

Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council (BSRAC)
Pelagic Working Group Meeting,
Danish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, Copenhagen, 19th January 2010

Chair: Ryszard Malik

Rapporteur: Sally Clink

Minutes

At this meeting there were WG members from 5 BS RAC Member States. Representatives from the European Commission, Danish and Swedish governments, ICES and MRAG also took part (participants' list attached).

1. Welcome, apologies, presentation, minutes from last meeting

The chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were apologies from Carl Jesper Hermansen (Pelagic RAC), Reine Johansson (Chair BS RAC), and Vesa Kartunnen (Finnish Fishermen's Association). Adam Jakubiak (Polish Fisheries Chamber) was substituted by Krzysztof Stanuch (Fishing Shipowners Association). There were no comments to the minutes from 15th June 2009.

2. Presentation of the ICES advice for a long-term management plan

Morten Vinther, on behalf of ICES, gave a power point presentation of the scientific advice for the stocks in question. His presentation also included consideration of a multi-species component with respect to the effect of an increased cod stock in the Baltic. His power point is here: <http://www.bsrac.org/archive/Dokumenter/Pelagic%20WG/190110/ICESpresenationWKMAMPEL.pdf>.

Morten explained that he had co-chaired the ICES Workshop on Multi-annual management of Pelagic Fish Stocks in the Baltic, on 23rd – 27th February 2009, on which the ICES recommendations were based. The so-called WKMAMPEL Report from the meeting is here: <http://www.ices.dk/workinggroups/ViewWorkingGroup.aspx?ID=372>

He presented the results for all the pelagic Baltic stocks except Western Baltic herring, which had been discussed in-depth at the JAKFISH meeting on 18th January 2010. By way of introduction he explained that ICES had received a request to produce harvest control rules to apply over the long-term, and to propose a suitable fishing mortality which could apply in the long run. ICES had also been asked to come up with a TAC constraint which could run from year to year.

Herring in the central Baltic (25-29 + 32 excl. Gulf of Riga) Morten explained that a lot of factors were known: mean weight at age, natural mortality, relationship between SSB and recruitment, exploitation pattern, management of the fishery and over-/under-fishing. The ICES recommendations for this stock were were:

- A long-term target F of 0.22,
- An annual TAC variation of 15%
- A spawning stock biomass trigger of 800,000 tonnes,
- The level below which fishing should stop at 385,000 tonnes.

Krzysztof Stanuch asked about the poor survival of escaped herring from the gear, since pelagic gear was set up at L50, and mortality was estimated at 90%. Morten Vinther explained that ICES did not take this into account and that it was not possible to manage the fish stock by means of mesh size. Michael Andersen (Danish Fishermen's Association) felt that the assumptions made on the stock were speculative. Morten Vinther agreed that there were many uncertainties. He pointed out that the aim was not to predict what future catches would be, but to test different harvest control rules for the stock, and thereby avoid the worst pitfalls. Michael Andersen took note of this, and pointed out that in his opinion the decision-makers were only making predictions.

Herring SD 28.1 Gulf of Riga

Morten Vinther highlighted that in the period 1977 –1988 there had been a small stock with smaller recruitment, whereas in the period 1989 – 2006 both had been higher. This was possibly due to climate. The assessment of this stock was relatively uncertain and there had been a tendency to over-estimate the stock, although this had not been taken into account when doing the assessment. Two options were put forward for this stock, based on a low and a high fishing mortality:

- Fishing mortality of 0.26 or 0.35
- TAC variation of 15% or 20%
- A spawning stock biomass trigger of 60,000 tonnes

One factor concerning this stock was not only the yields, but also the quality of the yield, because the level of dioxins and PCBs was highest in the older fish. However, this was outside the remit of the ICES working group.

There were no comments to this stock.

Herring SD 30 Bothnian Sea

Morten Vinther pointed out that ICES had no accepted assessment for this stock, and there was no advice available. Stefanie Schmidt (DG Mare) asked what could be done to solve this dilemma and whether the Community could play a role in this. Fredrik Arrhenius (Swedish Board of Fisheries) remarked that the stock was doing well, but it was getting smaller; however there was limited data and the model was not very good for this stock.

Sprat

Morten Vinther pointed out that there had been a shift in recruitment: it had been higher in recent years. There was also a tendency to over-estimate the SSB. The recommendation was:

- Fishing mortality of 0.4
- TAC variation of 20%
- A spawning stock biomass trigger of 400,000 tonnes

Pehr Eriksson (Swedish Fishermen's Federation) commented on the distribution of the sprat and herring in the Baltic. The natural base had been for the sprat in the east, and the herring over in the west and near the coast. But now they were much more mixed. However, it seemed that the stock species were returning to the former distribution. Bigger herring were also observed. Cod were located more in the southern part, and very few north of 56°. Michael Andersen had comments to the application of the target mortality of F0.1.

Morten Vinther commented on the multi-species considerations for a long-term management plan for pelagics. In the Baltic this was a relatively simple situation, since there was only cod, sprat and herring. Natural mortality of sprat was higher with the occurrence of more cod. Given the increase in the cod stocks, this implied that less sprat should be caught. ICES had drawn up three multi-species scenarios, the results of which indicate that it is not advisable to maintain a high sprat fishery when the cod stocks are high.

Michael Andersen felt that there was a density dependence between the two stocks. Pehr Eriksson pointed out that there was a shift in mean weight at landings of sprat – but this was in his opinion due to the shift in the fishery, with sprat being landed in 40 kilo boxes; the weight of sprat was decreasing because more of it was being used for fishmeal. Fred Arrhenius pointed out changes that had taken place in the Baltic, especially in the sub-plankton, on which the sprat feed. Krzysztof Stanuch returned to the mesh size considerations for the pelagic fishery with respect to the correlations between weight and length; if it appeared that older fish were being caught, he suggested using a smaller mesh size. Michael Andersen pointed out that it was important to maximise output from the fishery, but not to manage the fish stocks; rather to use a management plan as a management tool for the fisheries. It was clear not to expect high catches of herring and sprat if there was a high cod stock. Krzysztof Stanuch asked about the calculation of the sprat and herring biomass, to which Morten Vinther explained that this was done by observing the stomach contents of the cod and calculating from that. It emerged during the discussions that there had been some confusion on the exact calculation of the biomass for cod, depending on which figures had been used, and this in turn would lead to a different outcome for the numbers of herring and sprat. However, it was agreed that the overall pattern would be the same.

In conclusion to the discussions, Morten Vinther pointed to out his power point slide number 49 (page 13 of the presentation): the development of a multi annual plan should be developed in cooperation with various parties: scientists, managers and stakeholders.

MRAG study: Economic and social impacts of the proposed scenarios for a multi-annual plan for Baltic pelagic fisheries

David Agnew of MRAG gave a power point presentation of the socio-economic assessment of the ICES proposals.

<http://www.bsrac.org/archive/Dokumenter/Pelagic%20WG/190110/MRAGpresentation.pdf>

The Commission's guidelines for the study required the setting up of a status quo scenario, followed by some other scenarios. Option 1 was the status quo scenario (no management plans with no MSY targets), Option 2 (a move to the management system recommendations from the ICES Working Group), and then Option 3 a number of economic factors: 3a: changes in fleet capacity, 3b: 3a plus capacity reductions and 3c: 3a plus variable uptake of the catch (if fleet size and catches are reduced, then a response will be to increase uptake). There was also an option 3a_1: an increase in fuel prices. The study had taken a ten-year forward prediction period and covered the time span 2010 – 2020. They had used a bio-economic model, and results from the WKMAMPEL had been put into a standard STEFC model to describe the impacts. He explained the source of the data used and the fact that they had looked at environmental, social and economic impacts of the different scenarios. He pointed out that applying the ICES proposed long-term management F was not that different from the F now used in the current management regime for the pelagic stocks.

Krzysztof Stanuch expressed concerns about the information given in Table 24 of the report (page 62: Prospective changes to fleet numbers (Option 3b)) and possible conclusions that could be drawn with respect to the size of the Polish fleet. He also asked whether cost-of-living had been taken into account in the different Baltic member states. David Agnew replied that the report was not putting forward advice on how many vessels would be left in the pelagic fishery. However, he agreed that fleet dependency was important, and it would have been easier in the study to separate out the pelagic fleets. Michael Andersen pointed out that the aim of this report was not to give advice, but to calculate and describe different scenarios. It was important to take a baseline study. He was concerned about some of the percentages put forward in the study - percentages were not indicative of the relative importance of certain sectors in the different member states. Moreover, the impact of the report on the demersal fleet should be taken into account. Stefanie Schmidt reiterated that this report had been commissioned by the Commission to describe different scenarios and to generate discussion, and not to provide advice.

Presentation of the Commission's non-paper on LTMP by Stefanie Schmidt (DG Mare)

Stefanie Schmidt explained the background to the concept of a management plan. Sustainability encompassed economic, ecological and social objectives. In its approach so far, the Commission had focused on ecological considerations. But it was important to look at all factors in order to get a consistent approach. In connection with the LTMP for pelagic species a scientific request had been put to ICES, and a socio-economic request to MRAG. The final results from these came in August. These had been put to STECF in November 2009. The non-paper - due to come out from the Commission towards the end of February - will present preliminary thinking and highlight the possible problems; for example whether TAC setting based on a stock analysis is the best approach. The focus was on generating discussion. The BS RAC would have eight weeks to respond to the non-paper. Then an impact assessment had to be done, after which it was expected that a proposal would be tabled before the end of 2010. It will be possible to take into account the output from JAKFISH during the drafting of the proposal.

The hope was for discussion to be broader than in the JAKFISH: in other words to include a dimension beyond all the figures. This is what MRAG has been doing.

At community level long-term fisheries management had only recently started and was not yet perfect. Another part of the exercise was to see what is needed on top of what is already going on - an ecosystem approach and interaction between the different stocks.

In terms of plans, these had started with recovery plans, but now the move was increasingly into multi-annual plans. Thought should be given to the scope and the objective of the plans. Given the objective of putting into place a framework to ensure long-term sustainability, the need was to include flexible measures and targets.

Since the work from ICES and MRAG had been delivered, it was important to involve the industry. Moreover, the role of the Community was limited in terms of taking into account the social and economic elements: here the member states have a responsibility, for example via the fisheries fund. One of the reasons for asking MRAG was to come up with some scenarios and to generate a discussion and to cooperate across the community and member states. Perhaps it was possible to have a dialogue with MS on what role they could assume.

Michael Andersen pointed out that the Johannesburg declaration was not to arrive at MSY by 2015, but to strive towards it. The multi-species approach was a very interesting one - for example, whether fishing cod at one mortality rate will have an impact on the sprat stock. Also of interest was

the distinction between biomass target and biomass trigger: was it possible to have a biomass target in a pelagic plan. Moreover, based on new advice, the target mortality can be changed – and he advised against the ambition of adapting the management plan to each annual report from ACOM.

Stefanie Schmidt replied that ICES usually gave advice in line with the management plan. However the Commission could not change a Council regulation, and the multi-annual plan for cod was a regulation. However, there was provision in the plan to make it improvable: to change the mortality rates and, after three years, to evaluate the plan.

Ewa Milewska (WWF) pointed out that this meeting underlined for her that an ecosystem-based approach is the basic principle when drawing up a long-term management plan.

Stefanie Schmidt pointed out that market considerations could also be taken into account on how to reach a more consistent approach to managing the fishery. She would consult Commission colleagues on this.

The working group agreed to await the non-paper before fixing a date for a new working group within the BS RAC. This meeting would be held separate from the Pelagic RAC.

Camera trials on Danish vessels by Mogens Schou Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries

Mogens Schou gave a very brief status of the scheme in the Baltic in 2010. The aim was to have vessels equipped with a camera: in Denmark the plan was 30 vessels, of which 12/15 would be in the Baltic, 5/6 of which were in the western Baltic. The vessels should be selected in February. The idea was to give a catch quota of cod instead of a landing quota. In return for this, certain conditions will be imposed. There was also a cooperation with Germany, which had found 4 larger vessels, and smaller vessels in the Natura 2000 areas. The German trials would involve observers, but not cameras.

The fishermen would thus have to account for all catches and not be bound by the kilowatt restrictions. They would optimise the catch, not by discarding, but by means of selectivity. In the western Baltic they would be able to choose their own gear. The aim was to set up best practices and to involve fishermen, scientists and gear makers. The aim of cooperating with the Baltic RAC was to inform and to see to what extent the BS RAC would like to get involved in the activities, such as the gear trials. There was also a third trial element in the Baltic: flexibility in the use of the catch quota over to another year. Since the prices that Danish fishermen get for smaller cod is less than half of that for the bigger cod, it could help to increase fish prices and benefit the fish biomass if part of the quota was carried over to the following year.

Krzysztof Stanuch asked about the costs of the project and the aims of it. Mogens Schou explained that it was voluntary, so in principle the fisherman had to pay for it himself. However, in Denmark EFF funds were being used to help towards the scheme. The cost of the equipment for cameras was about 7,000 Euros. The aim was full accountability of what was caught and to eliminate discards. Thus it was incentive-based, the cameras were there to monitor the results.

Lothar Fischer (German Cutter and Coastal Fishermen's Association) asked why this project was needed in the Baltic, since only a few small cod are caught. In 2009, when prices were low for smaller cod, German fishermen, on a voluntary basis, fished with 140 mm in the T90. He informed that 2 German vessels in the Baltic may possibly participate.



Mogens Schou replied that according to ICES advice discards are relatively small – but for how long? ICES also reported that the cod caught in the western Baltic was small – but how did this fit in with discards?

Any other business

There were no points raised under aob.