

**Report from the Focus Group meeting Pelagic RAC and BS RAC
Copenhagen Monday 18th May 2009**

Chair: Ryszard Malik

Rapporteur: Sally Clink

Introduction

Ryszard Malik, chair of BS RAC Pelagic WG, chaired the meeting.

There were apologies from Pehr Eriksson (Swedish Fishermen's Association) and Søren Eliassen (Innovative Fisheries Management). A participants' list is attached.

Ryszard Malik welcomed everybody, and pointed out that according to the Council decision establishing the RACs, RACs should work together on an issue of common interest (jf. Article 8, Council Decision 19 July 2004 (2004/585/EC)). He did not know if this would lead to the establishment of a permanent focus group between the two RACs.

It was pointed out that the timing of the advice from ICES for the herring (late May for the Baltic herring and end of June for North Sea herring) made it difficult to coordinate a response from the two RACs.

There were no amendments to the agenda, but it was clarified that JAKFISH/GAP would be presented by Clara Ulrich Rescan (DTUAqua) later during the day and, if there was time, there would be a presentation on the EU DG MARE study "Economic and social impacts of the proposed scenarios for a long term management plan for Baltic pelagic fisheries" by Sten Sverdrup-Jensen (Innovative Fisheries Management).

With respect to the advice on pelagics in the management of fish stocks in the Baltic, it was agreed that it was good to have Clara Ulrich from DTU Aqua present, so she could provide scientific input.

Areas of cooperation between the two RACs.

Ryszard Malik said this was an important meeting. The aim was not to talk about figures, but to have an initial discussion. It was also important to establish a working practice: should discussions from the Focus Group go to the Pelagic WG, and then to the ExCom, or should the Focus Group be directly linked to the ExCom?

The goal was to achieve stability in the fishery, but since there was a lack of scientific data, and a large part of the Baltic Sea was involved, it was important to take the right steps.

How to proceed with the scientific advice from ICES

Regrets were expressed about the timing of the advice for the stocks concerning the respective RACs. It would be a positive thing in terms of cooperation between the two RACs if the timing of the ICES advice for the North Sea and for the Baltic coincided.

This gave rise to a more general discussion about the observations and perceptions from the fishermen with respect to the state of the stocks, the year classes and recruitment compared to what the scientists reported. There was agreement amongst the fisheries representatives that over the last few years, the behaviour of the fish had changed, and there had been historical changes in fishing patterns, and the scientists have not been able to follow this. Some participants gave examples of catch trends and patterns in the herring and sprat fisheries in the Baltic and Skagerrak/Kattegat. Several made the point that it was important for a closer cooperation between the scientists and the fishermen. The representative from DTU Aqua agreed that for many stocks there were different perceptions between the fishermen and the scientists. The scientists were aware of the limitations of their surveys. She gave two examples of the way things could be improved:

- Better co-operation with the industry by incorporating fishermen's data – e.g. sole in Area IIIa, and the North Sea fishermen's survey where fishermen supply information through a questionnaire.
- Becoming less dependent on year-to-year management plans and moving towards long-term management plans with no more than a 15%-20% variation per year.

There was common agreement that it was important to discuss the scientific assessments from ICES by contributing with data from the fishermen and to participate in the management plans so as to avoid big variations in catch possibilities.

There was also agreement on the need to improve cooperation with ICES, whilst at the same time influencing them in a positive way. It was generally felt that there was more openness on the part of ICES, and that ICES representatives were coming more to the RAC meetings.

It was agreed that a common position between the Pelagic RAC and BS RAC would put the RACs in a better position when discussing with ICES.

Distribution of the resources between the Baltic and the North Sea

The discussion on the allocation of resources was hypothetical, given the absence of the latest advice. The aim of today's meeting was not to come forward with actual proposals for alternative allocations. Some wondered whether the availability of more information on catches would affect the allocation principle. For example, was there a basis for a bigger allocation in the Skagerrak than for the Baltic? At present it was agreed by the Focus Group that the 50-50 allocation remained a political decision and that ICES will in its advice respond in the appropriate way to the question as to how to exploit the Western Baltic herring. The group agreed for the time being to keep to the 50-50 principle, until the advice becomes available, or until the RACs saw a reason for changing it.

Presentation of management plans

Clara Ulrich was invited to give a presentation of management plans and the background to the request from the Commission to ICES on a management plan for herring in Division IIIa and western Baltic.

She explained that given the frustrations that all felt about the present situation of fisheries management, the idea of creating a robust long-term (3/5 year) management plan to support a change in the stocks could be a good alternative. She explained the three parameters to management plans:

A: a long-term objective: what do we want for the stock?

B: a year-to-year variation in the TAC, which is acceptable to the fishermen

C: the minimum acceptable: to do what is necessary to ensure that the stock does not fall below the necessary biomass.

In the case of herring in the Baltic, the recommendation put forward by ICES is:

A: 0.25

B: 15%

C: 110,000 tonnes.

She gave an account of the projections carried out by scientists in order to predict what the stock assessment will be like: what could be the biomass and Maximum Sustainable Yield and catches for the coming years.

This gave rise to an exchange of views and questions. The inter-relationship between the three parameters was discussed in terms of what it would mean in terms of catch possibilities for herring. There was a discussion of the two factors recruitment and spawning stock biomass and the implications that they had on the fishing possibilities for herring.

It was agreed that there was a need to take a long-term approach. It was also important to take into account both the research done by scientists and the direct experience from the fishermen.

JAKFISH/GAP

Clara Ulrich Rescan gave a power point presentation of the proposed collaboration with the RACs through JAKFISH/GAP. The JAKFISH project runs from 2008 –2011. Its overall objective is a move from the top-down process by the Commission and ICES towards more involvement by stakeholders. It aims to investigate the roles that scientists play in helping to formulate policies. It also looks at governance: to enable policy decisions to address uncertainty and complexity based on research and with the participation of stakeholders. She gave an illustration of the work done so far and the first participatory modelling steps that have been taken.

There was a brief discussion on this work. No one was opposed to a co-operation with JAKFISH, but it was important to find out how to work with the DTU Aqua team and how to involve the fishermen.

Clara Ulrich handed out copies of the Good Practice Guide to Participatory research between fisheries stakeholders and scientists. This can be downloaded from the following link:

<http://www.gap1.eu/Downloads/D1. GAP Good Practice Guide.pdf>

Socio-Economic Study

Sten Sverdrup-Jensen from IFM had prepared a short presentation on the socio-economic impacts of a long-term management plan for Baltic pelagic fisheries. Due to lack of time this was not given, but the power point presentation is attached to these minutes.

Ryszard Malik concluded by saying that the BS RAC Pelagic WG would be held on Monday 15th May in Copenhagen. Members of the Pelagic RAC were welcome, as were DTU Aqua and IFM.