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Fishermen, conservationists, scientists and the EC agree to manage European fisheries for the long term

An international fishing seminar to explore how Long Term Management (LTM) plans can be used as an effective tool for achieving a sustainable exploitation of stocks by 2015 has resulted in multi-disciplinary agreement on the best way forward.

The seminar was held on September 11 and 12 at the headquarters of the Regional Council Pays de la Loire in Nantes, France, and was co-organised by five Regional Advisory Councils (Baltic Sea, North Sea, North Western Waters, South Western Waters, Pelagic Species) and sponsored by Région Pays de la Loire and AGLIA.

Its aim was to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and views in order to understand, from a multi-disciplinary perspective, how LTM plans might be better elaborated and implemented as an effective tool for achieving a sustainable exploitation of the stocks by 2015, following the EU commitment at the Johannesburg Summit in 2002.

Every December feelings run high when the EC, working from scientific advice, proposes changes and often reductions to TACs to sustain fish stocks.

Fishermen then feel obliged to argue the case for more fishing quotas through Government representatives and Ministers – this system has not worked well for either side.

At the Regional Advisory Council (RAC) led meeting in Nantes, all sides acknowledged this problem and began frank discussions on ways to work together in the management process.

A wide range of presentations about the different elements and dimensions of LTM plans were given by European Commission DG MARE, ICES and RAC fishing industry representatives, together with renowned researchers and independent experts in the fields of biology, environment, economics and social sciences.

Early results of a new long-term management system were analysed and it was shown that such a system allows fishermen, scientists and administrators to work together on planning methods for setting quotas for years ahead according to predetermined rules which allow depleted stocks recover and eventually lead to high and stable catches.

Director for Atlantic, Outermost Regions and Arctic at DG MARE, Reinhard Priebe, said: "All parties agreed during these two days that long term management arrangements will improve the management of fisheries compared to the far-from-perfect situation of annually negotiating TACs."

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However, members of the RACs noted that these management systems require proper assessments, combining biological, economic and social information, prior to their adoption.

Chairman of the North Sea RAC, Hugo Anderson, said: "In this new system, it's important to involve all concerned stakeholders and to think about how fast changes can be made and how much they will cost before returns improve.

"Some people are keen to avoid sudden and major changes, and they need to be listened to."

After years of disagreements, the RACs, scientists and the European Commission have agreed to work together on proper planning for fisheries management.

No doubt compromises will still be needed, according to Mike Sissenwine, president of ICES.

"For each fishery, multiple objectives are possible and we need to set intermediate objectives," he said.

Those attending the seminar recognized that the RACs have proven to be efficient organisations and should play an important role in channeling participation of stakeholders in this planning process.

However, coordination between the European Commission, the scientific community and the RACs has still to be better defined.

Developing RACs' involvement will require additional funding, which it is thought could be sought through EU structural funds.

-ENDS-

Notes to editors:

A final comprehensive report stating all the discussion, key points and outcomes of the meeting is currently being produced and will be available soon, together with all the relevant information about this event (agenda, meeting papers and presentations) on the websites of the organising RACs.

NWWRAC: www.nwwrac.org SWWRAC: www.ccr-s.org PELAGIC RAC: www.pelagic-rac.org NORTH SEA RAC: www.nsrac.org BALTIC SEA RAC: www.bsrac.org

Countries involved in the NSRAC are: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

These stakeholder-led forums give fishermen and other interested parties, including environmental organisations and consumer groups, a say in the way the CFP operates. They are the formal channel through which stakeholders can give suggestions and advice to the European Commission and the Council of Ministers.

Endsnotes