MINUTES

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
NORTH WESTERN WATERS REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Erin Room, Dublin Castle

Wednesday, 28th October 2009

09.30 to 13.00

Chairman: André LeBerre
Rapporteurs: Alexandre Rodríguez and Kristel Adriaenssens

1. Welcome and introductions

- Opening speech from the Chairman of the General Assembly:

Mr. André Le Berre, Honorary President of the NWWRAC and GA Chairman, welcomed all participants to the 5th Annual General Assembly of the NWWRAC.

Apologies were noted from Michael Keatinge (BIM), Emiel Brouckaert (Rederscentrale), Jeremy Percy (WFFA), Margaret Downey-Harrington and Peigi Ryder (Mna na Mhara), Robert Stevenson (NESFO), Ian Gatt (SFF), Béatrice Harmel (CRPBN), Dominique Thomas (CME-EOP) and Iwan Ball (WWF). The complete list of participants can be found in Annex I.

In his opening speech, Mr Le Berre referred to the financial problems faced by the NWWRAC and asked the members to assist in looking for solutions in order to safeguard the long term economic viability of the RAC. Furthermore, he addressed the current consultation on the reform of the CFP and stressed that the "human" factor (e.g. safety and security measures onboard, training and decent remuneration for the crews) was somehow missed and had not been taken sufficiently into account in the Commission's Green Paper. Finally, Mr. Le Berre highlighted the issue of inefficiency of the market, which leads to low incomes of first sale prices and undermines the profit of the fishermen.

A transcript of the complete speech of Mr. Le Berre can be found in Annex II.

- Adoption of the Agenda and Minutes of the last Meeting:

The agenda for the meeting was adopted without change.

Similarly, the report of the 4th GA meeting, held in Dublin on November 19th, 2008, was accepted as a true record and was approved without comment.

2. Report on work progress from the NWWRAC Chairman

Mr. Sam Lambourn, Executive Chairman of the NWWRAC, commended the Secretariat team on its work and specially thanked Patricia Comiskey, Executive Secretary until 17th of July 2009, for her valuable contribution to the establishment and the functioning of the NWWRAC, since its creation. He wished Miss Comiskey every success in her future career.

- Overview of the Year 4 work programme

Mr. Lambourn provided an extensive review of the meetings held, actions carried out and advice produced by the NWWRAC in year 4, in fulfilment of the working programme. He also recognised the amount of work and time invested by the members, highlighting the good work achieved in the focus groups on specific technical issues (e.g. LTMP for Northern Hake and VIa Haddock)

- Presentation of the work programme for Year 5

The NWWRAC Chairman proposed a preliminary calendar of the meetings for the last quarter of 2009-2010[1]. He underlined that the main body of work for the RAC during this period will be the CFP reform, stressing that the RAC had an opportunity to make a reasoned and valuable contribution to the chapter on governance. He also mentioned the ongoing consultation procedure on management measures for Nephrops stocks in Areas VI and VII, as a priority area of work and announced the organisation of a Focus Group meeting, to deal with this topic, in early November.

Furthermore, he called upon members to make immediate contact with the Secretariat in order to register their opposition to the Commission's new proposal of Regulation on Technical Conservation Measures. The Chairman advocated that the RAC together with other RACs, support the views contained in a letter to the Commission, issued by the South Western Waters RAC, requesting that the new regulation be postponed and asking for further consultation and engagement with stakeholders. The Chairman stated that the final version of the letter should be agreed, by all RACs and submitted to the Commission and the Member States representatives, in due time, and before the Council of Ministers´ meeting on the 19th of November.

[1] The meetings calendar is available together with the Chairman's presentation at the NWWRAC website: http://www.nwwrac.org/Meetings/Meetings_ENG/Navigation.php?id=351&language=English

Finally Mr. Lambourn provided an overview of the terms of reference of the RAC and suggested priority areas for Focus Group meetings. He asked members to submit topics for Focus Groups to their respective Working Group Chairmen and added that requests for interpretation of agreed Focus Groups should be provided to the Secretariat as soon as possible. The Chairman indicated that the Executive Committee will decide on the topics for Focus Groups and the Schedule of meetings at the Executive Committee meeting in January 2010, in accordance with NWWRAC procedures.

The full content of the presentation from the Chairman is available on the NWWRAC website.

- Debate and questions from the floor:

* Several members and observers intervened and commented on the following topics:

The Commission's representative, Miss Isabelle Viallon, announced the launch of an evaluation, by STECF, of three Long Term Management Plans currently in place. In particular, Miss Viallon stressed that, the review of the sole management plan in the Western Channel will be of particular relevance to the NWWRAC. She indicated that the analysis of the results of these plans will commence in late November and encouraged NWWRAC members to participate in this process.

Brendan Price suggested an analysis of the socio-economic aspects involving fisheries management regulations (e.g. EFF, Marine Strategy, Green Paper, diversification of fishing activities) as topic for consideration, to be discussed separately, in a Focus Group.

Several members pointed out that the Commission often overlooked the NWWRAC opinions and questioned the real influence of the contributions, coming from the RACs, within the decision-making process of the EU. Jim Portus and Jacques Bigot referred, in this context, to advice submitted to the Commission, e.g. LTMP on VIIe Sole.

Luc Corbisier referred to comments made by the representative from the Commission at the NSRAC GA and accepted an approach in favour of regionalisation within the reformed CFP. He suggested considering the possibility of including this subject as part of the work programme.

Jacques Pichon mentioned the NWWRAC Focus Group meeting on global management measures for the Irish Sea, held in Belfast, as a good example of a holistic and integrated approach to a number of inter-related stocks. He suggested that this model might be applied to other areas, such as the Celtic Sea.

Hugo González agreed with the Chairman on the necessity of setting up a Focus Group on Nephrops, without delay. In relation to CFP reform, he addressed the issue of overcapacity and stated that the Commission should set clear objectives in the future Regulation.

Daniel Lefèvre criticized the overcautious application of the precautionary approach in the management of several stocks. He perceived a contradiction between the significant decrease in fishing capacity, in the last decade and the Commission's proposals to reduce TACs and Quotas.

* In reply to these queries, Sam Lambourn made the following remarks:

The NWWRAC will continue to provide strong, evidence-based advice to the Commission on a regular basis, on issues of key interest to our members. It was noted that some of the advice provided by the NWWRAC had been received positively and had been acted upon, by the Commission (e.g. review of administrative structure in the functioning of the RACs, acceptance of review of reference points for Northern Hake before adopting a new Regulation)

The Chairman emphasised that all requests for Focus Groups must be submitted, in writing, to Working Group Chairmen for endorsement, before being sent to the Secretariat for communication to the Executive Committee.

3. Report from the Secretariat on budget and company issues

3.1. Current status of financial Year 4

Dr. Conor Nolan, Executive Secretary of the NWWRAC, presented a budget update for Year 4. The difference between eligible and non eligible expenditure was explained in detail for the benefit of members present. The attention of the General Assembly was drawn to the main budgetary discrepancies in Year 4, which were a decrease in expenditure on meetings, due to the fact that a number of Focus Group meetings, with an assigned budget, did not take place, and an increase in expenditure on operating costs, due to a rise in rental fees and overheads.

The meeting was informed that the co-funding contribution of the Commission to the NWWRAC would reflect these changes in expenditure and by definition would be less than that originally expected (€250,000).

Finally, the GA was advised on the next steps to be taken to complete the financial procedures relating to Year 4 (e.g. auditors´ report).

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3.2. Approved and finalised accounts for financial year 3

The meeting was provided with an overview of the completion of the accounts of Year 3 and of the negotiations and procedures carried out between January and June 2009 to achieve this. The consequences of both the co-financing rule and the rule on the "deficit of receipts" and the manner, in which they influenced the final deficit of € 18,502, were explained. The meeting was informed that the Executive Committee had approved the recovery of the deficit over a period of 2 years, through the allocation of 25 % of the membership fees in Year 5 and a proportional allocation of membership fees in Year 6, sufficient to clear the remaining deficit.

3.3. Approved budget for financial Year 5 (2009 – 2010)

Dr. Nolan provided an overview of the estimated expenditure and income for the current year, Year 5 (2009 -2010). The General Assembly was informed that there were two main areas of change within the budget, compared to the budgets of other years, under operational costs and the non-eligible costs.

Dr. Nolan explained that the secondment by the Spanish Ministry of Environment, Agriculture and Fisheries of the policy and information officer, Alexandre Rodríguez, since the 15th of January 2007 will come to an end on the 31st of December 2009. He thanked the Spanish Ministry on behalf of the Secretariat and the NWWRAC members for its generous support for the salary and travel expenses of Mr. Rodriguez over the last three years. The meeting was informed that, Mr. Rodríguez would be retained by the NWWRAC Secretariat and will become a permanent staff member of the NWWRAC Secretariat from 1ST of January 2010.

The implications of the above change for the budget were a proportionate movement of operational staff costs from non-eligible to eligible expenditure.

Finally, a request was made to the meeting that outstanding membership fees for Year 5 are paid before the end of October 2009.

3.4. Limit on reimbursement costs

Dr Nolan referred to the decision reached at the Executive Committee of 8th of September 2009 on the matter of reimbursement costs. The Executive Committee had instructed the Secretariat to prepare an alternative to the initial proposal of setting a limit on the maximum amount of travel costs at €300, in order to reflect the concerns of NWWRAC members.

In this context, Dr Nolan described the steps taken by the Secretariat team to reduce travel costs such as fixing the meeting venues of the working groups and the Executive Committee in Paris and Madrid[2] and giving advance notification of meeting dates.

Additionally, the meeting was informed that the Secretariat will organise Focus Groups to take place in the most economic and affordable locations for those attending.

Dr Nolan emphasised the importance that the provision of meeting rooms and facilities provided to the RAC and expressed his gratitude to the hosts for providing meeting rooms free of charge.

With regard to travel costs, an alternative proposal restricting travel costs to a maximum limit of €800 and per diems to a maximum of 2 per travel and event, was presented to the meeting.

Members were advised that they held a burden of responsibility to ensure the most economic use of travel funds and were requested to book their flights at the most economical rates, where possible.

It was highlighted that the Secretariat was very aware that some members, travelling from remote areas, had legitimate travel expenses, in excess of €800, depending on circumstances.

The Secretariat proposed that such claims be reviewed at the end of the financial year and should there be a residual surplus in the travel budget that this be used to make further reimbursement on these claims.

The meeting was reminded, however, that all reimbursements are, in principle, subject to budget availability.

Dr Nolan closed his presentation by stating that although the NWWRAC had a reduced budget for the current year, the Secretariat had worked hard to avoid any increase in the membership fee, whilst maintaining a full working programme and servicing the deficit.

At the request of Hugo Gonzalez, the Executive Secretary explained, in detail, the rationale of the new proposal and the origin of the savings arising from the limit fixed for travel and per diem costs.

[2] They have proven to be the most affordable venues for NWWRAC meetings according to an internal survey on costs undertaken in 2008.

The Chairman André Le Berre also referred to the necessity for the provision of meeting rooms at no cost and recalled that other RACs already have these limits to travel expense claims (e.g. €600 for the SWWRAC). He also pointed out that it is sometimes difficult to travel from remote areas. The Chairman suggested that the possibility of having 75 % of each travel costs covered by the NWWRAC be considered in the future.

Mercedes Rodriguez, Hugo González and Bertie Armstrong expressed their support to the new proposal presented by the Secretariat as a prudent way forward.

As no other comments were put forward by the members, the Chairman of the General Assembly proceeded to a vote on the new proposal presented by the Secretariat.
No votes against the proposal were received and the Chairman took note of the unanimous agreement on the accords reached:

- A maximum limit of €800 for members' travel costs for Year 5;
- A maximum limit of 2 per diems per travel event per member in Year 5;
- A redistribution of any remaining travel budget at the end of the financial year to members with travel claims in excess of €800;
- A modification of the NWWRAC's reimbursement rules to reflect these changes.

Finally André Le Berre called upon the membership to respect the deadline of one month after all RAC meetings for the reimbursement of travel costs.

3.5. Report on membership status

The Executive Secretary provided the assembly with a brief overview of the membership status and emphasised that there are three free seats remaining for other interest groups on the Executive Committee. He also underlined the fact that it is essential for the balance, transparency, credibility and function of the NWWRAC to have more NGO's involved.

4. Communications - Forum Website

Alexandre Rodríguez, Executive Assistant - policy and information officer, provided a practical demonstration of the NWWRAC website forum and its features.

Mr. Rodríguez encouraged members to read the user's guide available on the website[3] and to register with the forum without delay, with the aim of starting discussions on the reform of the CFP and exchanging views online.

Jim Portus wondered how the language gap would be dealt with as each member would contribute to the forum in their mother tongue. Alexandre Rodríguez explained that the Secretariat staff, as exclusive forum administrators and moderators, would be monitoring the forum on a regular basis and they could clarify the content of some comments or posts by adding executive summaries, in the required languages. Furthermore, it is envisaged to insert a link, to a number of free translation tools, within the forum.

5. Presentation from the Commission on the review of the functioning of the RAC's

Isabelle Viallon, the Commission's representative at the meeting, highlighted the different aspects of the Commission's review on the functioning of the RACs and identified a set of short-term, medium-term and long-term actions to be carried out by the Commission. She also provided a calendar of the CFP reform. Miss Viallon´s presentation is available at the correspondent meetings section of the NWWRAC website[4]

The Commission representative stressed that NWWRAC members needed to be proactive and available to participate earlier in the scientific consultation procedure. Indeed, she encouraged the RACs to appoint coordinators that might work closely with ICES and Commission in the early preparation of long term management plans. Finally, she announced that a debriefing meeting would take place between the Commission and the Secretariat together with a delegation of members of the NWWRAC. This meeting would be held prior to the NWWRAC Executive Committee meeting in January 2010, and would aim to coordinate and identify priority actions from the work programmes of both the Commission and the NWWRAC.

André Le Berre thanked Isabelle for her presentation and opened the floor for questions.

Alex Rodriguez recalled two pending actions resulting from the Commission's reply to the NWWRAC advice on the functioning of the RACs, received in April 2009. The first point referred to the drafting of a Commission template defining the criteria for evaluation of the advice of the RACs. This was deemed to be a useful tool to enhance transparency and justify the reasons for decisions. The second point was in relation to the request from Member States, to the Commission, on setting guidelines for the financial participation of Member States in the RACs. This would ensure a certain degree of harmonization in relation to the minimum requirements of support provided by Member States to the RACs.

[3] Members Area: http://www.nwwrac.org/Member_Page/Members_ENG/Members_Area.html
[4] Meetings section – GA 2009:
http://www.nwwrac.org/Meetings/Meetings_ENG/Navigation.php?id=351&language=English

It was noted, by Mr Rodriguez, that these questions had already been asked in the coordination meeting between ACFA, the RACs and the Commission, on the 5th October 2009.

Isabelle Viallon replied that a formal template for the evaluation of the quality of advice was not envisaged at this stage as this would be difficult to apply in practice. However, she agreed that there is room for improvement in the detail of the responses, and made a commitment that the Commission would try to tackle all issues and questions addressed by the RACs in the advice provided to the Commission.

With regard to the financial support of the Member States, Miss Viallon indicated that Member States are free to determine their level of support for the RACs and referred to ongoing discussions regarding the framework of the reform of the CFP. She indicated that a proposal from the UK government has been submitted in this regard.

Alex Rodriguez showed his concern on the proliferation of "*emergency procedures*" launched by the Commission in recent times (e.g. proposal of white fish catch composition rules for West of Scotland, management measures for nephrops stocks in areas VI and VII) as this should be an exception to the ordinary consultation period of 8 weeks and posed a serious problem in terms of budget availability and work programme planning.

Isabelle Viallon replied that in some cases such type of consultation procedures could not be avoided as the Commission had to react in due time for the December Council, to scientific revisions of advice based on updated data from vessel surveys. Furthermore, Ms Viallon suggested that RACs should adopt a "fast track" procedure to allow focus groups to be convened, at short notice, to address urgent requests.

In relation to governance and the role of the RACs, the members made the following comments:

Some members expressed their concerns that after the first consultation on the Green Paper on CFP Reform, there will be no opportunity for further additional stakeholder consultation beyond 2009.

Joe Maddock, Jacques Bigot and Daniel Lefèvre expressed their concerns regarding the overlap of common issues between ACFA and the RACs as this increases bureaucracy and deemed the consultation process on the CFP reform and its concept of regionalisation as a possible step forward to improve efficiency, although the role of the RACs should be clarified first.

Barrie Deas pointed out that there appears to be two strands of thought within the Commission regarding the role of the Regional Advisory Councils.

On the one hand there is a very encouraging view, as outlined in the Green Paper, that the Regional Advisory Councils are a success within the current CFP. On the other hand, the RACs are seen as an obstacle to the introduction of new legislative measures and they have been bypassed on issues such as the control regulation or the regulation on technical conservation measures, amongst others. It is a worry that this last perception would discourage members from being proactive and participating in the RACs.

Hugo González also referred to the recent consultation on Area VII nephrops. He expressed his concern that given the very limited time for consultation within the NWWRAC, the current proposal would be adopted unchallenged. Finally he stated that a formal proposal on Area VII Nephrops from the Spanish delegation had already been submitted separately, to the Commission.

The Commission representative took note of all these comments and stated that the NWWRAC opinion for nephrops must be submitted as soon as possible.

6. Update on the review of the CFP

Lorcan O´ Cinnéide, chairperson of the horizontal working group on CFP Reform, highlighted the key points to be addressed at the afternoon session and underlined the importance of the input of the NWWRAC in the process. He commended all present to work jointly to agree common positions on the questions of relevance stated in the Green Paper.

7. Nominations and Elections of Working Group Chairmen, Vice-Chair and Rapporteurs

Alexandre Rodríguez reviewed the current status of the Working Group Chairmen, Vice-Chair and Rapporteurs and proposed a way forward for (re)election of Working Group Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen based on the feedback received at the Executive Committee meeting the 8th of September. He also explained the reasoning why a deputy rapporteur is needed for each Working Group and encouraged those members who wish to volunteer for this position to submit an application of interest so decisions can be made at the next Working Group meetings.

Finally, the agreement reached at the last Executive Committee, in relation to the organisation of Horizontal Working Groups, was reported to the membership.

This presentation is available for consultation in the meetings section of the NWWRAC website.

8. Official closure of the meeting

The Chairman of the General Assembly, André Le Berre, emphasised to the members that the NWWRAC should receive as much financial assistance as necessary for its functioning and thanked BIM, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of the Government of Ireland, the Staff of Dublin Castle, the interpretation team, the Secretariat and all attendees.

The meeting was closed at 13:00.

Annex I. List of members and participating observers

André Le Berre	**General Assembly Chairman**
Isabelle Viallon	DG MARE - European Commission

Fishing sector

Bertie Armstrong
Víctor Badiola
Jacques Bigot
Ted Breslin
Richard Brouzes
Tom Bryan-Brown
Luc Corbisier
Juan Carlos Corrás
Bruno Dachicourt
Barrie Deas
Anton Dekker
Caroline Gamblin
Hugo C. González García
André Gueguen
Sam Lambourn
Daniel Lefèvre
Thierry Leprêtre
Alan Mc Culla
Joe Maddock
Eduardo Míguez
Cliff Morrison
Lorcan O´Cinnéide
Gerard O´Flynn
José Luis Otero González
Jacques Pichon
Jim Portus
Gavin Power
Mercedes Rodríguez Moreda
Jane Sandell
Paul Trebilcock

Other Interest Groups

Alberto Aguilar
Rory Crawford
John Crudden
Sonia Moorey
Brendan Price
John Woodlock

Secretariat

Kristel Adriaenssens
Conor Nolan
Christine O´Connor
Alexandre Rodríguez

Translators (ILS)

Sarah Jane Aberasturi
Azucena Bermúdez
Marie Delumeau
Armella McAllister

Observers

Hélène Syndique	Ministère d'Agriculture et Pêche - France
Simon West	DEFRA – United Kingdom

Annex II. Opening Speech from the President of the General Assembly, Mr. André Le Berre (in french)

Discours d'introduction à l'Assemblée Générale du Conseil Consultatif Régional Eaux Occidentales Septentrionales A DUBLIN le 28 octobre 2009

Monsieur Le Président du Comité Exécutif,
Madame représentante de la Commission Européenne
Mesdames et messieurs les membres du Conseil Consultatif

Très chers collègues,

C'est avec grand plaisir que je vous retrouve aujourd'hui à Dublin pour cette quatrième Assemblée Générale du Conseil Consultatif Régional des Eaux Occidentales Septentrionales (CCR EOS).

Oui c'est un grand plaisir même si l'actualité nous rappelle l'importance des enjeux du moment : une crise économique mondiale, des cours du poisson au plus bas et une réforme de la politique des pêches qui promet des débats difficiles.

Mais avant d'évoquer ces sujets politiques et économiques, je souhaiterais parler de notre Conseil Consultatif et attirer votre attention sur le travail et les efforts menés conjointement par les permanents et les membres du CCR EOS pour surmonter dans le passé les difficultés financières et assurer ainsi au CCR EOS le meilleur fonctionnement possible. Il me paraît évident qu'étant donné l'importance du travail du CCR EOS, il serait souhaitable si vous en êtes d'accord d'aider le CCR EOS à trouver des solutions constructives en vue de pérenniser sa viabilité économique sur le long terme et la réalisation des objectifs définis dans son programme de travail.

J'en profite d'ailleurs pour saluer le travail réalisé par Alexandre, Kristel, Conor et Patricia jusqu'à l'été dernier à la fois pour faire face à une charge toujours croissante de travail et pour leur action afin de réduire les dépenses sans préjudice pour le fonctionnement du CCR EOS. Je pense que la nouvelle organisation du CCR EOS apportera de nouvelles compétences et expertises auprès du CCR EOS ce qui est essentiel pour son avenir. Merci donc à tous et vous avez mon soutien pour la poursuite de ces objectifs. Il convient également de remercier les représentants de la filière et des ONG qui participent assidument au fonctionnement du CCR.

Pour ma part, veuillez m'excuser de m'être fait plus rare ces derniers temps mais j'ai du subir une opération chirurgicale il y a quelques mois.

J'évoquais il y a quelques instants une actualité chargée. Nul doute que nous discuterons aujourd'hui de ces sujets fondamentaux. Si vous le permettez, je n'en évoquerai que deux mais qui, à mes yeux, ont une grande importance. Il s'agit tout d'abord du bilan fait par la Commission dans le Livre Vert de l'actuelle PCP.

Certains d'entre vous ont participé à une conférence organisée par les régions françaises le 29 septembre. Tous ont contesté le bilan jugé catastrophique décrit par le Livre Vert. Je pense que ce bilan, qui est une compilation sans nuance des difficultés et dysfonctionnements rencontrés dans différents Etats Membres, doit faire partie des discussions car le rétablissement de la vérité déterminera les bonnes orientations à prendre dans le cadre de la réforme des pêches.

Je sais aussi que nombre d'entre vous partage le sentiment que la PCP ne prend pas suffisamment en compte la dimension humaine. Je ne parle pas de payer les marins pour mettre leur sac à terre, je parle de confort et de sécurité à bord. Je parle surtout de formation et de rémunération décente.

La question des rémunérations me conduit au deuxième sujet que je souhaite évoquer : la morosité du marché qui affecte les revenus des marins pêcheurs.

La crise économique mondiale affecte les cours des produits de la mer mais elle révèle également les faiblesses et les inégalités dans l'organisation du marché. Comment lutter économiquement contre des produits d'importation dont les conditions de pêche techniques et sociales seraient absolument interdites en Europe ? Comment maintenir l'équilibre financier des entreprises de pêche lorsque des armements y compris en Europe emploient de la main d'œuvre non qualifiée et sous rémunérée ?

La réforme de la Politique Commune des Pêches sur ces questions est l'occasion, si vous en êtes d'accord, de repenser et de consolider l'économie des pêches. Il faudra pour cela aborder certaines réalités avec détermination et sans se voiler la face.

Voilà, je n'irai pas pour l'instant plus loin dans le débat mais nous devons en parler. Je vous remercie de votre attention et je vous souhaite à toutes et à tous une excellente journée.

André LE BERRE
Président de l'Assemblée Générale du CCR Eaux Occidentales Septentrionales