



Fifth General Assembly Record of Meeting York, October 29th 2008

Rapporteur: A D Hawkins

Draft Record

1. Welcome, Apologies & Nominations

- 1.1 The Chair of the General Assembly, Patrice Leduc, welcomed participants to the General Assembly of the North Sea Regional Advisory Council. This was the fifth year of the NSRAC. We were meeting in a magnificent medieval building and over its main door, written in French, were the words "*God grant us good business*". He thought that if we amended this to "*Cod grant us good business*" then we would be assured of a successful meeting. The fishing industry was now recovering from the crises of the past. Fish resources were doing well, and markets were good. Against that we had a Common Fisheries Policy which was being managed for biology only. Strong measures were still being imposed and were leading to the dumping of marketable fish. Who could possibly benefit from such policies?
- 1.2 There were apologies from Bartek Kachniarz, Alan Coghill, Elspeth Atwooll MEP, Almudena Gomez, Nicki Holmyard, V Toulomon, John Claude Cueff and Hazel Curtis.
- 1.3 There had been no new nominations for Chair of the General Assembly, and Patrice Leduc was confirmed as Chair for a further year. There was one nomination for Vice-Chair, Jan Willem Wijnstroom. Jan Willem was elected unanimously as the Vice-Chair.
- 1.4 Two nominations would go forward for Vice-Chairs to the Executive Committee (ExCom), Christien Absil and Michael Park.

2. Report of the ExCom Chairman

- 2.1 Hugo Andersson reminded the meeting that the Annual Report, Paper GA1, reflected the immense amount of work which had been done over the year. At the General Assembly in Aalborg we had accepted an offer from Aberdeenshire Council to host the NSRAC for a further 3 years. The Council plays an important role, not least as a banker as funding from the Commission was slow to arrive. The Commission's rigid

and inflexible rules were also difficult to handle. We need to resolve these issues at the November meeting of the RACs with Commissioner Borg.

2.2 There had been three major initiatives during the year:

The Peterhead Conference on Control & Compliance
The Edinburgh Conference on Offshore marine Protected Areas, and
The Nantes Seminar on Long Term Management Plans

All three had shown that the RACs were fulfilling their role of involving stakeholders in the discussion of important issues. They had also shown that the RACs could collaborate with one another. All 3 meetings had proved a starting point for further activities. We would be discussing how to take these initiatives forward at the ExCom.

3. Report on the activities of the NSRAC during 2007-2008

3.1 Tony Hawkins, the NSRAC rapporteur, summarised the activities of the NSRAC. There had been three meetings of the ExCom and a large number of working group and focus group meetings as well as the three major conferences arranged in collaboration with others. At the last General Assembly the NSRAC had identified a series of priorities, including:

- Cod recovery and discard prevention
- Fuel prices and the future of the industry
- Achieving a more flexible and adaptable management regime
- Issues of governance
- The narrow margin of tolerance on the weighing of catches and landings
- Technical measures
- Improving the relationship between fishers and scientists
- Defining sustainable fisheries within the fish trade
- Marine protected areas, and
- Long-term development plans.

3.2 The Commission had also defined some of the topics it would be taking forward over the year, including:

- A new proposal for tackling illegal IUU fisheries
- Resolve issues over an effort management scheme for the Kattegat
- Adoption of Council conclusions on Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY)
- Cod recovery
- Discards
- Improved control and enforcement, and
- A new proposal for technical measures in the North Atlantic.

3.3 On Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) Fisheries, the NSRAC had concluded that the North Sea industry was being significantly disadvantaged through distorted competition on the markets. However, the Commission's proposal was centred on a detailed certification process to establish chain of custody. This would impose regulatory burdens on the legal trade in fish, without significantly reducing the sale of illegally caught fish. The NSRAC endorsed a paper on IUU from ACFA.

- 3.4 On cod recovery, the Commission had proposed a gradual move to lower fishing mortality with MSY as the objective. There would be no biomass targets – taking up advice which had originally come from the RAC’s cod symposium. Details of effort management and related incentives were to be devolved to Member States. The NSRAC had replied that TACs and effort controls were blunt instruments for reducing discards. It had predicted that mismatch between the 2007 and 2008 quotas and cod abundance would lead to widespread discarding of marketable cod. The NSRAC had emphasised the need for discard reduction & cod avoidance measures and had given its strong support to three initiatives:
- a real time area closure pilot project
 - an observer programme pilot project, and
 - a proposal for individual vessel cod rebuilding plans.
- 3.5 The NSRAC had also responded to the Commission on the elimination of discards. It had agreed that by-catch and discards were amongst the most serious challenges facing fisheries and had pointed out that specific solutions were required, appropriate to specific fisheries. Discards were often a consequence of existing rules. The measures proposed by the Commission were unrealistic and might not be achievable. A position paper was produced in response to the Commission’s proposals and a NSRAC focus group had met to develop new proposals for managing discards.
- 3.6 On technical measures, the Commission had announced that a simpler Council Regulation would be introduced alongside a new Commission Regulation on technical measures for the North Sea. The latter specified minimum mesh sizes for different target species. The NSRAC had been concerned that there might be a loss of democratic scrutiny and accountability. It was concerned at the lack of consistency in the Commission’s approach especially in relation to the retention of a catch composition approach to mesh size; the one net rule, which removed an important flexibility; and the lack of a results-based approach. There was also concern over the removal of minimum landing sizes for haddock, whiting, saithe, plaice, lobster & crab. The NSRAC would be coming forward with proposals of its own.
- 3.7 The Spatial Planning Working Group and its Focus Group on Wind-farms had produced a set of minimum standards and best practice guidelines for assessing the potential impacts of a wind-farm. This had been intended to contribute to greater trust between operators and fishermen. The protocol could also be used to inform national policy and would assist fishing communities and fisheries associations when liaising with wind farm developers over the siting of new wind farms. The protocol proposed that stakeholders and the NSRAC (representing international stakeholder interests) should be consulted at an early stage before any proposal gains critical mass. The protocol had been sent to the Commission, the European Parliament, Member States and the other RACs and had been well received.
- 3.8 The Socio-Economic Development Group had requested changes to the Data Collection Regulation. It wished to see an amendment requiring the inclusion of quantitative socio-economic data. It had recommended that the Commission should establish data-gathering mechanisms and should develop the data-frame and its user interface. The North Sea Women’s Network had held a seminar in May on how to manage change in coastal communities.

- 3.9 The Skagerrak and Kattegat Working Group had not been able to gain agreement with the Commission on an effort management scheme. It had discussed the ICES assessments for cod in the Kattegat and measures for the protection of cod and had considered Swedish proposals for a closed area in the Kattegat. A description of the fisheries in the Kattegat had been produced and plans were being developed for the future of those fisheries. Cod protection measures now needed to be inserted into the plans. The WG was coming forward at the ExCom with proposals for the temporal closures of areas where the occurrence of spawning or juvenile cod was high – a real time closure system.
- 3.10 Other issues discussed during the year had included:
- Selective fishing gears for whiting
 - Margin of tolerance on weighing catches
 - Lack of a level playing field for conversion factors
 - Concern over the treatment of stocks whose state was not known precisely and stocks which were under-utilised
 - Liaison with ICES and reforms to ICES Advisory System
 - The very slow progress in developing Long Term Management Plans for key fisheries.

Altogether, the year had been a very successful one for the NSRAC.

4. Strategic Plan

- 4.1 The future scope of the NSRAC's activities was discussed. The Strategic Plan proposed that the NSRAC should not advise on horizontal matters regarding the Common Fisheries Policy. It should concentrate its advisory effort on the development of long term management approaches; key issues of fishery policy; fishery issues of a regional nature; and other matters with an impact on the state of the resources. The NSRAC should refrain from preparing advice on short term matters.
- 4.2 During discussion it became apparent that there was disagreement with some of the proposals in the plan. It was agreed that the NSRAC did need to represent North Sea interests with respect to some horizontal issues. We certainly did not wish to rule horizontal issues out! Also the RAC would sometimes need to discuss short-term issues. Although we might sometimes have difficulty responding on a short time scale some short-term issues were extremely important for the NSRAC, and especially for fishers. It was agreed that the Strategic Plan would be revised to reflect these views. It was also agreed that the vision and objectives would be amended to reflect the original objective outlined on the NSRAC website. There, the principal objective of the NSRAC was given as: *"to prepare and provide advice on the management of the fisheries of the North Sea on behalf of stakeholders in order to promote the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy. This will be done within the general aim of attaining the sustainable management of fisheries, incorporating an ecosystem based approach and based on the precautionary principle"*. That wording should be incorporated into the new objectives. The question mark at the end of *"To conduct any other activities which are necessary to achieve its objective"* should also be removed. The bullet point on page 3 *"The NSRAC will aim strongly at giving advice which is backed by science and for which the socio-economic impact has been assessed"* should be amended to reflect the aspirations of the NSRAC environmental protocol.

- 4.3 The Directors of the NSRAC were proposing that as the RAC was now entering its fifth year of operation it should carry out a review of how it operated, its successes, things it could have done better and where it wanted to be in the future. To facilitate this review the Directors were suggesting that we should invite an external person to start the process. It was agreed that such a review should take place and that it should begin at the first ExCom meeting of 2009.
- 4.4 The Strategic Plan emphasised that the inflexibility of the funding rules had led to only one RAC ever received its full annual budget. The RACs were working together to try and find an amicable solution to this quite serious problem. Isabelle Viallon, a representative of the Commission, stressed that the NSRAC should inform the Commission if it anticipated any over-runs in the budget during the year. She did not think the constraints imposed by the Commission were unrealistic – they were perfectly normal practice. Isabelle also emphasised the need to prioritise RAC activities. The NSRAC needed to refine the subjects on which it would give advice.
- 4.5 It was agreed that the Spatial Planning Group had always been a permanent Working Group, not a temporary Development Group.
- 4.6 Pierre-George Dachicourt of the Comité National des Pêches Maritimes et des Elevages Marins (CNP MEM) emphasised that as part of the review we should be telling fishermen what the RAC had achieved. In his view the Commission rarely listened to what the RACs said and did not wish to do anything to support fishermen. The RAC was doing amazing work, but the Commission was spending much of its time concentrating on its own operational concerns and ignoring the advice it was receiving.

5. Presentation by Huw Irranca-Davies, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

- 5.1 The Minister thanked the NSRAC for welcoming him so warmly. Within Defra he was responsible for the Natural and Marine Environment, Wildlife and Rural Affairs. This was be a very busy time of year for Fisheries Ministers, leading up to the December Fisheries Council. He was especially interested in the challenges faced by the RACs. The UK had supported the stronger involvement of stakeholders in the CFP and the establishment of the RACs. It was now good to see them working, although he was aware of the funding difficulties that they faced. There were now important fisheries issues to be resolved, among them the problem of ensuring cod recovery. We needed to protect fragile stocks while increasing the proportion of fish landed rather than discarded. The agreement between the EU and Norway required a reduction in fishing mortality. He was determined to improve the efficacy of measures aimed at protecting cod. It would be for Member States to decide which measures would work best for their fleets. He had taken an interest in the initiatives taken by the UK fleets, and hoped that the lessons learned would be applied more widely.
- 5.2 The 2012 Review of the CFP was now fast approaching. Improvements were needed. There was a need for fundamental reform with strong emphasis on outcomes. We needed a more stable regulatory framework, based on long term management plans.
- 5.3 Hugo Andersson thanked the Minister for his presentation. Defra had given considerable political support to the NSRAC during its development phase and had

also supported a number of RAC initiatives. Barrie Deas echoed Hugo's remarks. He added that if the NSRAC was to make progress on issues like cod recovery it would especially need the support of scientists. Dialogue with scientists was often missing from our debates. He hoped the Minister would do all he could to persuade other Member States to work together in providing scientific support for the work of the RACs. The Minister replied that he was willing to enter into discussion with other countries. There were real prizes to be gained in terms of landings and the sustainability of fisheries if we could resolve issues like discarding. Guus Pastoor emphasised to the Minister the importance of market aspects of the CFP. We should be careful what we said about North Sea products. In the current financial climate we needed to make them attractive to consumers. Pim Visser pointed out that market issues were Europe-wide but joint action between Member States on such issues had proved difficult.

- 5.4 Several fishers reminded the Minister that fishermen must be placed at the heart of reforms to the CFP. Fishermen wanted their fisheries to be sustainable but the science was often flawed or out of date. Scientists should be "*on tap not on top*". The Minister accepted that social and economic aspects were important, and that science should not be blindly followed. He was prepared to listen to stakeholders and was especially open to ideas on how the RACs should develop in relation to future reforms of the CFP.

6. NSRAC Directors' Report

- 6.1 The Executive Secretary, Ann Bell, presented the Report of the Fourth Annual General Meeting of NSRAC Directors, held in June 2008. Discussions on the annual budget and other matters would take place at the ExCom meeting. Isabelle Viallon reminded the meeting that the accounts had to be agreed by the General Assembly.

7. The GAP Project

- 7.1 Steve Mackinson of CEFAS gave a presentation on the GAP Project, in which the NSRAC is a participant. The project was about bridging the GAP between stakeholders and science and was part of the Science in Society programme of EU Framework 7. It had begun in April 2008 and would end in September 2009. The project had 30 partners and involved 11 countries. It included 15 science institutes partnered up with fishermen's associations. It was intended to build capacity for collaboration between scientists and industry. It aimed to define good practice in stakeholder participation, and to prepare one or more participative research proposals. Steve described several of the research programmes already under way in different countries. From these programmes the project was seeking common threads for improving collaborative research. The RACs' experience would be valuable in defining good practice and would also generate research ideas. GAP itself would support the aims of the RACs - for example in preparing long term management plans.
- 7.2 Barrie Deas thought there were a number of areas where the NSRAC needed to engage more fully with scientists. One was in the definition of key fishing areas; another was the development of consensus on the state of fish stocks. The RACs also needed help from scientists in the development of long term management plans for key fisheries. How could GAP help with these? Steve thought that together we might be able to take advantage of funding opportunities. We were essentially at the

mercy of funding calls from the Commission, but the RACs could get subjects placed on the agenda, and their endorsement of projects could help meet the challenge of obtaining funding. Michael Andersen was sceptical whether the RAC itself could engage in research projects. The RAC is a collective of organisations. Euan Dunn was concerned whether there was a link between the GAP project and the Lot 7 project, which the NSRAC was associated with and which had similar objectives. Steve agreed that there was no reason why they shouldn't liaise with one another. Barrie Deas thought that projects of this kind offered a means for obtaining funding to facilitate contact between scientists and fishermen. There was agreement that science was important to the CFP and for the work being undertaken by the RACs. Fishers and scientists had to understand one another better. The NSRAC could benefit greatly from both the GAP and Lot 7 projects. We could benefit from the research done and we could also steer research in the right directions. Although we had aspirations – like mapping fishing activities in the North Sea - we did not have the capacity or means to pursue this work ourselves. We could only have our needs met by working with others.

8. NSRAC Annual Work Plan

8.1 Ann Bell introduced the annual work plan of the NSRAC. We now had a series of standing Working Groups, a number of Development Groups pursuing particular topics like long term management plans, and several Focus Groups had been set up for one-off meetings to address specific issues. The work plan set out a number of issues to be dealt with in the coming year. They included:

- Mapping of areas important to fisheries
- Offshore Natura 2000 network
- Offshore wind-farms
- Science/fisheries partnerships
- Data workshops
- Cod avoidance
- Control regulations
- Workshops which will include stakeholders, consumers and retailers
- Technical measures & how to eliminate discards
- Review of CFP
- Carry out an internal review of our work/policies and plan our future work
- Continued Inter-RAC co-operation

8.2 Michael Park thought that Inter-RAC co-operation was especially important. We often did not have the resources to pursue issues ourselves. It was agreed that the Inter-RAC conferences had been especially valuable. On the various Working Groups, it was agreed that although Spatial Planning merited a standing WG our Socio-economic interests were deeply embedded in the work of the other WGs, and we did not need a standing WG for that. Several people asked whether the list could be prioritised. Currently, it was a mix of objectives and means for achieving those objectives. Several new priorities emerged from the discussion:

- Fuel package measures for the North Sea
- Market issues for North Sea species
- New, unregulated fisheries
- Issues arising from the Marine Framework Directive

Barrie Deas emphasised the need to give priority to the preparation of long term management plans.

- 8.3 Isabelle Viallon said there was a need to present timetables for dealing with particular issues of interest to the Commission. When would the NSRAC be responding to the Commission on technical measures? Christien Absil thought we would need to develop a view on a number of issue; including the review of the CFP. Should we be aiming to develop a NSRAC viewpoint? Niels Wichmann thought our financial position was critical. Last year we had not been able to fund working group meetings as the money had already been spent on other activities. The ExCom certainly needed to set priorities.
- 8.4 On the review of the CFP, some organisations were aiming to produce position papers by the end of 2009. However, the Green paper from the Commission would not come out until the Spring of 2009, and that would launch the full debate. It was agreed that although it might be difficult for the NSRAC to reach a consensus on the CFP itself it should be possible to agree the way forward for the RACs. We did need to engage with the Commission on this as we had the experience to do so.
- 8.5 Pierre-George Dachicourt was concerned that we were over-complicating our organisation. We had set up many groups. However, fishers must be at the core of our priorities. We must engage with fishers. We should not be creating multiple layers like those within the Commission itself. Isabelle Viallon thought that is was important to concentrate on the key topics like, technical measures, dealing with discards, improvements to control and compliance and long term management plans. We also needed to tell the Commission what we expected of them. The Commission needs to know what is at stake for RAC members. We also needed to prepare timetables. Hugo Andersson concluded the discussion by saying that some of these issues could be dealt with together. However, we had prepared an ambitious list of issues last year and had addressed all of them. As we were dealing with a mix of issues and activities we should prepare a Table, setting out each issue, the way we would deal with it, and a timetable. At the ExCom in Berlin we would be looking at the future of the RACs. What should our priorities be and how would we fund them? We would return to the work plan at that meeting. In the meantime the Secretariat would revise the palm to reflect the discussion which had taken place.

9. Membership

- 9.1 There had been an application for membership of the General Assembly from the Aberdeen Producers Organisation. Gregg Anderson described the work of the PO. The PO was welcomed as a member of the General Assembly of the NSRAC.
- 9.2 In 2007 there had been three applications for membership of the ExCom. There was one vacant seat, in the 'other' category (making up one third of the membership). The Seafood Choices Alliance had now withdrawn its application, but wished to remain a member of the General Assembly. No-one was present from the Danish Society for a Living Sea, and it was assumed that its application no longer stood. That left Luc Corbisier's application on behalf of the Belgian Foundation for Sustainable Fisheries (Stichting voor Duurzame Visserij Ontwikkeling, SDVO). That application would be discussed further at the ExCom.

10. Any Other Business

- 10.1 There being no other business Patrice Leduc thanked the interpreters for their services and the English co-organisers for preparing for the meeting. Pim Visser issued an invitation for the next General Assembly to take place in the Netherlands, at either Amsterdam or the Hague, and this invitation was accepted

11. Action Points

1. Patrice Leduc was confirmed as Chair for a further year. Jan Willem Wijnstroom was elected unanimously as the Vice-Chair (1.3).	Secretariat
2. Two nominations will go forward for Vice-Chairs to the Executive Committee (ExCom), Christien Absil and Michael Park (1.4).	Secretariat
3. An attempt will be made to resolve budgetary issues at the November meeting of the RACs with Commissioner Borg (2.1).	Secretary & Chair of ExCom
4. The Strategic Plan will be revised to reflect the views expressed during discussion (section 4)	Secretariat
5. An internal review of the NSRAC would take place at the first ExCom meeting of 2009, in Berlin, with an external facilitator chairing the discussion (4.3).	Secretariat
6. The NSRAC will return to discussion of its work plan at the Berlin ExCom meeting. In the meantime, the plan will be revised to reflect the discussion which had taken place (section 8).	Secretariat
7. The application for membership of the ExCom by the Belgian Foundation for Sustainable Fisheries would be discussed further at the York ExCom (9.2).	Secretariat
8. The next general Assembly will be held in the Netherlands (10.1)	Secretariat

10. In Attendance

Christien Absil
Michael Andersen
Ann Bell (Executive Secretary)
Willem de Boer
Hugo Andersson (Chair of ExCom)
Barrie Deas
Tony Hawkins (Rapporteur)
Despina Symons
Jan Willem Wijnstroom
Flemming Kristensen
Patrice Leduc (Chair of General Assembly)
Michael Park
Guus Pastoor
Henrik Svenberg
Pim Visser
Luc Corbisier
Joyce Walker (Secretariat)
Gordon Lyon (NSRAC Communications Officer)

Luc Mellaerts
Fred Normandale
Mark Dougal
Derk Jan Berends
Kai Wieland
Isabelle Viallon
Emiel Brouckaert
Pierre Georges Dachicourt
Caroline Gamblin
Antoine le Garrec
Dominique Thomas
Giles Bartlett
Euan Dunn
Lothar Fischer
Karsten Kristensen
Niels Wichmann
David Hill
Ate Oostra
Geert Meun
Steve Mackinson
Hideo Kojimoto
Robert Stevenson
James Thain
David Anderson
Bill McKenzie
Bengt-Olof Eliasson
Fredrik Lindberg
Dale Rodmell
Daniel Wintein
Harald Oestensjoe
Ylva Engwall
Helene Syndique
Robert McLean
John McKay
Markus Brill
Elizabeth Bourke
Joanna Lenehan
Elisabeth Vallet
Emily Howgate
Peter Hopkins