



CONSEIL CONSULTATIF POUR  
LES EAUX OCCIDENTALES  
SEPTENTRIONALES

NORTH WESTERN  
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ADVISORY COUNCIL

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## MINUTES

### WORKING GROUP 3 (CHANNEL)

Online meeting on Zoom  
Wednesday 9 October 2024, 12:00 - 13:30 CET

#### 1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair Manu Kelberine welcomed all participants to the meeting. No apologies were received in advance of the meeting. The agenda was adopted as drafted. Action points from the last meeting include:

1. The Secretariat will keep members updated on EU-UK discussions on UK MPAs.

[There were no specific updates from DG MARE.](#)

2. The Secretariat will keep members informed regarding Commission's next step in relation to the organisation of a workshop on scallop management with the UK.

[The EU-UK Scallop workshop happened on 18 September. A report is available on the NWWAC website.](#)

3. 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.

[Comments received were included in the advice submitted to DG MARE on 31 August 2024.](#)

#### 2. Seabass

- **Draft advice prepared by FG Seabass**

The Chair explained that although the plan was to address a draft advice prepared by the Focus Group Seabass during the meeting, a feedback from recreational fisheries organisation had been received after the fixed deadline for comments, preventing consensus. His suggestion was for the FG to meet again in order to try to reach a compromise.

Emiel Brouckaert acknowledged that the late input from the recreational sector was a problem but emphasized the importance of drafting a joint opinion. He offered to work on the draft advice as NWWAC Chair and seek a compromise with a neutral proposal. As chair of the Advisory Council, he expressed a strong desire to find a resolution but noted that more time was needed to review the document. He agreed it was a good idea to set another meeting date for the FG and hoped he could finalize the proposal by that time.



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Franck Le Barzic noted that during the previous FG meeting, there appeared to be some consensus, especially considering the need for more flexible measures due to the extensive seabass discards. He believed they had reached a reasonable compromise, so he questioned what had happened in the meantime for such a drastic shift in opinion by the representatives of the recreational sector. He pointed out that, in the past, a majority opinion was followed by a minority opinion that simply challenged the points made in the majority view, which he found unconstructive. Instead, he argued for reaching a true consensus, rather than producing contradictory advice, and supported Brouckaert's proposal to find a balanced compromise.

Dominique Thomas also agreed with the proposal by the AC Chair, noting that if the AC cannot produce advice, it would be a failure for everyone involved. She stressed the importance of reaching a consensus, as this is a fundamental principle for any Advisory Council. However, she added that the consensus must be meaningful. They need to find common ground and draft a document that incorporates all perspectives, while also reflecting the majority opinion that emerged from their work.

Matilde Vallerani pointed that dissenting opinions can be recorded in an annex if supported by more than one organization, allowing for a more concise minority position. In her opinion, reaching a full consensus on this topic seems unrealistic. However, she hoped for a more balanced outcome that reflects the views exchanged during the meeting and the input received afterward. She agreed that a second meeting of the FG would be necessary to review the main body of the advice, determining what could be agreed upon and what could not. While this would be a challenging task, she thanked Brouckaert for his efforts in helping to make the process more balanced.

Pauline Stephan, Chair of the Focus Group, stated that there are significant discrepancies in terms of discards between professional and recreational fisheries. She felt it would be beneficial to check the different sources of this information and that a list of sources should be included at the end of the advice document.

Llibori Marinez Latorre felt this was a good solution. *"While there are different points of view, I believe we all share some common ground"*. Regarding the possibility of converting discards into landings, this concept is important but may create further divisions concerning these resources. He also agreed with Stephan about the importance of providing the source of information. This should be a standard practice in every piece of advice produced by the AC.

**ACTION:** The FG Seabass will meet again to find a compromise solution on the advice while the AC Chair will also review the current draft to develop a more balanced version.

- **Updates from FMP briefing with UK**

Vallerani referred to the presentation made by the UK administration during a briefing meeting on 18 September focusing on updates and planning for Fisheries Management Plans (FMP). The Seabass FMP mentions the establishment of a UK Bass Management Group to bring different sectors together to provide more collaborative, holistic approach to seabass management and help deliver FMP measures.



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She felt that it might be a good idea for the NWWAC to ask to become observer in this Group, to foster collaboration and information exchange between stakeholders. She still wasn't sure of the possibility for this to happen, but she first wanted to know the opinion of WG3 and the availability of members to follow the work of this UK stakeholder group.

Stephan took the floor and put herself forward to represent the AC in this forum, as she is in charge of the seabass file at French level and chair of the NWWAC Focus Group Seabass. Members agreed this was a good choice.

**ACTION:** The Secretariat to get in touch with UK authorities regarding observing the Bass Management Group.

### 3. Scallop

The Chair explained that the aim of this discussion was to follow up on the EU-UK workshop held on 17 September. He invited Vallerani to share on screen the draft letter summarising the main points discussed during the workshop to see if there's the possibility to submit advice to the Commission.

The Chair noted that at the French level and within Ifremer there is confidence in having all necessary scientific data, as this stock has been closely monitored by various scientific groups for at least the last 20 years, if not longer. However, the Chair acknowledged that management measures require further development. The technical measures associated with this species in France should gradually become acceptable to everyone. The Chair also highlighted the Irish trial conducted on ring sizes and welcomed this exercise. He emphasized that management should focus on two important points: increasing the Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) and working on ring sizes simultaneously. This aspect has already been included in the third block of bullet points in the document presented.

Le Barzic referred to the different levels of productivity identified by scientists, highlighting the distinctions between the Western and Eastern parts of the Channel. He suggested that it would be valuable to make a distinction regarding MCRS in the two areas. The measures proposed should also reflect this distinction, noting the success of the 92 mm ring size in the Western channel, which outperformed the 85 mm size. He explained that the move to a 97 mm ring size in the 7d has yielded positive results. Le Barzic concluded by stressing the importance of not applying the same measures in the whole Channel area, reinforcing the need to differentiate between the 7d and e.

Alannah Gourlaouen agreed with the previous statements and expressed a desire for the Irish to conduct trials in 7d, emphasizing the importance of distinguishing between the two regions. Testing ring sizes in the Channel would be very relevant, especially in discussions about joint management with the UK. She also highlighted that the draft advice presented includes discussions from previous workshops and underscores the efforts needed to promote exchanges and communication. While many studies already provide significant information about the stock, she acknowledged that there are still gaps in knowledge and that further efforts are needed to agree on improving management strategies in relation to the fleet on both sides of the Channel. She expressed hope that the ongoing work, along with the Irish trials, will facilitate progress in these negotiations.



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John Lynch discussed the ongoing Irish trial in area 7d, noting that it is currently underway and expected to conclude shortly. He remarked on the favorable fishing conditions in 7d since the opening, with preliminary reports indicating that the gear is functioning well and yielding positive results similar to previous trials. He emphasized the importance of distinguishing the different growth rates of scallops across the Eastern channel, Western channel, Celtic Sea and Irish Sea. He highlighted that 7d has the highest growth rate, where French vessels are using a 97 mm ring size. However, he expressed concerns that implementing a 97 mm size for the Irish fleet is currently impractical. He explained that the Irish fleet would need to utilize multiple types of gear to navigate different areas, which would lead to gear being left unused on the pier during seasonal changes for various fisheries. As the number of Irish vessels involved in this fishing is quite limited, representing a small fraction of the overall fishery, he reiterated the importance of making decisions that would not jeopardize the sustainability of the fishery. Lynch conveyed a willingness to continued engagement in discussions regarding MCRS and ring sizes, stressing that having more information would lead to better decision-making.

The Chair informed Lynch that French legislation regarding MCRS in the Western Channel has just recently been amended, increasing MCRS to 10.5 cm.

Stephan proposed that another meeting between the French and Irish sector representatives is organised to discuss these items. Lynch agreed but proposed to have the meeting in Ireland or in a location that is convenient to both parties.

Vallerani expressed her concern about the timeline and progress of discussions within the AC. She emphasized the need for further discussion before they could send advice to the Commission and suggested to wait for the report from the Irish trials in 7d before proceeding. She proposed to organise a meeting of the Focus Group Scallop, inviting DG MARE, to ensure discussions about the topic continue.

**ACTION:** The Focus Group Scallop should meet again once results from the Irish trials are available.

Members also agreed that discussions and engagement should continue with UK counterparts at stakeholder level.

#### 4. Follow-up to the joint recommendation on squid

The Chair explained that the NWW MS Group approved a joint recommendation on squid during the summer, which proposed to increase the current mesh size of towed gears used for directed squid fishing (at least 40 mm throughout the area) to at least 80 mm for bottom trawls and seines in ICES divisions 7a-e, 7g-h and 7k, while maintaining the basic mesh size of at least 40 mm for towed gears in ICES sub-areas 5 and 6, for pelagic otter trawls within 12 nautical miles in ICES division 7e, and for bottom trawls and seines in ICES division 7j.

However, the STECF concluded that while in principle mesh size increases are a means of improving the selectivity of fisheries, they aren't in a position to assess the potential effects of the proposed mesh size increases because supporting information is lacking. Member States should provide a



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detailed justification of the underlying objectives and criteria used to determine which vessels will benefit from this exemption. Therefore, at this stage, the European Commission is rather reluctant to adopt a Delegated Act.

Le Barzic added that a similar Joint Recommendation was put forward for the North Sea. In his view, STECF provided a nuanced advice, stating that they could not fully assess the impact of these exemptions due to the difficulty in defining "targeted fishing". This issue was not unique to this regulation but applied to technical measures overall, as there is no clear definition of targeted fishing. The Commission decided not to adopt a Delegated Act for the Channel but only for the North Sea. He pointed out that professionals on the grounds had been requesting this mesh size increase for a long time. He felt this is a missed opportunity and suggested that the NWWAC writes to the Commission and asks to implement a Delegated Act as soon as possible.

Geert Meun agreed with Le Barzic and expressed the disappointment of the Dutch fleet regarding this. As the Joint Recommendation for the North Sea will proceed, but the one for the Western Waters will be delayed, the Dutch fleet operating in the southern North Sea and the eastern English Channel will face different mesh sizes, creating an uneven playing field. He agreed that the NWWAC should ask the Commission to follow the request and advice from the fishing industry.

**ACTION:** The NWWAC should draft advice to the Commission requesting that the joint recommendation on squid is brought forward.

## 5. Review of draft advice on choke risk in the NWW

The Chair explained that the members of the Working Group will receive the choke traffic light spreadsheet after this meeting and are invited to provide comments to update the AC advice on choke risk in the NWW.

He also asked members to reflect on stocks in the Channel that according to members should be prioritised by ICES as in need for benchmark work.

**ACTION:** The Secretariat will share the updated choke traffic light spreadsheet for members to provide inputs and contribute to the preparation of advice.

## 6. AOB

No AOB was raised.

## 7. Summary of actions agreed and decisions adopted by the Chair

- 1) The FG Seabass will meet again to find a compromise solution on the advice while the AC Chair will also review the current draft to develop a more balanced version.
- 2) The Secretariat will get in touch with UK authorities regarding observing the Bass



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Management Group.

- 3) The Focus Group Scallop should meet again once results from the Irish trials are available.
- 4) The NWWAC should draft advice to the Commission requesting that the joint recommendation on squid is brought forward.
- 5) The Secretariat will share the updated choke traffic light spreadsheet for members to provide inputs and contribute to the preparation of advice.

## 8. Participants list

### Members

| Name        |                  | Organisation                                   |
|-------------|------------------|--|
| Emiel       | Brouckaert       | Rederscentrale                                 |
| Alannah     | Gourlaouen       | CRPMEM de Normandie                            |
| Gerald      | Hussenot         | Blue Fish                                      |
| Manu        | Kelberine        | CRPMEM de Bretagne                             |
| Franck      | Le Barzic        | OP COBRENORD                                   |
| John        | Lynch            | Irish South & East Fish Producers Organisation |
| Llibori     | Martinez Latorre | IFSUA  |
| Geert       | Meun             | VisNed   |
| Corentine   | Piton            | FPDR   |
| Jean-Marie  | Robert           | Pêcheurs De Bretagne                           |
| Pauline     | Stephan          | CNPMEM   |
| Dominique   | Thomas           | OP CMEMMN                                      |
| Durk Wieger | Van Tuinen       | Nederlandse Vissersbond                        |
| Arthur      | Yon              | FROM Nord                                      |

### Observers

| Name   |              | Organisation                           |
|--------|--------------|--|
| Sandra | Van Der Meer | Fisheries department of Dutch Ministry |

### NWWAC Secretariat

| Name    |           | Role                       |
|---------|-----------|----------------------------|
| Matilde | Vallerani | Deputy Executive Secretary |