REPORT
North Western Waters Regional Advisory Committee
Working Group 4 – Irish Sea (VIIa)
18th February 2009
14:00-17:00
MMARM - Madrid (Spain)

Chairman: Lorcan O´Cinnéide
Rapporteur: Alexandre Rodríguez[1]

1. Welcome

- Adoption of the agenda: The chairman proposed to include as first point of the agenda for discussion the review of the functioning of the RACs. He noted that this was a cross-cutting issue relevant to all Working Groups and therefore opened to all NWWRAC members. This topic was initially meant to be dealt with at WG3, but due to the lack of time it was agreed that it might better be discussed here. The Chairman proposal was unanimously backed by all attendees.

- Adoption of report from last meeting: The report of the WG4 meeting held in Madrid the 3rd July 2008 was adopted without any comments or amendments.

2. Review of the Functioning of the RACs

Alexandre Rodríguez presented the discussion paper drafted by the Secretariat for consideration and debate among the members[2]. This document was conceived to analyze and respond some of the proposals raised by the Commission on its Communication on the review of the functioning of the RACs, adopted in June 2008. The Secretariat addressed on its paper a number of questions in relation to specific issues of interest such as structure, membership and operational procedures, or input of the RACs to the CFP decision-making process. The aim is to look for amendments or changes in the interpretation of certain provisions contained in the RACs foundational rules (Decision 2004/585/EC as amended by Decision 2007/409/EC).

[1] Acting rapporteur in absence of Alan McCulla.
[2] Discussion paper available in the website:
http://www.nwwrac.org/admin/publication/upload/Discussion_Paper_Review_Functioning_RACs_EN.pdf

The following comments and agreements were reached by the WG4 members:

- Women's networks: Although representatives of the Other Interest Groups clearly stated that vacant seats should be retained for these organizations even if not occupied, it was accepted that Mna Na Mhara might temporarily be included in this category whenever this does not hamper to other legitimate organizations to join and become members of the GA / EX CO in future. The representative of Mna Na Mhara showed no objection to an eventual move of this organization from "Fishing sector" to "Other Interest Groups" but it was understood that it would be up to the General Assembly members to take a final decision on this.

- Procedure of admission of new members: It was agreed that the current rule should be modified in such a way as new members have to be formally accepted by the Executive Committee after a non binding advisory consultation of the Members States.

- Composition of General Assembly: The members supported the proposal of the Commission to apply the current composition rules on the ratio 2:1 in a more flexible manner for the General Assembly. It should be done taking into account the current operational circumstances of each RAC, while ensuring that all legitimate views and interests are respected and taken into account.

- Representation at the Executive Committee: The members are happy with the structure in place and the current number of Executive Committee members (24). Therefore, they supported the second option proposed by the EU Commission but they also considered that each RAC should be entitled to choose the option that is more convenient for them.

- Participation of scientists: The members upheld the proposal of the Commission to broad the scope of the definition of "*scientists*" including other relevant experts (such as economists or sociologists) that might give a positive input in RAC meetings. The members demanded more flexibility in relation to the timing to request scientific participation and the possibility of inviting ICES scientists through the MoU to deal with specific issues within shorter period of notification.

- Level of involvement of Member States: It was agreed that article 7.5 of Decision 2004/585 needs further clarification. A common framework should be drawn by the Commission specifying the level of support that Member States must provide to the RACs (payment of fees, provision of meeting rooms…). This would bring more certainty to the RAC Secretariats when elaborating their budgets.

- Commission financial support (grant agreements): The members strongly advised that RACs should be entitled to extend their period of eligibility of the costs. That means that the Commission should allow flexibility and corrections on overspend or under spend between budget years as it is the case under national company laws.

- Commission financial support (eligible costs): The members supported that Chairman fees would be considered as eligible costs. Furthermore, they agreed to request that the wording in Annex II of the Decision in relation to the rule on "deficit of receipts" is rephrased according to the wording agreed at InterRAC meeting on November 2008.

- Follow up of RAC advice: The members showed their concern about the lack of clarity and detail in some of the responses received from the Commission to NWWRAC advice last year. They supported the initiative of the Commission to set up benchmarks to indicate the quality of RAC advice, but also suggested that a template containing clear guidelines on presentation of advice should be defined for the RACs. Finally, the members noted that they would appreciate regular feedback or reporting from the Commission about how each opinion or advice has been assessed and incorporated into final EC proposals on an individual basis.

Action: It is agreed that the Secretariat will revise the discussion paper to accommodate all the above suggested amendments and present the paper as Draft Opinion to be circulated among all NWWRAC members first, and the Executive Committee later for endorsement. The Opinion will be submitted to the Commission at the end of March.

3. Assessment of TAC and Quotas for 2009

- Cod: The reduction of 25% in TAC without accompanying socio-economic measures was regarded by the fishing industry members as a blunt decision depriving them to exercise their activity and letting many fishermen out of the business… It was also noted that cod recovery plans and regulations are constraining also those vessels neither targeting nor catching cod (below 1.5 % by-catches)

- Haddock: Members were satisfied with the increase in 15%.

- Whiting: Again the reduction of 25% was considered as very disappointing for the members.

- Nephrops: The members wondered why the Commission proposed a 15% cut in TAC when the camera surveys seemed to indicate that this stock was underexploited.

In general for all the above mentioned species, concerns were raised in relation to the accuracy of scientific advice and quality of data and the uncertainty of future management decisions. Scientists should work more closely to the fishing industry to find paths for a sustainable exploitation of the stocks. RAC members expect to know what the Commission objectives are; what is the target number of decommissioned vessels and fleet capacity in tonnage they want to achieve; in summary, where the Commission wants to go.

Proposal of Fisheries-Science Partnership for the Irish Sea

The Chairman gave the floor to Davy Hill, who distributed a discussion paper on behalf of NFFO on the development of the Fisheries-Science Partnership for the Irish Sea. Davy explained to the members that it is necessary for the industry to build collaborative strategies and set in motion initiatives to work closely with scientists to improve quality of data and advice and avoid discarding of more marketable catches as a result of further reductions in TAC in forthcoming years.

The chairman proposes to set up as a matter of urgency a one-day workshop to be held before the end of April with all principal actors being instrumental in this process of review of stock assessments in Irish Sea and efficacy of closures there implemented: industry members and other stakeholders, national administration representatives, scientists, gear technologists, etc.
It was recommended by some members that a reputed scientists (as Chris Darby) might be the workshop leader and assume the task of explaining which data would be needed from the fishing industry (e.g. catches data, gears used and areas of fishing activity…)

The main aim of this workshop would be to reach common grounds of understanding among all participants from different Member States about how to fill the data gaps and achieve a certain degree of coordination and validation on past trials and scientific surveys, as well as and put together common efforts for future ones.

The RAC would act as a facilitator and support help in the organization and diffusion of information of this event but it would be presented of bigger scale and thus outside the scope of the RAC.

Actions:
- It is agreed that the paper submitted by Davy will be circulated among all WG4 members for comments and endorsement to be put forward to the Executive Committee.

- It is agreed that the NWWRAC would act as facilitator in spreading the information related to this meeting (agenda, ToR, background papers…) and send invitations to some representatives to attend. The Executive Committee will be asked to expressly support this meeting.

4. Spurdog management in Irish Sea

This issue was finally not dealt with at the meeting.

5. Update on the Irish Sea Data Enhancement and Discards Project

The chairman briefed to the members that the initiative is still going on but due to budget constraints and crisis of confidence the project is running at low profile. The outcomes of this project will be presented and integrated in the workshop mentioned in agenda item 3.

Action: It is agreed that the chairman will keep the Secretariat updated on any new information and initiatives arisen under this project.

6. Scallop dredging in welsh waters (Jeremy Percy, WFFA)

Following a four fold increase in scallop dredging in close inshore Welsh waters in the Spring of 2008, that raised concerns of both indigenous fishermen and environmental interests, the WFFA conducted an extensive consultation in Wales and beyond with regard to the future management of this activity in Welsh waters.

After extensive consideration of the range of views expressed and in an effort to provide management recommendations to regulators in Wales in support of a minimum level of protection to assuage the concerns originally expressed and at the same time to ensure, as far as possible, that existing traditional and developing scallop fisheries were not unnecessarily restricted, the WFFA, with the agreement and support of the various scallop dredging representatives in Wales, produced a recommendation for the future management of scallop dredging in Welsh inshore waters.

Members considered that the recommendation did not unnecessarily restrict traditional effort on scallops or reduce fishing opportunities to any extent, whilst at the same time providing a sensible and practical level of protection on behalf of wider fishing and other interests.

Further discussions are being held with regulatory bodies in Wales to investigate practical and realistic management options in both the short and long term.

The Recommendation: Close to dredging from Bardsey to Newquay 0 – 6 miles; Newquay Head to Strumble Head 0 – 1.5 miles; Strumble to the South around the coast 0 – 3 mile closure.

Members noted that 70% of the coastline of Wales, and 30% of the Welsh Territorial Sea is presently covered by environmental designations, with more in the pipeline, including extensive Special Areas of Conservation as well as potentially a coherent network of highly protected marine reserves and that it was incumbent upon them to ensure a balanced approach to fisheries management, mindful of the concerns of environmental groups, statutory and otherwise as well as colleagues within the fishing industry.

The Recommendation is an attempt to assuage the concerns of all those with an interest in and a concern for the marine environment whilst at the same time supporting the continuation of traditional scallop dredging activity in appropriate areas.

Due to the lack of action by regulators in time for the next season, the WFFA in agreement with UK scallop interests introduced a voluntary Code of Practice that importantly included a requirement from buyers that scallops were harvested in line with the agreement.

The Welsh Assembly Government has now convened a Scallop Working Group to give consideration to future management options, the WFFA being member of that group.

Action: Jeremy Percy will report WG4 members and the NWWRAC on the results of the Working Group and decisions on management for the fishery in this area, and if the Welsh Government will open to stakeholders a public consultation on this issue.

7. AOB

There are no other businesses.

8. Agreed proposals to put forward to the Executive Committee

- Review on the functioning of the RACs: The Secretariat will revise the discussion paper to accommodate all the above suggested amendments and present the paper as Draft Opinion to be circulated among all NWWRAC members first, and the Executive Committee later for endorsement. The Opinion will be submitted to the Commission at the end of March.

- Assessment on TAC and Quotas for 2009 / Irish Sea fisheries-science partnership:

* The paper submitted by Davy will be circulated among all WG4 members for comments and endorsement to be put forward to the Executive Committee.

* The NWWRAC would act as facilitator in spreading the information related to this meeting (agenda, ToR, background papers…) and send invitations to some representatives to attend. The Executive Committee will be asked to expressly support this meeting.

- Update on the Irish Sea Data Enhancement and Discards project: The WG4 chairman will keep the Secretariat updated on any new information and initiatives arisen under this project.

- Scallop dredging in Welsh waters: Jeremy Percy will report WG4 members and the NWWRAC on the results of the Working Group and decisions on management for this fishery in the area, and if the Welsh Government will open to stakeholders a public consultation on this issue.

ANNEX I. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

First Name	Last Name	Organisation	Status
Armando	Astudillo	DG MARE	European Commission
Iwan	Ball	WWF	Member
Thomas	Bryan-Brown	Manx Fish Producers Organisation	Member
Luc	Corbisier	Stichting voor Duurzame Visserij	Member
John	Crudden	European Anglers Association	Member
Davy	Hill	National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations	Member
Sam	Lambourn	NWWRAC Chairman	NWWRAC Chairman
Joe	Maddock	Irish Fishermen Organisation	Member
Conor	Nolan	BIM	Observer
Lorcan	O´Cinnéide	Irish Federation Producers Organizations (IFPO)	WG4 Chairman
Jeremy	Percy	Welsh Federation of Fishermen´s Association (WFFA)	Member
Brendan	Price	Irish Seal Sanctuary	Member
Alexandre	Rodríguez	NWWRAC Secretariat	Secretariat / Rapporteur
Peigi	Ryder	Mna Na Mara	Observer
Paul	Trebilcock	Cornish FPO	Observer
Michael	Walsh	Irish South & East Fish Producers Organisation (ISEFPO)	Member