcia's subject and that she was going to report back to ICES on the AC's interest in this topic.

Regarding sole, the Chair was wondering if the old model was erroneous all the time or only the previous year.

Morgan was unsure but stated that the SAM was used in the benchmark and revised data was brought in, as well as changing the recruitment year and including discard data in the model.

The Chair felt that the new model better reflected what fishermen see on the ground.

Murphy wondered about the revision of benchmarks and how many years it might take to reset the advice and to accept that the stock is steady at a lower level. He expressed his satisfaction that increases in survivability from better handling on board were taken into account for example in relation to sole, but concern that this change in fishing pattern may not be in the assessment.

Morgan felt changes in selectivity will be included in the assessment as it will show up in the age data. This would also then be taken into account in any rebuilding plans.

Brouckaert referred to the fact that if the fishermen make efforts to regarding avoidance, these would then not be recorded.

Morgan commented that survey data is pulled together for benchmarks which provides ICES with



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR  
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES  
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN  
WATERS  
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA  
LAS AGUAS  
NOROCCIDENTALES

another view of the population. She explained that the length frequency during a survey is usually different than during a fishery. If an extreme mismatch was recorded than a problem may arise, but usually the model can handle the changes.

#### 4 Irish Sea cod tagging project - Jonathan White, Marine Institute

The Chair welcomed Jonathan White from the Marine Institute who presented on the mixing of cod between the Celtic Sea and the Irish sea.

White explained that the work was carried out between 2016 – 2021 with the report published in 2022. The project concentrated on commercial vessels and involved double tagging each fish with only simple tags. He reviewed the state of cod in the Irish Sea going back to 2018 which was when the first 0 catch advice was issued before providing an overview of the core fishing areas in the Irish Sea by gear type.

Other tagging studies in the areas were also reviewed as part of the project.

The project involved an intense awareness raising campaign to ensure as much reporting of tags as possible which in January 2019 was 166 of 4759 released cod to date. Tagging took place across various locations. Based on recapture data different migratory categories were identified with some individuals migrating from the Irish Sea into the Celtic Sea but the majority remaining in the Irish Sea.

White concluded that further tagging work has been undertaken by AFBI in Northern Ireland.

The Chair thanked White for his presentation and opened the floor to questions.

Murphy commented on the increase in biomass wondering if this was cross-references with the water temperature. He felt that this was a very positive trend and asked if there was any additional information as to the reason for this.

White responded that the only information was included in the stock assessments which could be compared to the study, note that the stock assessment does not take into consideration sea temperature.

Dominic Rihan was wondering if there was any noticeable difference in patterns when comparing the results from this study to the others.

White felt there was a small change but that it was difficult to establish if this change was significant or just “noise” as only a relatively small amount of fish were tagged. Preferably three to five time series points should be included in a study, and this one only included two.

Rihan added that some juvenile fish were tagged and were there any observations regarding their return. He felt it was difficult to understand how there was such low recruitment.

White felt that the project was not long enough to show any change. He added that mortality rates are quite high for juveniles which could be another reason why no offshore migration had been



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR  
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES  
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN  
WATERS  
ADVISORY COUNCIL

CONSEJO CONSULTIVO PARA  
LAS AGUAS  
NOROCCIDENTALES

observed. He felt that when the population size was very low it was also difficult to catch enough individuals for tagging.

Brouckaert referred to White's presentation at a recent NWWAC meeting on climate change effects on cod in the Celtic Sea, wondering if this information would be useful to included in the AC's work.

White felt that the work was definitely connected as cod migrate between the two areas and that climate has a strong impact on fish stocks. He added that ICES are planning a series of workshops on climate impacts. He added that the information from this study should not be viewed in isolation.

The Chair noted the cod tagged in the ICES rectangles off the south coast of Ireland, asking if they were considered part of the Irish Sea or Celtic Sea cod stock.

White stated that the landings off the south east corner of Ireland (rectangles E33 and E32) are transferred into the landings of the Celtic Sea (for the ICES stock assessment), but that in the study most tagging was carried out in the Irish Sea.

## **5 Summary of actions agreed and decisions adopted by the Chair**

Murphy asked if the AC could work on the framing of questions posed by the advice requesters.

The Secretariat advised that the AC has previously made this comment and that this comment would be included in the fishing opportunities advice. Vallerani explained that some Secretariats have also come together to develop a framework on how to better include stakeholder advice in the formulation of advice requests which can include this.

Rihan added that ICES will be doing this work anyway as climate change is becoming more important and felt that no additional action point was needed.

Murphy explained that he felt an action point was needed regarding the fact that stocks are not recovering despite fishermen adhering to the advice. He referred to the fact that when cessation in certain fisheries is advised, support mechanisms are put in place which he felt could be part of the advice.

The Chair agreed that a low SSB leads to lower catch advice which then becomes an economic question. He wondered at what stage intervention was needed in support of the fleet, and at what point the size of the fleet would need to be decreased.

Murphy emphasised that other measures are needed than simply catching less fish and asked if the AC could make a request for ICES to include other measures such as temporary closures in order to improve the advice and move away from simply advising on the F range.

Morgan commented that sometimes ICES is asked about temporal and spatial options, however, these measures cannot be simply added to the advice without this being specified by the advice requesters, which in this case is the Commission.



Murphy agreed but reiterated that this then needs to be included in the advice requests as expertise and knowledge on this is available in ICES.

### Actions

<b>1</b>	Members of the WG confirmed Aodh O'Donnell as Vicechair.
<b>2</b>	Comments made following presentation of ICES advice will be taken into account in the preparation of the AC advice on Fishing Opportunities by the FG Landing Obligation. Members are invited to send any other contribution via email before the FG meeting on 24 July
<b>3</b>	The WG will continue to follow ICES work related to expanding the use of the stability clause.
<b>4</b>	Proposal to elaborate a request to DG MARE to enable the possibility to expand ICES advice beyond catch advice and consider management measures where needed.

### Participants

NWWAC members	
Emiel Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
John Lynch	ISEFPO
Patrick Murphy	ISWFPO
Aodh O'Donnell	IFPO
Dominic Rihan	KFO
NWWAC observers	
Alexandra Philippe	EBCD
Experts and observers	
Kylie Kronal	Department for Agriculture and Fisheries
Joanne Morgan	ICES
Dirk van Guyze	Department for Agriculture and Fisheries
Jonathan White	Marine Institute
NWWAC Secretariat	
Mo Mathies	Executive Secretary
Matilde Vallerani	Deputy Executive Secretary