

Meeting report
Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council
General Assembly
Klaipeda, 11th May 2010
Honorary Chairman: Steve Karnicki
Rapporteur: Sally Clink

What was decided at this meeting:

The General Assembly:

- **agreed** to approve the draft annual report and the draft annual accounts for 2009 – 2010, subject to approval by ExCom the day after;
- **approved** the proposed work programme and draft estimated budget for 2010 –2011, subject to approval by ExCom the day after;
- **approved** the continuation of Jan Hallerup, Hallerup Net ApS, Overgaden Oven Vandet 48E, 1415 Copenhagen K, Denmark, as certified auditor for the 2010-2011 accounts;
- **agreed** to hold the Executive Committee meeting next year in advance of the General Assembly, in order to facilitate procedures for adoption of BS RAC documents.

The BS RAC Chair, Reine J. Johansson, welcomed all the participants. He explained that the purpose of the meeting was to look back - to look at the achievements and to summarise 2009, as well as to look forward to 2010 and the future. Both years were difficult and challenging. In 2009 the Green Paper on CFP reform had been released. In 2010 they had started to discuss concrete details, and he hoped that through the workshops that were planned, a vision would emerge of how the revised CFP will be. So it was important that the BS RAC made a lot of comments. He then welcomed and gave the floor to the honorary chair of the BS RAC, Steve Karnicki.

1. Welcome by Honorary chair of the General Assembly, Steve Karnicki

Steve Karnicki took over the chairmanship of the meeting. He explained that in 2009 work had focused on a long-term plan for salmon; the non-paper for pelagics had been put on the table; and the problem of discards had been highlighted. Discussion of the latter would continue in 2010, and it was important that the BS RAC was present. Moreover with respect to selectivity, bigger mesh sizes had been introduced in 2009, and the industry had had to adapt to that. There had been discussion on how to deal with this, and a lot of practical issues would emerge this year. The role of the BS RAC was essential and important. He thanked the Lithuanian authorities for hosting the General Assembly in Klaipeda.

2. Adoption of the agenda, apologies

With respect to the agenda, it was agreed to postpone until the ExCom the presentation by Lithuania on research into the environmental and economic impacts of using trawl with window mesh of size 120 mm. The draft agenda was adopted with above amendment.

The list of participants, together with apologies received, is included in Annex 1.

3. Opening address Mr Darius Niemius, Director of Fisheries, Fisheries Department, Lithuania.¹

Darius Niemius welcomed everyone and expressed pleasure that the meeting was being held in Lithuania. He underlined the importance of fisheries in the Baltic Sea, as well as co-operation in the region, and stressed the positive contribution of the Regional Advisory Councils in the implementation of the CFP. He added that the role of the RACs could be enhanced by paying more attention to improved regional representation and integration. At the informal meeting of fisheries ministers on 4th - 5th May 2010 in Vigo, strengthening the role of the RACs and the importance of their advice had been stressed.¹

4. Invited keynote speaker: Poul Degnbol, Head of Advisory Programme, ICES:

“Ecosystem approach and how it fits in with MSY”ⁱⁱ

Poul Degnbol explained that he was here to present the ideas surrounding MSY. These ideas had come out recently. Two things had been taking place simultaneously:

1. The clients of ICES (Commission and governments) were asking to move forward with MSY.
2. The Marine Strategy Framework was being implemented.

These two developments were extremely important and would be at the core of discussions. The aim of his presentation was to give a status quo of both.

Poul Degnbol explained that the MSY approach has a long history in science. It was legally set up as a component of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement in 1995. To this came the ICES response with the precautionary approach. Then in 2002 came the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and an agreement to rebuild fisheries to MSY by 2015. Thus there has been mounting interest in moving towards that goal. The long-term management plans are moving in that direction. Hence the ICES decision to start on how to reframe the advice follows this path. The big change of tide is moving from the precautionary approach (to avoid recruitment impairment – “don’t fall over the edge of the cliff”) towards MSY within the precautionary approach (a positive approach to get the most out of our fisheries and ecosystems - “get the most out of everything and keep far away from the edge of the cliff in the proces”). Poul Degnbol added that MSY means different things to different people. For example, scientists have been using a mathematical approach which then ceased to be used in the 1970s. Politicians do not think in terms of a mathematical model.

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In the various political agreements it is more a conceptual approach. In ICES use is being made of a long range of approaches, as well as stock specific knowledge, to capture a concept of high long term production. The estimates of MSY are not universal or eternal: if the natural system changes, the productivity changes, and this gives a different result. The framework ICES is suggesting is to move to a fishing mortality which will give high long term, production. It must be within a precautionary approach which means that if a spawning stock falls below a certain minimum biomass, action has to be applied by reducing the fishing pressure. If the stock is above this biomass, we can fish at the fishing mortality producing high long term yields. And if the stock is extremely low, we may need to do more and there is thus a need for a discussion on what to do and what measures to apply. The reference points involved in this are: F_{MSY} : the fishing mortality giving the MSY – to provide a long-term yield; and the B_{MSY} trigger: providing the safeguard – the biomass reference point which triggers a cautious response. B_{MSY} is not explicitly a reference point, and ICES does not have an opinion on that. All this gives rise to two questions:

1. “Isn’t it a step backwards?” (which is what the NGOs may ask).

In response, yes, if that is all you do. The classical MSY can be dangerous - there are good reasons to say that implementing a traditional MSY approach in isolation is not sustainable and this was already known in the 1970s. It is based on a single species approach, and one must not ignore the interactions between species, and it does not in itself take account of the other impacts on marine ecosystems which fisheries have. But no, it is a forward approach if it is used as one measure amongst several, because it does the most fundamental thing needed also to reduce wider ecosystem impacts of fisheries – to reduce the overall fishing pressure from present levels which for many fisheries are unsustainable. And here comes the ecosystem approach and the Marine Framework Strategy. It must be cross-sectoral, because a lot of things affect the sea, and all policies must contribute to the ecosystem approach to the marine environment (not just fisheries). So it is important to address the interaction between the environment and fisheries, for example pollution, mineral extraction and considerations as to whether these should be regulated. The Marine Framework Strategy Directive is this cross-sectoral approach - there are 11 descriptors, and at least four of these are of direct interest to the fisheries (descriptors 1, 3, 4 and 6). these criteria concern not just species, but also habitats and ecosystem structure. Under 1 we are dealing with biodiversity which is impacted when fisheries take by-catches of a wide range of animals. Under 3: these relate to commercial fish stocks and the sustainability of exploitation where F_{MSY} is incorporated. These have been incorporated in the proposal for the MFS Directive, but have to go together with the CFP reform package. Under 4: food webs: this is about keeping the food flow in the ecosystem and this is relevant to fisheries because we remove prey or predators. Under 6: this is about bottom habitats and relate to some sea-floor types which are not impacted by fisheries but others are, for example some reef types. The BS RAC will have to discuss how the achievement of good environmental status regarding these four descriptors works together with fisheries management in the future.

The present fishing mortality is for some stocks up to 3 times more than the recommended MSY. So to reduce the F in the present situation to F_{MSY} is in most cases the most significant step that can be taken. In parallel there must be efforts to reduce bycatch and the impact on the habitat environment. MSY by 2015 is a first step only. Then there is the need to apply the MSF

Directive by 2020. So the idea is to take the MSY approach as part of the whole ecosystem approach.

2. “Isn’t MSY an economic threat to the industry?” (which could be the industry question).

The answer would be yes, if we make a large reduction immediately. But no, once we are at MSY level there will be more fish to catch with less effort, which makes very good sense economically. The challenge is to make a transition to get there. In terms of EU implementation, the Commission interprets the WSSD policy to get to FMSY by 2015. Following this ICES propose 5 gradual steps towards this so that we would be at FMSY in 2015. So what would the advice for 2011 look like? The users of ICES advice are asking for a transition, but also want advice based on the current precautionary approach. But only one advice is wanted in order to avoid confusion. These choices are political, and Poul Degnbol gave an example given from the Celtic Sea, where the policy choices are made explicit.

ICES has had a consultation with clients in the spring, and held a drafting group in early May. The idea is to include options according to MSY, as well as options from the former framework. At the meetings with the RACs to present the 2011 advice, the aim is to discuss this. So the aim this year is to collect experience.

He concluded by asking the audience to think about whether the form of the advice is appropriate. Finally, he urged all to remember the MSY and the ecosystem approach: and how they are connected.

Niki Sporrang commented that MSY is a single species concept. But at the same time the Baltic Sea is a simple structure with cod, sprat and herring. She asked how it was possible to maximise the yield of all three species. Degnbol replied that no one has a good model for MSY ecosystem development, so work is being started on the science side M_{SEY} : maximum sustainable ecosystem yield.

Michael Andersen objected to the notion of urgency, since the stated goal of MSY by 2015 is “where possible.” He felt that the urgency cannot be so imminent that economic and social consequences are disregarded. He added that it is dangerous if we do not realise that the MSY approach is a “notion” and that it is a fishing mortality which is lower than for most stocks. MSY could be implemented at a bit slower pace for some stocks.

Poul Degnbol replied that this is a political choice for the Commission and governments to make. But moving to MSY by 2015 is what has been agreed by the member states of ICES and of the EU. Moreover, MSY is a concept, not a classical definition, but there has to be some initial decision on what our best estimate is: we make the best estimate we can, move in the right direction, and adapt it as we go along.

Peter Breckling asked whether the descriptors for the MSF Directive can be used on terrestrial ecosystems. Would they mean that the whole sea area would be a completely undisturbed area with, for example, no wind farms? Poul Degnbol replied that care must be taken not to mix up good environmental status with “pristine” status. One cannot think of applying the descriptors in the thinking that they should be based on going to some unimpacted or untouched state.

Michael Andersen pointed out that the problem can be with the digits in the advice. He agreed that there are benefits from fishing at a lower F for some stocks, but it makes a difference if the

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target is F 0.26 or 0.29. So the industry would opt for the highest political candidate. Poul Degenbol commented that when one gets down to practicalities, the decision will have to be based on a “this is what we do now, this is the best we have” - in other words to have a direction and a decision on how big a step to take. Michael Andersen said it could be possible to have a level or a target – and above that level reduce the fishing mortality by x%. But he requested removal of the “dire straits” language in the advice. A different kind of language was sought, so that the industry was not seen as the problem.

Alex Olsen agreed with the fact that MSY is a concept, but at the same time there have to be some figures to work with. But care has to be taken with the limit above which and below which one can fish, because this has a big impact on the consumer.

Poul Degenbol agreed, but pointed out that they have to come up with a number for next year. The problem is how to present the near to or close to.

Steve Karnicki concluded by saying that it is a political decision as to how to reach the MSY by 2015. It must be up to the politicians how to get there and in how many steps. Poul Degenbol confirmed that it is not an ICES decision to set the steps.

5. Reports by Working Group Chairpersons for the year 2009 – 2010

a. Report from the Demersal Working Group by Michael Andersen (chair of the WG)

Michael Andersen explained that there have only been two demersal WGs in the last year. They have benefitted from the intensive work done in the preceding years in producing the cod plan. At the June 2009 meeting there was a unanimous decision to adhere to the cod management plan. Certain derogations were requested (for example, they reiterated excluding the 220mm gillnet fishery targeting flounder and lumpfish from the cod plan), but these were not met by the Council Decision in October 2009. The rest of the year was dedicated to discussions focusing on selectivity and the discard project, leading to the BS RAC recommendation on a discard project. The BS RAC has also made comments to the Commission’s policy paper on fishing opportunities. After the October Council the BSRAC produced comments to the technical measures for the cod fishery, and these will be part of the selectivity meeting in May (19th – 21st) with the Commission, following up on the video conference in April. He thought that the BS RAC could make a very meaningful contribution. The revision of the cod management plan was discussed in April 2010, and the derogation for the small-scale fishery was discussed, as well as the effort plan: the BS RAC would have to work hard on these aspects. With respect to the MSY discussion, the main problem is not how the TAC is set, but the negative spiral of fishing effort. A further BS RAC Demersal WG meeting is planned in the summer before the October Council. He recalled the former IBSFC when meetings were held in September. But now the Council decision process was in October, and technical issues are also dealt with. This complicated things for the BS RAC. One of the big tasks for the RACs is to advise in a wise and timely manner, so that decisions do not give problems to managers, inspectors or fishermen.

Steve Karnicki asked about the multi-annual plan for cod and assumed that the current decision on TACs and quotas will be based on the current cod plan. What is the BSRAC position on this?

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He encouraged the BSRAC to come with comments already now. He underlined the importance of starting on this.

Michael Andersen replied that the RAC is prepared to take on the work – it is in the work programme for the current year. There is also the obligation for 2010 to evaluate the plan. But the actual consequential effects in terms of legislation can take years.

Niels Wichmann asked for clarification on the LTMPs - they have to be decided by co-decision, so what was the timing going to be?

Isabelle Viallon explained that a process was now going on in the Commission with elaborating long-term management plans, but initially only with sole. There was a lot of work going on to establish a system with respect to LTMPs. The idea with cod was to launch the evaluation this year. And if there is a good evaluation, with consensus from the industry, the RAC and the member states, then there should be a fast-track process for it.

b. Report from the Pelagic Working Group by Ryszard Malik (chair of the WG)ⁱⁱⁱ

Ryszard Malik went through the meeting schedule for the year 2009 -2010. He commented that it had been a busy year, and he thanked everyone for their active participation. There were no comments or questions.

c. Report from the Salmon and Sea trout Working Group by Henrik Svenberg (on behalf of the WG chair Gunnar Asplund)

Henrik Svenberg explained that the BS RAC Salmon + Sea trout WG had elaborated documents on a salmon management plan over three years and given them to the Commission in order to be proactive. So an elaborated document from the BS RAC was in existence. He was also glad to hear that the Commission was elaborating a systematic approach to LTMPs, but at the moment the BS RAC was not in any dialogue with the Commission, and there is a non-management of salmon. So there is scope for comments and clarification from the Commission.

This gave rise to a discussion about LTMPs in general and how the Commission is trying to improve its methodology for assessing existing management plans and introducing new ones. Isabelle Viallon pointed out the comparison between the salmon and pelagic management plans, and that the preparation had not been the same. She explained that the Commission proposal for salmon is almost finalised, but due to the Lisbon Treaty, there is currently discussion on what is to be done and how to present it – and what elements could be put into a Commission procedure, so not everything has to go through Council and Parliament. Henrik Svenberg pointed out that in fairness it would be good to have a salmon working group and to invite the Commission to go through its thoughts.

6. Presentation of Annual Report for 2009 -2010, by the BS RAC chair Reine J. Johansson

Reine J. Johansson referred to the draft Annual report for 2009 –2010 and added his own more personal comments and opinions. He highlighted some of the BS RAC meetings during the year, such as the Science Workshop and the Conference on the Baltic Sea Fisheries. He spent some time

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commenting on the BS RAC work and meetings connected with selectivity, and pointed out that the BS RAC must continue with its proposal on selectivity. He also referred to CFP Reform and the need to discuss regionalisation and to have a discussion with member states around the Baltic. He acknowledged the work of the BS RAC secretariat as well as the good cooperation with the Commission. In conclusion he highlighted the real importance of CFP reform and his expectation of change, as well as the fact that regions within the EU are different.

7. Presentation of the draft financial statement for 2009 -2010, by BS RAC secretary

Sally Clink explained that the draft financial statement had only just been approved by the auditor. The exchange rate used by the Commission was explained: this does not have such a big impact on the accounting because the Danish kroner are closely tied to the Euro. She explained the budgeted resources which are based on an amended budget to include contributions from “Laksefonden” and Chalmers University (as well as the Economic and Social Committee and the Swedish Ministry of Agriculture – who paid directly to the costs of the Conference in October 2009), a smaller member state contribution from Germany, as well as extra membership payments during the year, and a reduction in the rent. She gave an account of the expenditure during the year and the use made of the reserve to cover any overshoot on specific items. The actual resource base did not include the final payment of € 50.000 from the Commission. The outstanding balance would be paid once the financial statement had been approved by the Commission. The General Assembly took note of this information.

Steve Karnicki invited members to approve the draft annual report and draft financial statement, subject to the approval by the ExCom on 12th May 2010. They were approved.

8. Work Programme for 2010 -2011 by the BS RAC chair Reine J. Johansson

The BSRAC chair highlighted that in 2010 there will be a discussion of the structural elements of the CFP, as well as budget issues. He appealed to members to contribute to this process. It was important to take action and go to the Commission, and to be active.

Alex Olsen raised the subject of market issues and labelling, which can be a very complicated issue. The BS RAC must make a position and be clear amongst itself on labelling, and what is meant and wanted. It costs a lot of money, and the result can be a label that nobody wants.

Reine Johansson suggested that this could be an agenda point at a coming ExCom meeting to get an update on this issue. He wondered whether the European Parliament had produced a statement on the labelling of fish products, and whether the discussion could depart from there.

Jesper Kobberø felt that in the draft work programme under the heading “Markets issues: labelling/traceability/dioxin” there was more focus on improving the image of the fishing industry, rather than improving the actual industry. The labelling and traceability points were good, but care should be taken with having too much focus of the “image.” Reine Johansson pointed out that poor information on cod has already dented the image of the fishery and it would take years to rebuild confidence. Both Niels Wichmann and Henrik Svenberg felt that the paragraph focused on efforts to

respond to the demand from the consumer to improve the image of the products; in all simplicity it dealt with the markets and the image of the sector. The section was left unchanged.

Peter Breckling pointed out that competition was becoming increasingly important, and thought should be given to creating structures for getting hold of important people. Reine Johansson and Steve Karnicki agreed to taking a pro-active approach and to inviting MEPs to the BS RAC. Two Polish MEPs (Marek Gróbarczyk and Jarosław Wałęsa) have contacted the BS RAC, and this should be followed up at ExCom level.

Peter Breckling also mentioned spatial planning and Natura 2000, and informed the meeting that the German government had announced that they were working on it. There was no agreement to make changes to the work programme to take this on board.

9. Estimated operating budget 2010 -2011

Sally Clink explained this in some detail. The resource base was presented as follows:

Non eligible 26.925	Eligible 283.000	Total budget 309.925
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Explanation was given of the change in the rules regarding in-kind payment (for rent and cleaning): Status was given on the payments received from member states and BS RAC members. The General Assembly was also informed that it was no longer required to have guarantees by members. Thanks were expressed to the Danish Fishermen's Producers Organisation and the Swedish Fishermen's Federation for doing this up to now. There were no comments or questions.

Both the draft Work Programme and draft budget were adopted by the General Assembly, subject to approval by the ExCom the day after.

10. Appointment of a certified auditor to audit the annual accounts of the BSRAC

Appointment of Continuation of Jan Hallerup, Hallerup Net ApS, Overgaden Oven Vandet 48E, 1415 Copenhagen K, Denmark, as certified auditor for the 2010-2011 accounts. The Secretariat explained the advantage of using the same accountant who was not familiar with the working of the budget and the Commission requirements and rules. It was agreed that this gave a good continuity in the work of the BSRAC.

The General Assembly approved the appointment.

11. Changes/updates on membership

The Secretariat informed that of the current 39 members, 38 have paid. There had been one new member to the BS RAC during the year 2009 -2010: the Association of Fishmeal and Fishoil

Manufactures in Denmark. One member had ceased to exist at very start of the BS RAC year 5: the Fishing Shipowners' Association, Poland. The General Assembly took note.

12. Floor open for discussion/comments

There were no comments from the floor.

13. Any other business

There were a few updates by the Secretariat. She mentioned that a few improvements would be made to the website to make it even better:

1. To create a Documents Section so all relevant documents (TACs and quotas EU, Commission, ICES, and STECF etc) could be found more easily.
2. The newsletter would now be put straight on the website, and members informed by email as before, but without the newsletter being copied into the mail.

Members were urged to respond to the web-based questionnaire in order to get feedback on key issues such as the functioning of the RACs, budget and financial information, and fee structures. The deadline was 6th June.

14. Closing remarks

Steve Karnicki thanked everybody for an excellent meeting. He stressed that 2010 - 2011 would be a crucial year. He encouraged the participants to use all their resources. He also underlined the importance of the two Polish MEPs and contact with the European Parliament. He also acknowledged the excellent work of the BSRAC Secretariat.

References

Annex 1: Final participants' list here:

http://www.bsrac.org/archive/Dokumenter/General%20Assembly/11052010/List%20of%20Participants%20General%20AssemblyFINAL_1.xls

ⁱ Presentation by Darius Niemius is here:

<http://www.bsrac.org/archive/Dokumenter/General%20Assembly/11052010/openingaddressDariusNiemius.pdf>

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ⁱⁱ Poul Degnbol's presentation is here:

<http://www.bsrac.org/archive/Dokumenter/General%20Assembly/11052010/PoulDegnbolPresentationtoBSRAC.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ryszard Malik's account of the year is here:

<http://www.bsrac.org/archive/Dokumenter/General%20Assembly/11052010/RyszardMalikreport.pdf>