



Report on Discussions with ICES re Data Workshops

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At the Brussels Demersal WG in December 2007 it was agreed that a small NSRAC subgroup would come forward with definite proposals for a data workshop with ICES scientists.

In the event, by the end of December ICES had still not come to firm conclusions about the reforms to its system for preparing scientific advice. The MIRAC (Meeting between ICES and the RACs) in Vigo at the end of January provided an opportunity for an open discussion with ICES on their proposed reforms and on the role of the data workshops proposed by the NSRAC.

This paper reports on discussions at the MIRAC. Members of the ExCom are asked to note these discussions. Further information will be made available once decisions have been taken by ICES.

Provision of scientific advice to the RACs

Much of the discussion with ICES was concerned with the strong pressures now placed upon scientists, with their extended role of providing advice to their national governments, to the Commission through ICES and STECF, and to the RACs. ICES would like advance warning of requirements for advice, and wishes any requests for scientists to attend RAC meetings to be submitted well in advance, so that appropriate plans can be made.

It will be necessary for the NSRAC to plan in advance for the inclusion of ICES scientists in its meetings. Requests must be forwarded through the Commission.

Reforms to the ICES Advisory Process

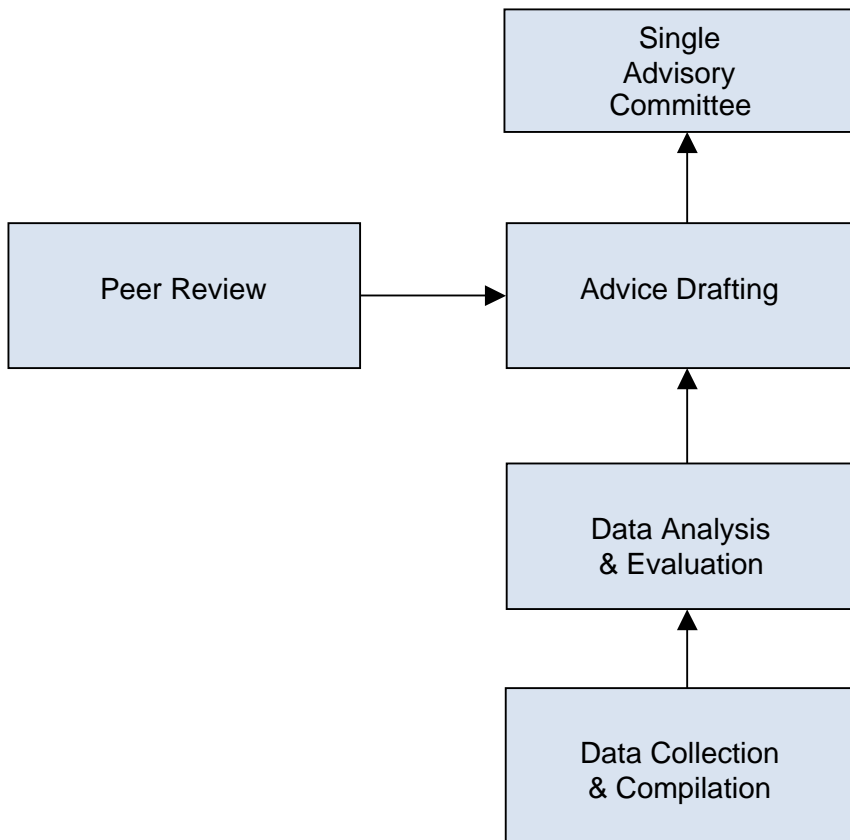
The new, reformed, advisory services of ICES are intended to be more efficient and effective at delivering the advice decision makers need. The focus on ecosystem issues has increased in recent years and has driven the reform agenda (i.e. the focus is no longer just on commercial stocks). There is also a need for more integrated advice, for

additional Peer Review, and a distinction is to be made between short-term and long term (strategic) advice. Moreover, the Commission has brought forward the time of the year when scientific advice on the principal stocks is required to May/June, which requires adjustments to be made to the timetable for advice.

ICES has now accepted that the process of stock assessment must begin with a **Data Compilation Workshop**, which will provide an opportunity for data contributors to provide and evaluate data on a regional basis. The data may be in the traditional format or may include non-traditional data like information from fishers' surveys. The workshops will identify any data which are missing.

Analysis of the data will be carried out at a separate **Expert Working Group**. The advice will then be drafted by more experienced scientists at an **Advisory Working Group** and subjected to **Peer Review**. Finally, the advice will be issued by a single **Advisory Committee**.

The new system for providing advice will be as follows:



The MoU between ICES and the Commission now places an obligation upon ICES to hold Data Compilation Workshops, and it is intended that the industry will be able to participate in them. Observer status may be possible at the subsequent Working Groups, but has yet to be decided by ICES.

Benchmark Working Groups will also take place periodically, probably in the autumn, and these will provide an opportunity to scrutinise the models and methodology applied to particular stocks or groups of stocks. The Benchmark Meetings will provide an opportunity to think outside the box, and will look at different ways of performing the assessments.

RACs' Perspective on the reforms

The weakness of many ICES stock assessments because of poor data or inadequate models was a major and enduring concern for a number of RACs. These deficiencies were often recognised by ICES but to date there had been no major, systematic and collaborative effort to improve the quality of the assessments.

Not all assessments are weak and resources are scarce. It would be helpful therefore if ICES introduced a "traffic lights" system that signalled ICES own opinion whether an assessment was robust, basically sound but with some short-comings or very weak and in need of serious remedial work. This would help to focus attention and scarce resources to where they are most urgently needed.

RACs had particularly sought open **data workshops** where scientists and fishermen can sit down and in relation to specific stocks:

- Identify what information is available
- What data gaps exist
- How assessment models might be improved

The focus must be on total out-take, not just official landings figures, if a realistic picture of the state of stocks is to emerge. Filling the gap would primarily require accurate data on landings and discards but for a truly comprehensive picture various forms of industry data should be integrated into the assessment.

The material likely to be presented and discussed at the Data Compilation Workshops may include, as well as the traditional data:

- Data from reference fleets
- Results from joint Industry/Science Partnerships
- Results of Fishers' Surveys
- Discard data
- Improved landings data
- Data from fishers' logs/diaries
- Spatial data

The challenge will be to ensure that the information coming from fishers can take its place within a time-series and therefore contribute seriously to the assessment process.

The ICES Data Compilation Workshops will only partially fulfil the functions requested by the RACs. There may also need to be a link into the ICES Benchmark Working Groups, where more fundamental aspects of the assessments will be discussed.

Fishers' Survey

The Fishers Survey conducted by the NSRAC had been evaluated by ICES and it had been agreed that it could make a valuable contribution to fish stock assessments, especially with a few adaptations to increase the fit with ICES methodologies. The suggested changes included:

Improved focus on specific stocks, especially where there is little other information (e.g. monkfish)

An improved response rate. Currently the rate is 5% to 30%. This should be increased to between 30% to 60%

A proper assessment on how representative the returns were of the whole fleet is required

Improved feedback of the results to the industry

The meeting agreed that a discussion in a smaller group on how the survey might be improved was required to develop it further.

Long Term Management Plans

The Commission, ICES and RACs agree that the development of long term management plans to meet the political commitments on MSY, should be an inclusive process based on the best available science. Specifically, the role of science should be to illuminate options for discussion by stakeholders.

It has become evident however that there are institutional constraints on funding the kind of scientific work required and also funding the kind of stakeholder meetings necessary to ensure that the development of long term management plans is an inclusive process.

The Commission is adamant that it should not pay twice, first for ICES advice and then again for separate advice via the RACs which ultimately would come from ICES or some other competent scientific body. Also, the RACs are already paid to reflect stakeholders' view and this should be part of the RACs normal work.

The RACs emphasised that its funding was only sufficient to cover its basic administration costs and normal programme of meetings. The development of well founded, inclusive, management plans could not be met within this budget. The alternative was to let the Commission take the lead in developing stock by stock, fishery by fishery management plans and the RACs would merely provide comments on them. This apparent impasse may be circumvented in the following way:

ICES could be involved in providing scientific underpinning for RACs discussions if specific requests are made through the EU/ICES Memorandum of Understanding, or if invited to participate in RAC events. Additionally, national laboratories may be willing to contribute to the RAC work on request

If, as part of the current review of RACs, the Commission considered that the RACs funding is insufficient to cover the additional (often port or regional) level meetings necessary to ensure that MSY is an inclusive process, additional funding may be made available

The North Sea RAC proposed a meeting in July 2008 (possibly involving other RACs) to which ICES would be invited. The aim of the meeting would be to assess the progress to date and the work yet to be done on the development of well-founded, inclusive, management plans. It was hoped that the meeting would resolve the twin issues of scientific input and funding for stakeholder meetings.