

Suggestions for small-scale research projects linked to evaluation of the Cod Recovery Plan (CRP)

The North Sea Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC) is in a unique position to support in-depth research on the likely impacts of changes to fisheries policies and management regimes. The membership of the NSRAC could potentially provide access to all parts of the fishing industry around the North Sea, which would enable researchers to explore a wide range of perceptions and likely behavioural changes in response to alternative management plans. The value of this type of in-depth qualitative research is enhanced understanding of the rationale driving the actions of fishing vessel operators and owners, and others in the marketing and distribution chain. Improved understanding of likely behavioural change can inform policy makers of the effectiveness of proposed changes to policy or management regimes.

Four alternative projects are suggested below. Each of these is based on a qualitative approach to research, and is focused on developing a deeper understanding of issues facing vessel owners/operators in the countries accessing the North Sea. The research would explore the factors affecting behavioural change, and the perceptions and understanding of fishers. It would allow for analysis and comparison between:

- vessels operating in different parts of the North Sea
- vessels operating with different gear
- vessels from different countries around the North Sea
- ownership categories/types
- the effect of marketing and distribution systems.

In each case the approach suggested is a mix of face-to-face interviews, supported by telephone interviews. In our experience face-to-face interviews enable the development of trust between interviewer and respondent which results in a deeper level of information exchange. The face-to-face interview enables a wide range of follow-up questions and the opportunity to explore the full range of factors affecting fishing and business decisions. We also suggest combining a small number of face-to-face interviews with slightly larger samples of telephone interviews which helps to validate the findings from the in-depth studies, and enables a wider range of fishers to be included in the study.

Although face-to-face interviews are resource intensive (and thus samples tend to be small) we find them invaluable in providing deep understanding of issues that cannot be obtained in any other way. For example, a recent study carried out by CCRI on the social impacts of inshore fishing (Defra 2010) used in-depth interviews to develop a new understanding of the relationship between inshore fishermen and the local communities in which they operate.

The projects proposed here imply the need either for interpreters (to provide translation), or working in co-ordination with other research organisations in the countries accessing the North Sea in order to overcome language barriers.

The four suggested projects are:

1. Reaction to alternative action plans

- a. Exploration of alternative approaches to achieving the CRP. A range of alternatives could be described and examined, for example: increased effort restrictions; removal of effort restrictions; catch quotas; fully documented approaches; ban on discards and landing all catch; stronger links to markets for by-catch; changes to composition rules. The project would explore implementation issues and the likely behavioural change from different implementation regimes (e.g. imposition of catch quotas and monitoring requirements) across vessels from the different countries accessing the North Sea.
- b. The project could explore not just likely behavioural change in response to actions (e.g. fully documented fisheries) but also the demands made on fishers, and the impact on costs. It also offers the opportunity to explore potential benefits in the form of links to certification bodies and the potential benefits of traceability in marketing fish and fish products (likely to become more important in future). Interviews could also be conducted with relevant stakeholders in the supply chain to explore potential market advantages of fully documented fisheries. The NSRAC is in a unique position to support this type of research due to its membership and extensive links with all aspects of the industry.
- c. The approach would be a small number of face-to-face interviews of selected fishers (most likely to include a range of vessel sizes and gear types), based in different countries, and followed up by telephone interviews to validate findings.
- d. Face-to-face interviews will increase the depth of understanding of the way in which alternative actions might impact vessels, and likely changes in behaviour on the part of vessels and owners/operators.

2. Cod avoidance: - what is really occurring and factors influencing activities

- a. The fisher survey in May-June 2011 identified that cod avoidance action was being taken by vessels in different parts of the North Sea, but did not provide any sense of the extent to which avoidance was occurring and whether more in fact could be done.
- b. This project could explore avoidance measures in more detail, and the factors influencing when avoidance takes place, how much avoidance occurs, and the type of avoidance. It could also examine the financial effects of different avoidance measures at the level of the individual vessel and throw light on the interplay between business decisions and fishing activity in the different countries.
- c. One approach could be a combined face-to-face interview/telephone interview approach with representative samples from each country represented in the NSRAC. A small number of in-depth face-to-face interviews with selected fishers, followed by a larger sample of telephone interviews to pick up on key themes and validate findings from the in-depth interviews.

3. Continuation of work carried out in May-June 2011.

- a. This would simply be a continuation of the existing survey applied to a larger sample of vessel owners/operators in each of the member states surrounding the North Sea. In the previous study (May-June 2011) the sample size was limited by time constraints.
- b. Face-to-face interviews could provide deeper understanding to issues of economic impact, avoidance measures and perceptions of the current state of stocks. Findings would be supported by some additional telephone interviews.

4. Economic analysis at the level of the individual vessel

- a. There are suggestions that vessels are being impacted financially by the current Cod Recovery Plan yet limited information exists on the economic impacts of current TAC and effort restrictions at the level of the individual vessel. The recent fisher survey for example suggested some boats had improved their financial position (through being able to buy quota and days at sea) while others were worse off. There were also suggestions that owners/operators were delaying or avoiding investment in new equipment, laying off crew/employing foreign crew, and finding it increasingly difficult to make business decisions for the future.
- b. A thorough exploration of financial aspects of vessels and the influence of the current CRP among a representative range of vessels would deepen understanding of the impacts of specific types of action (e.g. quota, effort restrictions, technological measures, etc.). A new publication from the New Economics Foundation (nef) suggests that trawlers have a net negative impact on the societal value of the cod fishery. This report appears to make a limited study of factors influencing fishing for Cod in the North Sea - and economic data used in the study appears to have come from aggregate data held by the European Commission.
- c. The approach taken would be in-depth interviews with a small sample of fishing vessels owners/operators from different countries. Respondents would not be identified in any way except by size category of vessel. This is clearly a sensitive area in which to work and assurances would have to be given to ensure support.

John Powell
CCRI
11 October 2011