

Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council (BSRAC)
Demersal Working Group Meeting
Sea Fisheries Institute, Gdynia, 18th March 2009

Chair: Michael Andersen

Rapporteur: Sally Clink

At this meeting there were 38 participants from 4 BS RAC Member States. Two representatives from the European Commission also took part, as well as scientists and researchers from scientific establishments around the Baltic Sea.

1. Welcome, apologies, presentation

The chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. There was a *tour de table*. There were apologies from Niki Sporrang, Fisheries Secretariat. A participants' list is attached.

2. Presentation and discussion of scientific projects

- **UNCOVER**

Doug Wilson from Innovative Fisheries Management explained the background to the 4-year project, which looks into how decisions on recovery plans are made. He made a Power Point presentation. He was visiting the RACs to discuss what the role of the RACs should be in this decision-making process. RAC documentation is also included in the study. His aim was to interview 5 - 7 BS RAC members. There was a *tour de table* to establish who was willing to participate in this process. A representative from the fishing industry and from the NGOs said they were willing to help.

- **RESTOCK (Stock enhancement)**

Josianne Støttrup from DTU Aqua gave a Power Point presentation of this EU financed project, which started in 2005 and which draws together competences from restocking, aquaculture and Baltic ecology. Conclusions from the first part of the study have shown i.a. that there is potential for re-stocking the eastern Baltic cod and that it is economically viable. A continuation of the project, which is subject to funding, could enable more international cooperation, a look at restocking potential and the carrying out of stocking scenarios under changing environmental conditions. Involvement of the BS RAC could enable closer cooperation with fishers and managers, involvement with recovery plans or management plans for this stock, and involvement of other countries around the Baltic. The WG discussed scientific aspects of the project with respect to the survival rate of the stock and stock development, as well as interaction with indigenous cod stocks and other species in the Baltic. The question was raised as to whether there could be potential

economic benefits for the fishers. There was general support from the WG for the project. It was agreed to write a letter of support to the project and send it to Baltic 2020. This letter of support could be put to the ExCom in May for approval. DTU Aqua could take contact to Baltic 2020 with a view to organising a meeting.

3. Selectivity in the demersal fishing gears in the Baltic area

Vesa Tschernij, Iconex, gave an historical overview of the development of the BACOMA gear. The development took into account cod survival, variations in selectivity and the need to find an appropriate mesh size and design. He showed films to demonstrate the working of the BACOMA gear and the practical work involved with vessels of different sizes in testing the gear. The aim now was to make a design which is incorporated with the trawl so that it will not interfere with the catching process. A longer panel in the net could improve selectivity, but care must be taken not to affect the performance of the trawl in terms of stability.

Piotr Nowakowski from the western Pomeranian University of Technology (ZUT) gave a presentation of the research work done to test the BACOMA and T90: “Project of Physical and Selectivity features of gadoid cod-ends of BACOMA and T90 type and ways of improving selectivity.” The findings from the research were that BACOMA and T90 have almost the same selectivity, despite differences in mesh size. There was general satisfaction with the catches in the nets, but there were concerns about the survival rates of the fish that escape.

Krzysztof Berest from the western Pomeranian University of Technology (ZUT) supplemented the presentation with a film which gave a visual account of the trials carried out and the use of sleeves to demonstrate the survival rates of the fish.

Eskild Kirkegaard, DTU Aqua, gave a Power Point presentation on Baltic Sea Fisheries Selective fishing and Discards. He put forward reasons why it was desirable to do further work on selectivity. He gave figures showing the yield and spawning stock biomass for cod in both the western Baltic and eastern Baltic. He provided figures to show that by reducing fishing mortality by 50%, combined with the selectivity parameter of avoiding catches of fish 1 –3 years old, yields and spawning stock biomass could be increased for both eastern and western Baltic cod. His conclusion was that although the main issue is fishing mortality, gains could be made by improving selectivity.

There was a long and extensive discussion of the different gears available to fish cod and the possible ways forward to ensure an improvement of selectivity. Mortality was also a subject raised by some members in connection with the escape of fish from the nets during hauling. Other technical measures such as mesh size were discussed, as well as the current discard policy in the EU. The discussion focused on what steps the BS RAC should take to look at selectivity, so that all countries around the Baltic were involved. The Sea Fisheries Institute (MIR) was willing to participate in any project on selectivity. The discussions and suggestions had short-term and long-term perspectives.

The Commission representatives explained that they were awaiting the results from their request to ICES to look into the selectivity in the cod fisheries before deciding on how to proceed in general with selectivity. However, they were keen to have a discussion with the BS RAC on selectivity and welcomed proposals and recommendations from the RAC. They were happy with the discussions today. Discussions could also include other factors such as mesh size.

It was discussed whether to take an approach, which could consist of several steps. A suggestion was put forward to take one immediate, short-term step of trying out an extension of the BACOMA window, followed by a more long-term investigation into selectivity. This led to a discussion of the current regulation on technical measures for the Baltic and the feasibility of making any amendments to it. A Commission representative pointed out that the technical measures regulation for the Baltic was recent (2005), so a major overhaul was not envisaged, but it may require amending or adjusting given the change in population dynamics of the cod stocks. She signalled that they would be willing to look into the legal implications of an extension of the BACOMA in connection with the Regulation. Some members expressed concerns about the stability of the BACOMA if it were extended.

Another suggestion was to bring scientists and fishers together to look at a possible revision of BACOMA and T90. In this connection the WG was reminded of the decision taken at the recent ExCom meeting in Tallinn to put together a project with the aim of considering a review of the selectivity of the gear in the cod fishery and to produce a report from this work. This would have a longer time-scale.

No decisions on selectivity were taken at the WG. It was agreed that there was a need for further reflection on selectivity, and the discussions from the WG would be referred to the ExCom.

4. Commission's discard policy

This point was not dealt with due to lack of time.

5. Outstanding issues

- **- 8% rule**

The chair pointed out that the BS RAC has made a recommendation on 8% and would be keeping to that.

- – **compulsory landings**
- – **flexibility**

A question was asked about the derogation from the 220 mm mesh size. A Commission representative replied that they had not yet got all the information they required, and that they would be taking a step-by-step approach to this.

6. Preparation for the BS RAC Science Workshop in May

An update was given on the planning and contents of the Science Workshop. The invitation has already been sent out.

7. Report from the ICES benchmarking workshop (16th-23rd January 2009)

The chair explained that for the cod stocks in the Baltic a very thorough investigation was carried out. For western Baltic cod use was made of a new assessment method developed by DTU Aqua and which incorporated information on landings. The outcome of the workshop was that scientists perceived the western cod stock to be in better condition. This will be measured against the regular ICES assessment at the end of April. For the eastern cod stock it was decided not to use the new assessment method. A member of the WG asked for an ICES representative to come to the ExCom in order to explain the methodology chosen for this benchmarking and to explain how the assessment has been done. The chair pointed out that this will also be one of the issues for the forthcoming Science Workshop.

8. Report from the ICES workshop on management plan evaluation (28th-30th January 2009)

The chair explained that the focus of this meeting was on how to evaluate management plans, and which criteria should be used. The question was also what to do with a management plan which has not been evaluated by ICES.

There was a presentation by Grzegorz Szomborg of ZRP Ustka. He presented a report which showed that the biomass of fish stocks was not calculated in the correct way. The report based its findings on landings of cod. He expressed his concern about the cod stocks. He gave an account of his report, which he gave to the chair of the WG and hoped that it could be taken into account when the BS RAC considered forthcoming scientific advice.

9. Management without forecasts (Commission meeting 13th February 2009)

The chair explained that the result of this meeting was a request to ICES. There are indications that if there is a CPUE series of data indicating an increase in the stock, then the TAC could be increased by 15%, and vice-verse in the case of the opposite. If there are no indications, then there could be a roll-over.

10. AOB

It was agreed to hold the next WG after the ExCom in May. A date was not decided.