

**The North Sea Regional Advisory Council**



**General Assembly  
Boulogne-sur-Mer, France: 10<sup>th</sup> October 2011**

**Seventh Annual Report of the North Sea  
Regional Advisory Council**

## **Seventh Annual Report of the North Sea Regional Advisory Council, October 2011**

The North Sea Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC) was the first Regional Advisory Council to be formed. It held its First General Assembly in Edinburgh in November 2004. This is the annual report on NSRAC activities to the Eighth General Assembly, to be held in Boulogne-sur-Mer on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

### **Seventh General Assembly, Aberdeen, October 21<sup>st</sup> 2010**

The Vice Chair of the General Assembly, Luc Corbisier, opened the Seventh General Assembly of the North Sea Regional Advisory Council in Aberdeen. The open debate on reform of the CFP was nearing its end. There would be another Conference on CFP Reform on the 16<sup>th</sup> November 'Another Future for the Fisheries'. This would provide another opportunity for the NSRAC to influence development. The big question for the future was the role to be played by the RACs.

The new NSRAC Secretariat would take over on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November. Luc Corbisier welcomed Colin Mackenzie, the Chief Executive of Aberdeenshire Council, who introduced the new team. Martin Brebner; the new Executive Secretary, would ensure the delivery of the Work Plan.

Niels Wichmann was nominated as Chair of the ExCom. Michael Park and Christien Absil were nominated as Vice Chairs of the ExCom

Tony Hawkins presented the annual report of the NSRAC. A large number of meetings had been held during the past year and a series of advisory papers and communications sent to the Commission. An important feature of the year had been the Conference on 'Decision making within a Reformed CFP' which had been held in Edinburgh, and which had subsequently influenced the whole debate on reform of the policy.

Three key strategies had been identified for the future of the NSRAC:

- Build external relationships beyond the Commission
- Build legitimacy with the rank-and-file fishing industry
- Re-examine the division of labour among the various NSRAC bodies and members

Over the year work had included:

- Ways of reducing cod mortality, including discussion of catch-quotas
- Concerns over the introduction of the new Omega Net Gauge
- Reform of the CFP – introducing a more regional approach
- Development of a Long Term Management Plan for *Nephrops*
- Revision of the sole and plaice management plan

- New format for ICES advice introducing Maximum Sustainable Yield
- NWWRAC initiative to rectify data deficiencies
- High levels of whiting discards
- Defining Good Environmental Status under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive
- Offshore wind farm developments
- Proposals for Marine Protected Areas in the North Sea
- A wider European approach to the marketing of fish
- Deep Sea Access
- Fishing Opportunities for 2011

A draft Work Plan had been presented to the Boulogne ExCom and would now be followed by the NSRAC over the coming year. The appointment of the new Secretariat and other administrative issues would be negotiated between the ExCom and the Commission over the forthcoming year.

Gifts were presented to Ann Bell, Hugo Andersen and Joyce Walker who were retiring from the NSRAC with best wishes for the future.

### **ExCom Meeting, Aberdeen, October 21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010**

The guest speaker, Michael Nielson of Marine Scotland, gave a presentation on fisheries priorities for the Scottish Government. The RACs had been a success. The Scottish Government was looking for further moves towards devolved decision-making and co-management of the fisheries. Another priority area was marine planning and renewables. The Scottish Government was looking to produce the first draft of a marine plan for Scottish waters by the middle of 2011.

Niels Wichmann was agreed unanimously as Chair of the ExCom. Christien Absil and Michael Park were re-elected unanimously as the two Vice Chairs for the ExCom. Hugo Andersson thanked participants for allowing him to chair the NSRAC for 6 years. He hoped he had contributed greatly to the work of the RAC, but wished to leave while still enjoying the task. It had been right to gather stakeholders together to operate by consensus. In 2012 we hope that there will be a new more important role for the NSRAC. More responsibility for management must be given to fishers and other stakeholders. Niels Wichmann thanked Hugo Andersson, Ann Bell and Joyce Walker for their contribution to the work of the NSRAC.

It was agreed that the Chair and two Vice-Chairs would be the Directors of the NSRAC with an additional Director from Aberdeenshire Council. It was also agreed that the main working groups would now be the Demersal, Spatial Planning and Skagerrak/Kattegat WGs. The current Chairs would be re-appointed to the respective WGs. The overall budget for the forthcoming year was approved. Tony Hawkins was appointed as the NSRAC rapporteur, subject to resolving contractual problems.

The *Nephrops* Management Plan Development Group, led by Michael Park, had completed its visits to fishing ports. A meeting to discuss the management plan had also been held in Denmark and a meeting was planned in the Netherlands. It was agreed that the NSRAC should write to the Commission emphasising that they should wait for completion of plan rather than adopting management measures prematurely which might prejudice the plan. The fishing industry was strongly against the setting of individual TACs for the functional units. The Management Plan for the *Nephrops* Fisheries in the North Sea would be revised before the next ExCom

Ton IJlstra gave a presentation on the FIMPAS (Fisheries Measures in the North Sea) Project, which related to the introduction of new Natura 2000 areas in the North Sea. The NSRAC was concerned about the poor involvement of fishermen and would like to hear more from the project before its conclusions were made final. The NSRAC noted that there would be a further workshop in January on fisheries management options for the Dutch N2000 sites that fishers could attend through application to ICES.

A letter had been received from the Commission acknowledging the NSRAC's latest advice on cod recovery. The Commission acknowledged that there had been uncertainty over the cod assessments and the resultant advice. However, it persisted in its view that effort controls had worked and were responsible for the reduction in fishing mortality on cod. Nevertheless there was recognition that the initiatives taken by the industry had also been effective. The letter proposed that the Commission and NSRAC should work together to resolve the various issues over cod recovery.

It was agreed that the NSRAC would prepare comments for the JNCC on the UK proposal for a SAC on the Dogger Bank.

### **Focus group on Real Time Closures, Aberdeen, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2010**

It had become evident that there was confusion over the establishment of RTCs. A number of problems had emerged especially in relation to the establishment of RTCs by single Member States. Nevertheless, RTCs had encouraged some fishers to adopt cod avoidance measures and to stay well away from areas that had been closed. Norway was now pressing for draconian RTC measures based on their practice in the Barents Sea – where fisheries do not have the same mixed characteristics and diversity as the North Sea fisheries.

It was agreed that as a matter of principle stakeholders should be involved in any discussions on policy with respect to RTCs to ensure that procedures were carefully designed and sensitive to fishers' requirements. The Commission and Member States should consult the NSRAC over the rules to apply to RTCs. In addition Member States that were introducing their own systems of RTCs should consult not only their fishers but also fishers from other Member States who might be affected.

A position paper on RTCs would be drafted.

### **Demersal Working Group, Brussels, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2010**

Barrie Deas was elected unanimously as the Chair of the Demersal WG and Pim Visser as the Vice-Chair.

The NSRAC had replied to the Commission's response to its letter on fishing opportunities for 2011 stressing the positive trends reported for North Sea stocks. The NSRAC letter had also referred to the need to reconsider the cod assessments in the light of new ICES advice.

The NSRAC had received the Commission's response to its most recent letter on whiting discards. The letter failed to answer the criticism that the declining quotas for whiting were resulting in high levels of discarding in areas where whiting were abundant, and that a solution needed to be found to resolve this problem. It was agreed that the NSRAC should proceed to develop its own management plan for whiting.

Comments had been received from members on a draft paper on Maximum Sustainable Yield. It was agreed that the paper would be developed further as advice from the NSRAC.

The NSRAC would join with the NWWRAC in pursuing the suggestion of a regional task force to look at data deficiencies and rectify them. Further discussions would take place with ICES and a letter would be sent to the Commission seeking support for this initiative.

Fisheries Ministers from the UK, Norway and Denmark had met in Aberdeen on the 1<sup>st</sup> October and had called for fundamental changes to fisheries management, including measures taken to reduce discards. Catch quotas were being discussed. The view of the NSRAC on catch quotas that they had to be voluntary; required incentives; should be clearly documented; and should lead to discard reduction.

A focus group had met in Aberdeen on the 21<sup>st</sup> October to discuss Real Time Closures (RTCs). It was agreed that a position paper on RTCs would be prepared for sending to the Commission.

The NSRAC had received a reply from the Commission to its letter on cod recovery. The letter recognised that there was uncertainty over the cod assessments. However it commented that this uncertainty should not be used as an excuse for inaction. Draft comments drawing attention to the fact that reduction in fleet capacity that had preceded the reduction in fishing mortality would be circulated.

A timetable would be prepared for completion of the *Nephrops* plan. The NSRAC had previously agreed that it should write asking the Commission not to take action on *Nephrops*, especially in relation to management of the Functional Units, before the LTMP for *Nephrops* had been completed and submitted.

Concern was expressed that recent changes within DG MARE had major implications for the NSRAC. We no longer had dialogue with the Commission but were engaging in parallel monologues. There was particular concern over the Commission's wish to follow ICES advice, when ICES itself was uncertain of that advice. There was a need to address this issue before the CFP was reformed.

### **Whiting LTMP Development Group, Edinburgh, 19th January 2011**

Michael Park chaired the meeting, which was convened to develop a Long Term Management Plan for whiting. A letter to the Commission from the NSRAC had pointed out that the quality of the scientific assessments for North Sea whiting had

progressively deteriorated. Moreover, a small difference in the interpretation of the ICES advice could lead to an increase rather than the recommended decrease in the TAC for 2011. This issue had been raised at the EU/Norway bilateral meeting where advice had been presented which had subsequently led to an increase in the TAC for whiting.

The NSRAC had concluded that the most sensible solution to the problems with whiting was to develop a long-term management plan for those fisheries catching whiting. One of the main purposes of the plan would be to look at ways of reducing discards and improving yields from the fishery.

To take development of the plan further we would wish to look at the different fisheries catching whiting in areas IV (North Sea) and VIId and examine their particular features. Members were asked to obtain the data from their member state officials

### **Demersal Working Group, Edinburgh, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2011**

It was agreed that a letter should be sent to the Commission seeking greater transparency within the EU/Norway discussions. Although there had been some progress in 2010 there was scope to go still further.

The Cod Recovery Plan had been one of the most significant burdens upon North Sea fisheries. It was now to be reviewed. Points the NSRAC might wish to get across during the course of the scientific re-evaluation of the plan would be:

- the need to recalibrate the TACs for cod;
- adjustments to targets;
- and the nature of any future effort regime.

It was concluded that a NSRAC focus group should be convened to consider the views of participants within the NSRAC.

NSRAC representatives had attended the MIRAC meeting with ICES. There had been discussion of the new format for advice, which featured MSY, the precautionary approach, and the management plan approach. The use of careless language by ICES had been highlighted as a weakness (e.g. a fishery could under the proposed format be described as subject to overfishing but harvested sustainably). RAC representatives had asked for an indicator from ICES of the quality of their advice. Scientists are working on this but it is not an easy task as there is a wide range of factors to take into account.

There was agreement with the NWWRAC that we cannot go forward with 60% of ICES assessment failing to achieve 'analytical' status. Both RACs had sought support from the Commission to establish data task groups, but their approaches had been declined. Both RACs had now met with ICES to discuss this issue and strong agreement had been reached on a way forward. The next step would be to invite ICES and Member States to a meeting to discuss the establishment of regional data task forces.

A meeting of the *Nephrops* LTMP Development Group would be held to refine the draft management plan. One way forward in developing alternative measures for the vulnerable units would be to start with the development of a sustainable fishing plan

for a specific vulnerable unit with the involvement and cooperation of fishermen. It was agreed that there was a need to present strong arguments against individual TACs for the functional units to the November Fisheries Council.

With respect to the development of an LTMP for the whiting fisheries, a meeting had been held in January and a full report produced. One of the conclusions had been that further information was required on those fisheries that caught whiting in each Member State. Information on the discarding of whiting would be especially valuable. It was agreed that the NSRAC should write to the Directors of each of the administrations seeking information on the fisheries catching whiting and the levels of discards occurring in each.

Problems with the management of the shrimp fishery were raised. A focus group might enable the NSRAC to start the process of developing an appropriate management plan.

The flatfish management plan had been evaluated by STECF and a report sent to the Commission. Its current status was uncertain. There was a major problem because of the coupling of plaice with sole.

A draft paper on MSY had been developed from points made at the previous meeting. The paper would be further refined before sending to the Commission.

It was not yet clear what role was envisaged for the RACs under a reformed Common Fisheries Policy.

Discards had recently become the subject of media focus. The Commission had convened a high level meeting for the 1st March. It was agreed that the NSRAC should collate a list of initiatives for reducing discards.

A draft position paper had been produced on Real Time Closures, intended for the Commission and Parliament. This paper would now be completed and sent off.

A further letter on whiting discards would be sent to the Commission.

The NSRAC was brought up to date on the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. There were implications for the preparation of Long Term Management Plans (LTMPs) by the NSRAC.

### **ExCom Meeting, Edinburgh, 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> March 2011**

Carla Montesi from the Commission described its commitment towards substantial reforms to the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The Commission wanted to stop micro managing at the EU political level. General principles would be laid down, targets set for reaching MSY, and harvesting guidance provided. Then Member States and the RACs could work together to achieve the objectives for each regional sea. Specific measures and tools would be decided at the regional seas level. Regionalisation was at the heart of the reforms and the RACs would play a key role. The Commission was looking at ways of giving the RACs more responsibility. Their composition might need to change. Market arrangements also needed to be revised through a new markets policy.

One major challenge was to deal with discards. The Commissioner had stated that she intends to deal with discards under the reforms. On the 1<sup>st</sup> March she had met

Fishery Ministers to discuss how to move towards her aim of achieving a discard ban. However, she recognised that this aim could not be achieved overnight.

A number of management plans were now in place and four of them had been agreed with Norway. ICES had been asked to evaluate these plans. STECF was evaluating the Cod Recovery Plan and together with ICES was setting out a work plan for the evaluation. An important consideration was whether the Cod Recovery Plan needed to be revised. If it did, what were the options?

Representatives of the NSRAC had attended the STECF/ICES joint scoping meeting on evaluation of the Cod Recovery Plan. A programme for the evaluation was being drawn up and the NSRAC would be given the opportunity to participate. Scientists at the meeting had raised a number of questions. They had including issues like whether incentives to fishers had worked, and had effort controls worked. It was agreed that the NSRAC would prepare a paper for the next STECF/ICES joint scoping meeting.

Niels Wichmann, the chairman, emphasised the difficulties the RACs were experiencing in obtaining scientific advice and assistance. With reform of the CFP there would be a stronger need for scientific advice.

On discards there was a good story to tell, to counter media reports. The NSRAC would publicise initiatives already taken by fishers to reduce discards.

Members were reminded to ask their administrations to provide information on the whiting fisheries for the next meeting of the Whiting Development Group

The preparation of a management plan by a brown shrimp focus group was discussed.

A draft Position Paper that set out the NSRAC position on Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) had been prepared. It would be further refined and then sent out.

A draft Position Paper on Real Time Closures had also been prepared and would now be sent to the Commission, Member States, ICES, members of the Fisheries Committee and to Norway

A letter had been drafted which welcomed the increased transparency in EU- Norway negotiations, but now sought a more central role for the NSRAC in future meetings. It was also important that the Commission officials dealing with the negotiations be made aware of the NSRACs interests. It was agreed that the letter would be sent to the Commission.

A draft letter had also been prepared for the Commission stressing that the fishing industry was strongly against the setting of individual Total Allowable Catches (TACs) for *Nephrops* Functional Units in the North Sea. The letter was agreed. It would state that the NSRAC was giving thought to alternatives that retained the benefits of management at the Functional Unit level, but involved the preparation of sustainable plans for vulnerable functional units. The NSRAC would also inform the Commission and Member States that it were preparing a management plan for whiting.

Poul Degnbol, Head of the Advisory Programme at ICES, provided a briefing on the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

It was agreed that the NSRAC would set up Task Forces with the NWWRAC and ICES to identify data deficiencies and attempt to rectify the problems.

It was agreed that there was a lack of contact between the NSRAC and Parliament. The NSRAC needed to address that problem and involve members of the Fisheries Committee in its business.

### **Spatial Planning Working Group, Brussels, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2011**

The purpose of the meeting was to capture and develop NSRAC views on proposals emerging from the FIMPAS process on fishery management measures to meet the conservation objectives for Dutch offshore Natura 2000 sites.

There were three proposals for Dutch N2000 sites; the Frisian Front (designated under the Birds Directive), the Cleaver Bank, and the Dogger Bank (both of the latter designated under the Habitats and Species Directive). The SPWG intended to assemble responses from stakeholders to the emerging management proposals. The FIMPAS Steering Group would then take this feedback into their framework to assist the development of their own final proposals.

An important question was what would happen to the proposals on management measures to come out of FIMPAS and to be implemented under the CFP. Member States had not agreed that they would develop a common management plan. There were responsibilities placed directly on Member States and they had to develop their own management plans for their own sites. It was agreed that the NSRAC had the opportunity to send its comments on the FIMPAS process, and the proposal to develop a coordinated approach to management measures for the Dogger Bank. The Commission saw the NSRAC as being able to influence any Natura 2000 proposals where fisheries measures are being discussed and proposed. The Commission would want to consult the NSRAC as part of its process for deciding on management measures

### **Skagerrak and Kattegat WG, Copenhagen, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2011**

The meeting discussed thoroughly the reasons behind the poor status of the cod in the Kattegat. The consequences of repeated effort reductions were not acceptable. As to closed areas, it was the fear of the meeting that if such areas were a success then they would be prolonged: equally if they were not then they would be prolonged anyway so that they would be a success! DTU Aqua gave a presentation "Assessment and Management for Plaice in the Skagerrak and Kattegat".

Initial discussions took place leading to a proposal for a management plan for plaice. The proposal for a management plan for *Nephrops* in the North Sea was discussed. Those discussions have led to a proposal from the WG that there should be no change to MLS in the Skagerrak/Kattegat.

### **Cod Recovery Focus Group, London, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2011**

The meeting had been convened to prepare a response to the planned review of the Cod Recovery Plan. The ICES/STECF Joint Scoping Meeting in Copenhagen on

February 28th to March 4th had set out terms for the review of management plans, including the Cod Recovery Plan. The evaluation would be backward looking, and would examine how management plans had performed to date. The next meeting of the ICES/STECF WG would take place in Hamburg on June 20-24th and the NSRAC would have the opportunity to prepare a position paper for that meeting.

After full discussion of cod recovery it was agreed that a draft position paper would be prepared to reflect the views expressed. It would be accompanied by the results of a survey of fishermen's experience with the current cod management plan.

### **Nephrops LTMP Development Group, Edinburgh, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011**

The draft version of the LTMP had been taken round the fishing ports and discussed with fishers. As a result, the development group had now been presented with a revised version of the plan, prepared by the rapporteur, for further discussion and amendment. The intention was to present the plan to the industry for further discussion and refinement.

It was agreed that the plan would be further refined and would be sent to the Commission as 'work in progress'. The plan and the covering letter would give emphasis to the difficulties that would arise if TACs were set by the Commission for each functional unit. A key feature of the plan was now the development of sustainable fishing plans for any vulnerable functional units – rather than the setting of individual TACs. A project proposal for the preparation of a draft sustainable fishing plan for the Farne Deeps had been submitted to Defra.

### **Spatial Planning Working Group, London, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2011**

The meeting was convened to discuss the Forewind wind-farm development on the Dogger Bank, and also to follow up on decisions taken at the earlier SPWG meeting in Brussels.

An update was provided on the Forewind Dogger Bank development. The Dogger Bank is the largest of the Round 3 zones granted by the Crown Estate and is 8660km<sup>2</sup> in area. It is intended that 9GW will be generated by 2020 and 13GW by 2023 by means of 2600 5MW turbines. At 13GW the development will provide 10% of the UK's electricity. The area is 125 to 290 km from shore at water depths ranging from 18 – 63 m. Surveys had been conducted and an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) would be prepared following the CEFAS 2004 guidance.

The interests of fishers were discussed in relation to other interests. It was noted that For a major development of this kind a Consultation Report has to be produced and must include a statement of common ground – and a statement of differences. Affected stakeholders could also be invited to submit their own documents.

The FIMPAS project and Forewind had much in common. However, FIMPAS claimed to have much better fishing activity data. The fishing industry might be hit from both sides and attempts should be made to merge the nature conservation and wind-farm requirements to minimise impacts on the fishing industry. There was general agreement that information would need to be shared and made publically available. Forewind were informed that the UK Government had asked ICES for scientific advice on fisheries issues on the UK sector of the Dogger Bank.

There was to be an Intergovernmental Workshop in Copenhagen to discuss the North Sea N2000 sites. However, the NSRAC would not be represented, even as an observer. It was agreed that the NSRAC would forward a list of written questions for that Intergovernmental meeting.

Following a decision at the SPWG meeting on March 23, the NSRAC was committed to forming a small focus group to develop a fisheries management plan for the Dogger Bank. Martin Pastoors and Lisa Faber had described the MASPNOSE project being conducted by the Wageningen Centre for Marine Policy. A full management plan from the NSRAC, taking into account all the developments on the bank, including the Forewind proposal, would not be possible. A traditional NSRAC Position Paper was the way forward. MASPNOSE would be able to help the NSRAC to prepare the main elements of a fisheries management plan for the Dogger Bank.

### **Demersal Working Group, London, 5<sup>th</sup> May 2011**

Lex Vredeveldt, a naval architect from the Dutch measurement standards institute (TNO), reported on further tests with the Omega Gauge, introduced by the Commission Control Agency to improve measurements of mesh sizes. Essentially measurements on synthetic fibrous materials required some pre-stressing to give consistent readings. Uncertainty in the measurements can be reduced by increasing the pre-tension loads and by repeating the measurements several times. The simple measurements currently conducted by inspectors, with one measurement per mesh, did not apply any pre-stressing.

It was agreed that as soon as the TNO report was available the NSRAC would write to the Control Agency and ask whether it intended to review its protocols in the light of these new findings.

A NSRAC Focus Group had met on the 8<sup>th</sup> April to consider the review of the Cod Management Plan. The ICES/STECF Joint Scoping Meeting in Copenhagen in February/March 2011 set out terms for the review of a number of long-term management plans, including the EU Long-term Management Plan for Cod. The NSRAC and other stakeholders had been invited to prepare and submit a report on the performance of the Cod Management Plan that would be included as an annex to the ICES/STECF report. The NSRAC had now drafted a position paper and was gathering information from individual fishing vessels to illustrate the breadth and variation of response to the Cod Management Plan.

A press release had been sent out by the NSRAC, following the campaign in the press over discards, and giving examples of sustainable practices by fishermen. It seemed to have had some influence. The Commission had held a public meeting on discards from which it had been clear that the Commissioner wanted to have a discard ban with a timetable introduced as part of the Reforms to the CFP.

The NSRAC had agreed to collate examples of successful discard reduction projects, fishery by fishery. A number of submissions from different fleets had been received and would now be placed into a common format.

CFP Reform was discussed at length. It was agreed that a focus group meeting would be needed to set out NSRAC views on the reforms.

A meeting had been held with the NWWRAC and ICES on 31<sup>st</sup> March to consider how to rectify those data deficiencies that currently impaired stock assessments. ICES scientists and working group chairs, Member State representatives, and RAC participants had attended the meeting. Momentum on this initiative would be maintained.

The latest draft management plan for *Nephrops* would now be sent to the Commission with a covering letter drawing its attention to the inclusion of sustainable fishing plans as an alternative to individual TACs for the functional units. Newcastle University had been successful in obtaining a grant from DEFRA to prepare a sustainable fishing plan for the Farne Deep. This would serve as a model for the other functional units and would provide the NSRACs with experience in drawing up such plans. It would take the LTMP one stage further forward.

A reminder would be sent out on the information required on the whiting fisheries and whiting discards from each Member State.

A reply had been received from the Commission to the NSRAC Position paper on RTCs. However, it did not satisfactorily deal with how the difficulties experienced with National RTCs might be resolved. It was agreed that the NSRAC would write back to the Commission and would copy the letter to Member States, emphasising the need for cooperation over these closures.

A letter had now been drafted to the three MEPs from the Fisheries Committee designated to liaise with the NSRAC, asking how the NSRAC might work more effectively with them.

### **ExCom Meeting, Paris, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2011**

A report had been prepared that had publicised initiatives taken by fishers to reduce discards. Material had been forwarded to the Secretariat by a majority of members and the report added as an annexe to a new position paper on discards.

A position paper relating to the review of the Cod Recovery Plan had been prepared, commented upon by members, and submitted to the STECF/ICES meeting that had taken place in Hamburg.

Kenneth Patterson from the Commission reported that the Commission's plans for reform of the Common Fisheries Policy were still under discussion. The proposals would be published on July 13<sup>th</sup>. The intention was to introduce measures for the transfer of quotas and fishing rights, which would reduce fishing capacity and reduce discards. More responsibility would be devolved to Member States. The obligation to introduce Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) would be implemented. New arrangements for agreements with Third Party States would be proposed. A new European Fisheries Fund would be announced at the end of November. Revision of technical measures would not take place until after the CFP reforms had been introduced.

Kenneth Patterson also gave a presentation on the current consultation on Fishing Opportunities. The Commission was consulting the sector, the public, and Member States on methods for setting TACs. The Commission would receive scientific advice beginning in June and would prepare TAC proposals beginning in September.

It was agreed that a written response would be prepared from the NSRAC to the Commission's paper on Fishing Opportunities.

On spatial planning, it had been agreed that the NSRAC would accept the task set it by FIMPAS to try and put a fisheries management plan forward for N2000 areas, and the NSRAC had enlisted the help of the MASPNOSE project to facilitate this process. A small Focus Group had met and it had finalised the list of questions for the Intergovernmental meeting. It had also agreed the future tasks and timelines for the preparation of the fisheries management plan. A MASPNOSE-led workshop was then held at Schiphol to agree the format and outline of a management plan for fisheries within the N2000 areas.

There had been no feedback from the Intergovernmental Meeting. In addition, communication from FIMPAS had gone quiet. It was not clear how the NSRAC and FIMPAS processes would now be aligned. FIMPAS had set out to be an integrated process involving the NSRAC. The Commission had said that the NSRAC would have to be consulted and that if it could reach a consensus on a management plan then it would be difficult for the Commission to reject it. However, it was not clear what support or interest there was from Member States in recognising and coordinating with either the NSRAC or FIMPAS.

German officials appreciated the work that had been carried out by the NSRAC but they had not been able to take part in meetings with others until their own internal consultations had been completed. They had now produced a scientific paper that was out for consultation. The German Government was on board for cooperation and would bring its own ideas forward in due course. However, Germany had a system of 10 marine N2000 sites and would like to have a package applying to all of these. A joint management scheme for the Dogger Bank would be welcome, as it would facilitate observance, control and enforcement.

It was agreed that time would be allowed for reflection on the fisheries management plan forward for N2000 areas.

A meeting had taken place last week in Hamburg with STECF and ICES to discuss the retrospective review of the cod management plan. Both the NWWRAC and the NSRAC had submitted papers and these would be incorporated into the final report. The discussions with STECF had been very constructive. It was acknowledged that any reductions in F had taken place before the effort regime had been put in place. The STECF report would now be finalised and sent to the STECF plenary and then to the Commission. It was a backward looking review and its main impact may be to show that the Commission's plan has not been effective. The NSRAC might have a role to play in terms of developing future plans.

A request would be re-submitted to Member States for information on the whiting fisheries. Members were asked to do what they could to obtain the relevant data from their officials as this was holding up the preparation of the whiting management plan.

A grant had now been received from Defra to aid the development of a sustainable fishing plan for the Farne Deeps fishery, and it included funding for holding meetings with fishers.

The planned brown shrimp focus group would be established once it is clear what the different Member States wished to do. The immediate need was for discussion with governments.

The NSRAC had submitted a detailed position paper on MSY to the Commission and had received a response at the end of May. The reply was unsatisfactory. It had not considered the NSRAC position and had ended up by saying that the Commission intends to take the new form of ICES advice, based on MSY, into account in coming forward with its proposals to meet international requirements on MSY, as this reflects the best available science. The Commission wished to discuss and take up these issues through its consultation on Fishing Opportunities.

It was agreed that the Commission letter had not addressed the core issues that the NSRAC had raised. The NSRAC would reply to the points the Commission had now emphasised and raise again the difficulties with mixed fisheries.

A letter had been sent to the Commission by the NSRAC which welcomed the increased transparency in EU- Norway negotiations. It noted that in recent years there had been a progression from these meetings being completely closed to the introduction of plenary sessions open to a wide range of stakeholders. A more central role was now sought by the NSRAC.

The Commission had replied proposing that each RAC should in the future nominate three representatives to assist with the consultations. Those representatives should not just be fishers but should include NGOs and representatives of civil society. The Commission was seeking a joint response from the Pelagic RAC, Long Distance RAC and the NSRAC. The general consensus within the NSRAC was that it should remain with the current position, where all organisations with an interest were allowed to attend the negotiations and could be consulted by the EU delegation. The other RACs would be consulted and a decision reached at the next ExCom meeting in Boulogne.

A draft letter addressing the stakeholder concerns on the outcome and process of consultation on the proposal to site a Natura 2000 area on the Klaverbank would be sent from the Chair of NSRAC to Ton IJlstra as head of the FIMPAS Steering Group.

It was proposed that members of the ExCom should assist towards writing off the NSRAC financial deficit.

Participation in the North Sea Stock Survey for 2011 was approved.

### **Skagerrak and Kattegat WG, Copenhagen, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011**

The meeting analyzed and discussed the relevant advices from ICES. The work leading to the current proposal for a management plan for plaice continued as well as discussions on the management plan for *Nephrops* in the Skagerrak and Kattegat. DTU Aqua gave a talk on "Sustainable prawn fisheries in the Skagerrak".

### **Demersal Working Group, Schiphol, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2011**

There had been no reply from the Control Agency or the Commission to the NSRAC correspondence on the Omega Gauge and the attached TNO report on the operation of the gauge. We would send them a reminder, seeking a response.

It was agreed that the NSRAC would prepare a short draft paper on cod management, condensing the points made in the ICES/STECF report and raising key points of concern to the NSRAC; for discussion at the November Demersal WG.

The NSRAC response to the Commission on fishing opportunities for 2012 had been completed and sent off. It had been especially critical of the Commission's proposal that data deficient stocks should have their TACs cut by 25%. The NSRAC would prepare a further paper on Fishing Opportunities for 2012 once more was known about the Commission's intentions. This topic would be discussed again at the November Demersal WG

The NSRAC would invite other RACs to join it in organising a conference on the Management of Mixed Fisheries, to be held in January. A steering group would be formed to take this initiative forward.

The NSRAC would prepare a forward-looking paper on discards for discussion at the next Demersal WG.

An unsatisfactory reply had been received from the Commission in response to the NSRAC Position Paper on MSY. A letter in reply had been produced, circulated to members for approval by written procedures, agreed, and sent to the Commission.

Steve Mackinson of CEFAS gave a presentation on the GAP2 project that had just started. It involved scientists working with stakeholders to improve management and governance of fisheries and connected science to the stakeholders and to policy. It was based on a series of case studies. The project would make a particular contribution to the development of LTMPs by the RACs.

The NSRAC would write to the Director of each fishery administration requesting data on the whiting fisheries.

A Focus Group would meet on 4<sup>th</sup> October to discuss management of the brown shrimp fishery. IMARES would present an ecosystem approach for the fishery.

A LTMP for saithe in the Skagerrak would be presented to the next ExCom

The NSRAC would invite Dominic Rihan to address the next Demersal WG on the subject of changes to the Technical Conservation Regulation in the light of CFP Reform.

Discussion of the Court of Auditor's Report on Fleet Overcapacity would take place at the next ExCom or Demersal WG.

### **Skagerrak/Kattegat Working Group, Skagen, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2011**

The meeting again discussed the reasons behind the poor status of cod in the Kattegat. It was agreed that a paper would be produced explaining the WG's view upon this and that this paper would be given at the evaluation of the closed areas meeting taking place at the beginning of 2012. It was decided to propose a management plan for plaice in the Skagerrak to the ExCom in October. It was also decided to continue work on *Nephrops* and the proposed management plan and that the result would be presented to ExCom in October.

## **Position and Advice Papers and other accomplishments during the year**

Annual Work Plan of the NSRAC: October 2010

Letter to the Director General on the Cod Recovery Plan: October 2010.

Comments to the UK JNCC on the UK proposal for a SAC on the Dogger Bank: October 2010

Press release on discards, following the campaign in the press over discards, giving examples of sustainable practices by fishermen: February 2011

Position Paper to Commission on Real Time Closures: March 2011

Position Paper to Commission on Maximum Sustainable Yield: March 2011

Further letter on whiting discards: March 2011

Establishment of Regional Task Forces with NWWRAC and ICES to look at data deficiencies and rectify them

Letter sent to the Commission seeking greater transparency within the EU/Norway discussions and a more central role for the RACs: April 2011

A list of written questions were forwarded to the Intergovernmental Workshop on Natura 2000 sites in the North Sea: April 2011

Collation of examples of successful discard reduction projects, fishery by fishery: May 2011

Grant obtained from DEFRA by Newcastle University to prepare a Sustainable Fishing Plan for the Farne Deeps: May 2011

A Management Plan for the *Nephrops* Fisheries in the North Sea was revised throughout the year. It was sent to the Commission as work in progress, together with a covering letter emphasising that TACs for individual functional units would jeopardise the plan: May 2011

Position Paper to STECF/ICES joint scoping meeting on evaluation of the Cod Recovery Plan, accompanied by the results of a survey of fishermen's experience with the current cod management plan. The report was subsequently included as an annex to the ICES/STECF report: June 2011

Letter to the three MEPs from the Fisheries Committee designated to liaise with the NSRAC, asking how we might work more effectively with them: June 2011

A MASPNOSE-led workshop produced a draft format and outline of a management plan for fisheries within N2000 areas: June 2011

Letter addressing stakeholder concerns on the outcome and process of consultation on the proposal to site a Natura 2000 area on the Klaverbank to Ton IJlstra as head of the FIMPAS Steering Group: July 2011

North Sea Stock Survey began: July 2011

Position Paper on Commission's Paper on Fishing Opportunities: July 2011

Letter sent to the Commission, copied to the Control Agency, asking whether it intended to review its protocols in the light of the new findings contained within a new TNO report on the Omega gauge: July 2011

Reply to the Commission on its reply to the NSRAC Position paper on Maximum Sustainable Yield: August 2011

A Brown Shrimp Focus Group was established to prepare a management plan for the shrimp fisheries: October 2011

Preparation began on a management plan for plaice in the Skagerrak

Work began on the planning of a conference on the Management of Mixed Fisheries, to be held in January 2012

## **Membership of the Executive Committee of the North Sea Regional Advisory Council (October 2011)**

### Fisheries sector

Danish Fishermen's Association – Svend-Erik Andersen, Kenn Skau Fischer;  
Dutch Fishing Industry – Pim Visser, Paula den Hartog  
Scottish Fishermen's Federation - Michael Park  
National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations - Barrie Deas  
Rederscentrale, Belgium – Emiel Brouckhaert  
Deutscher Fischerei Verband; Peter Breckling  
Swedish Fishermen's Federation - Henrik Svenberg  
Comité National des Pêches Maritimes et des Elevages Marins – Pierre-Georges Dachicourt  
Union des Armateurs à la Pêche de France - Patrice Leduc  
Polish North Atlantic Producers Association - Jarek Zielinski  
European Organisation for Fish Traders - Guus Pastoor  
European Association of Fishing Ports and Auctions – Johan van de Steene  
European Transport Worker's Federation - Karsten Kristensen

### Other interests

Seas at Risk - Christien Absil  
World Wide Fund for Nature - Giles Bartlett  
BirdLife International - Euan Dunn  
European Anglers' Alliance - Jan Willem Wijnstroom  
North Sea Women's Network – Annemiek Bais-Rienstra  
European Bureau for Conservation & Development – Arianna Broggiato  
EUCC -The Coastal Union – Ate Oostra

Chairman      Niels Wichmann

Secretary     Martin Brebner  
Rapporteur    Anthony Hawkins