MEETING REPORT

North Western Waters Regional Advisory Council

Focus Group on Management Measures for Nephrops Stocks
Merchants Hall, Edinburgh
3rd November 2009
9.00 – 11.30 h

Chairman: Lorcan O´Cinnéide
Rapporteur: Alexandre Rodríguez

1. Welcome & Agenda

The Chairman welcomed all attendees to this technical meeting. Apologies were noted from Kenneth Patterson (DG MARE) and Colm Lordan (Marine Institute) who could not be present at the meeting due to prior commitments and technological constraints at the meeting venue[1]. The full list of participants can be found in Annex I.

Adoption of Agenda

The Chairman noted that items 2 and 3 (presentations from the Commission and scientists) would not be covered due to the absence of the invited speakers. Similarly, agenda item 6 would also be skipped as the Scottish industry finally did not submit any proposal. The agenda of the meeting was adopted with the changes outlined above.

2. Preparation of a NWWRAC response to the Commission's non paper: analysis of suggested measures and proposals

The members did not agree with the either the format or the content of Nephrops advice provided by the Commission on its Proposal of Regulation on Fishing Opportunities for 2010. Similarly, the consultation paper on nephrops submitted by the Commission to the NSRAC and the NWWRAC the 19th of October[2] was considered to be unacceptable as a basis for advice to set fishing opportunities for 2010.

The members believed that the NWWRAC would be able to make a significant contribution to this process and give an immediate input to STECF and the Commission by focusing mainly on the objectives to be achieved.

[1] The room had no video conference system set up.
[2] Revised version amending the error of the original version, received the 7th of October, in relation to geographical co-ordinates of proposed closure in FU16 (Porcupine Bank) - page 3

In relation to the process, the Chairman suggested starting dealing with the industry proposals of setting up a temporal closure on Porcupine Bank on the following order: Spanish proposal, Irish proposal, and then open the debate from the floor.

Following a query coming from a French representative, the Chairman made it clear that no formal position has been adopted by the NWWRAC to date in relation to a proposal of spatial-temporal measure or a fishery by fishery approach for stock management. The purpose of this meeting was precisely to agree a common position and provide advice by consensus.

3. Presentation of Spanish Proposal on seasonal closures for Porcupine Bank

Hugo González took the floor to present the main features of the proposal agreed by the Spanish industry. Mr. González reminded that the intention to launch this proposal was already announced in previous NWWRAC meetings[3] Working Groups (July) and Executive Committee (September) meetings. The proposal was submitted to the Secretariat the 20th of October in response to the draconian measures proposed by the Commission for FU16.

The proposal aimed to set a seasonal closure in the North West area of Porcupine Bank starting on 15th of May and finishing on 31st of August. The geographical coordinates of the boundaries and the map of the area can be seen in the Spanish paper made available at the NWWRAC website[4].

Mr. González also stated that the Commission's proposal was not detailed enough and it was not clear from the wording if the closure only affected the nephrops´ fleet or all fishing activities. Mr. González also noted that the amount of catches have been considerably reduced in Porcupine in last years, so this proposal constitutes a pro-active and responsible initiative coming from the fishing industry itself in order to have a proportionate response and to rebuild the stock in 2-3 years while ensuring the economic viability of the fleet.

Mr. González referred to a scientific document prepared by Alvaro Fernández (IEO) for this meeting highlighting the main biologic characteristics and seasonality of the Nephrops stock[5]. It was pointed out that IEO, together with Marine Institute from Ireland, had undertaken in recent years yearly surveys for Nephrops stocks in Porcupine bank. It was stressed that the conclusions drawn from this report fitted in with the proposal of the fishing industry. Therefore, it seems that a predefined closure restricted to summer season would be most appropriate for the recovery of the stock.

[3] Working Group2 in Paris (9th of July) and Executive Committee in Madrid (8th of September)
[4] Direct link – Meetings section:
http://www.nwwrac.org/admin/publication/upload/Joint_Proposal_Anasol_Arpesco_Celeiro_Oppao_Closure_Porcupine_Bank_Oct2009_EN.pdf
[5] Mr. Fernández report is available at the NWWRAC website (summary in English – text in spanish):
http://www.nwwrac.org/admin/publication/upload/Nephrops_Porcupine_Banks_Alvaro%20Fernandez.pdf

4. Presentation of Irish Proposal on seasonal closures for Porcupine Bank

Lorcan O´Cinnéide took the floor to make a presentation on behalf of the Irish Industry. This proposal was also based on scientific analysis provided by Colm Lordan on behalf of the Irish Marine Institute. The full content of this presentation is available at NWWRAC website[6].

Attention was drawn to the fact that ICES Advice for 2010 proposed to cut in overall terms a 50% cut in TAC for this stocks. A serious problem was also observed with the choice target fishing mortality at F0.1. F0.1 was regarded as an inappropriate proxy for MSY for nephrops. Furthermore, it was warned that the effects of using F0.1 could lead to predation and increased competition for food and cannibalism due to high densities of this species. Finally, it was noted by Mr. O´Cinnéide that decision taken by ICES ACOM was not in accordance with the experts´ deliberations and advice from scientists within ICES framework at previous stages.

Mr. O´Cinnéide also provided details on the timescale of events and regulations proposed. He mentioned that the Commission gave short prior notice to the NWWRAC.

Regarding to the content of the Commission's proposal, he felt that the Commission not analysed correctly the state of stocks in the different functional units involved as, except for the Porcupine Bank. Some scientists have reported that stocks are in relatively good condition at current levels of fishing and no changes have been observed in the state of stocks.

He concluded that there was a need to maintain an Area VII-wide management area for Area VII.

In relation to the specific management measures set for Porcupine Bank, Mr. O´Cinnéide considered that it imposed an unnecessary and disproportionate annual closure, ignoring scientific advice and being detrimental for some national fleets in comparison with others (as some are utilizing these quotas and others not)

The Irish industry thinks that a seasonal closure is needed and can be very positive for the recovery of the stock. However, they reject all-year closure on FU16. Mr. O´Cinnéide explained in detail the Irish proposal on seasonal closures for Porcupine that is believed to deliver fishing mortality up to a reduction of 70%. He also remarked on the need for a closure in the high-activity fishing areas, accompanied by scientific information to monitor the impact of the measure for the stock recovery.

[6] Direct link to document – see Nephrops Focus Group at meetings section: http://www.nwwrac.org/admin/publication/upload/Irish_Proposal_Nephrops_Management_LOC_Oct2009_EN.pdf

5. Debate from the floor

Ross Skinner (nephrops´ skipper from Scotland) said he was skeptical about the success of the implementation of a closure in Porcupine bank, as other closures in the same area for cod have not worked. He also expressed disappointment about the short consultation period available to assess both the Spanish and Irish proposals. He noted that any proposed closure should be limited and minimize its impact in fishing activities. Mr. Skinner also suggested that there were other possible alternatives to consider for a responsible quota management.

Mr. González and Mr. O´Cinnéide argued that their proposals as reasonable and legitimate solutions agreed by their national fishermen with extensive experience in the fishery. It was noted that Irish and Spanish skippers acknowledged that the Porcupine stock is in poor shape and needs to be recovered. They asked the members present consider this proposal taking into account factors such as the differential in marginal earnings and profits in comparison with previous years. It was also stated that if we do not act the Commission will do it for us and impose more severe restrictions.

Jacques Pichon, representative of the French fishing industry, said that he found the Spanish proposal acceptable but that certain aspects needed to be reviewed. He said that he was more agreeable with the period of closure proposed by the Irish as it was more tailored to reality of fishery for French fleet. In particular, he showed his concern about the implications and displacement of effort within area VII and asked for a clear definition of the nephrops fleet. Mr. Pichon advocated coordinating and accommodating both proposals under a coherent single document.

Mr. Pichon showed a graphic concerning fishing effort and consumption of quota between fleets in France and Ireland. He suggested not only to propose measures for the closure of the Porcupine bank, but also to consider management implications for other areas as many stocks are involved and management for all areas and species need to be coordinated.

Sean O´Donoghue agreed with Mr. Pichon and Mr. Ó Cinnéide in the need of coordinate the Spanish and Irish proposals. Mr. O´Donoghue expressed his concern about the change in the basis for scientific advice resulting in an overall 50% reduction in TACs. He stated that many scientists have fundamentally disagreed with ICES official advice. He was also worried about the proposed closure in Porcupine bank made by the Commission together with the TCM regulation in case it is finally adopted as this closure might be included there. Finally, he referred to a significant increase in the catches of female Nephrops in the last two years in Porcupine.

Doug Beveridge asked for more consistency in the scientific approach (ensuring that methodologies are similar and duly tested) and an improved procedure for the collection of data, which nowadays is difficult to achieve due to the situation of the Nephrops market.

Rory Campbell affirmed that if Nephrops fishery in Porcupine was closed there might be a significant displacement to other areas already overfished (e.g. IV). Mr. Campbell invited the attendees to think on the consequences of the effort displacement. He also remarked that analysis by FU proved very difficult to do, with several surveys ongoing but not fine tuned.

Gerard O´Flynn highlighted the unreliability of available data. He argued that imposing effort into sub-units in VII is not the best option for viability of the stocks. He also stated that any fishing rules going towards a management by FU would be a step back. In relation to Porcupine closure, he suggested looking at the period and geographical extent of such a closure.

Jacques Pichon insisted that he would like to see, besides accepting a proposal of closure for Porcupine, a written commitment for managing the fleet capacity and the implications for the cod fleet in area VII. He asked to include in the final NWWRAC advice a proposal of limitation of effort or capacity ceilings for VIIfg.

Hugo González thanked Jacques for agreeing with the core terms of the Spanish proposal and manifested that the Spanish delegation would be willing to co-ordinate with the Irish in terms of the temporal period of the closure till end of July. Furthermore, Mr. González proposed to adopt in the NWWRAC proposal the geographical areas comprised in the Spanish proposal and the time of duration proposed by the Irish industry. He clarified that the closure would mean the Nephrops fleet stopping fishing activity for this period in the area proposed and also fishing for fish other species in the area during this time (e.g. hake, monkfish…)

Victor Badiola expressly asked for a review of the impact of this closure by the scientists in a timeframe agreed. The Chairman and all participants agreed to include Mr. Badiola´s proposal in the final NWWRAC advice text.

6. Summary of outcomes and conclusions by the Chairman

Having heard all opinions and taken note of relevant considerations, the Chairman summarized the main conclusions reached at this stage. It was also convened that while analysis by FU was acceptable, it should not be considered as a basis for Area VII management due to seasonality of the abundance for this stock and the flexibility needed in the management of volume of catches and markets.

It was agreed that the Irish and Spanish industry would work on a single compromise text incorporating the main comments and corrections made at this meeting. It was also agreed that the closure in Porcupine would only apply to bottom trawlers and not to other gears such as gillnetters or longliners as it is understood that they do not have incidence on the seabed.

7. Timetable and proposed way forward for a NWWRAC opinion

The NWWRAC Secretariat asked the members to set a clear procedure and precise work timetable as there is only two weeks left to submit the NWWRAC advice.

The Chairman, in agreement with the Secretariat, suggested the following way forward which would allow addressing the key issues to be put forward to STCEF at the shortest time, and to present an alternative proposal of closure for Porcupine Bank. This proposal was agreed by all members and attendees.

Proposed way forward:

- To circulate quickly a compromise paper which reflects the tenor of the discussions at this meeting. It is agreed that the draft compromise paper will include two elements: a) general remarks related to the approach adopted by the Commission in relation to Nephrops stock; and b) alternative proposal on a seasonal closure for Porcupine bank.

- To mention or insert a commitment recognizing that there might be a potential displacement of effort and that the NWWRAC would work on develop measures in 2010 to deal with this effect and do not simply transfer this problem to other areas.

- To ask in the proposal for a review of the impact of the closure of this fishery by scientists in an agreed/given timeframe.

Once the paper is circulated and comments received, the Chairman and Secretariat will reformat and circulate for electronic adoption by the Executive Committee, pursuant to its being submitted to the European Commission, STECF and Member States.

Meeting was adjourned at 11.30 h

ANNEX I. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

NWWRAC FOCUS GROUP MEETING ON NEPHROPS MANAGEMENT EDINBURGH, 3th of NOVEMBER 2009			
NAME	**ORGANISATION**	**COUNTRY**	**STATUS**
FOCUS GROUP MEMBERS			
Lorcan O´Cinnéide	IFPO	IRELAND	Focus Group Chairman
Gerard O´Flynn	IS&WFP	IRELAND	Member
Barrie Deas	NFFO	UNITED KINGDOM	Member
Kevin McDonnell	MNWFA	SCOTLAND – UK	Member
Jacques Pichon	ANOP	FRANCE	Member
André Gueguen	OPOB	FRANCE	Member
Juan Carlos Corrás	PESCAGALICIA-ARPEGA-OBARCO	SPAIN – EU	Member
José Luis Otero	LONJA DE A CORUñA	SPAIN	Member

NWWRAC MEMBERS			
Rory Campbell	Scottish Fishermen Federation	SCOTLAND - UK	NWWRAC Member
Cliff Morrison	AIPCE	UNITED KINGDOM - EU	NWWRAC Member
Joe Maddock	Irish Fishermen Organisation	IRELAND	NWWRAC Member
Sean O´Donoghue	Kyllibegs Fishermen Organisation	IRELAND	NWWRAC Member
Víctor Badiola	OPPAO	SPAIN	NWWRAC Member
Hugo González	ANASOL-ARVI	SPAIN	NWWRAC Member
Eduardo Míguez	EAFPA	SPAIN - EU	NWWRAC Member

OBSERVERS - SECRETARIAT			
Douglas Beveridge	SFP	UK	Observer
Dennis Clark	NFFO	UK	Observer
Ross Skinner	SFO	SCOTLAND – UK	Observer
Alex Rodríguez	NWWRAC Secretariat	EU	Secretariat – rapporteur