



Demersal Working Group Record of Meeting September 12th, 2007, Dublin, Ireland

Rapporteur: Tony Hawkins

Record for approval by WG

1. Apologies & Welcome

- 1.1 Barrie Deas, Chairman of NSRAC's Demersal Working Group, welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially Kenneth Patterson from the Commission and Chris Darby & Tom Catchpole from CEFAS. Apologies were received from Nathalie Steins, Christien Absil, Nicki Holmyard & Hugo Anderson.

2. Report of the Meeting held in Vienna on June 14, 2007

- 2.1 The report of the Vienna WG prepared by Tim Daw was approved without further amendment. Matters arising would be dealt with under the items listed in the agenda.

3. Cod Recovery Measures

- 3.1 At the last meeting of the WG an Interim Position Paper on Cod Recovery had been completed and approved. The paper had subsequently been sent to the Commission. It had drawn heavily on the experience of the Cod Symposium and endorsed many of the points made in a summary paper prepared for the NSRAC and the NWWRAC. It had made a number of specific points on cod recovery:

- § There was scepticism whether effort control could deliver cod recovery
- § There was recognition of the need to avoid adverse impact upon other fisheries
- § There were concerns to avoid extreme segmentation of the fleet
- § There was recognition that as cod recovery took place 'decoupling' would become more difficult (decoupling is the operation of fisheries for other species in a way which reduces their impact upon cod)

- § It pointed out that 'decoupling' needed to be achieved at a local scale and should be evolutionary, not revolutionary
 - § There was a 'third way' in which industry could take the lead on 'decoupling'.
- 3.2 In Vienna we had received a presentation from the Commission on its 'non-paper' on the future of the cod recovery programme. Today, we had to agree further recommendations on cod recovery which took account of that 'non-paper'. Our comments would go forward to the Executive for approval as advice to the Commission.
- 3.3 The main points of the Commission's analysis were as follows:
- It agreed with the conclusion from the symposium that rebuilding of cod stocks to safe levels was both possible and desirable. It took the view however that there was still too high a rate of fishing mortality upon cod.
 - Management of fisheries other than cod was important and should be considered from the outset when renewing cod recovery measures.
 - An area-based approach should be taken. This was reflected in the structure of the non-paper.
 - For cod to recover there should be less fishing on cod
 - One option for achieving this would be to manage the activity of the fleets which caught cod through overall limits on fishing effort. This would imply levels of effort substantially lower than at present.
 - Another option would be 'decoupling'; seeking to manage fisheries for other stocks differently and better to avoid the capture of cod.
 - 'Decoupling' could involve technical measures relating to fishing gears, related catch composition rules, or potentially a by-catch only rule in some areas. It implied a much more rigid system of fleet segmentation than had applied previously.
 - The evidence of the effectiveness of the current days at sea system in reducing fishing effort was inconclusive, but suggested that it had not been as effective as expected and had involved relatively little reduction in actual effort.
 - The effort regime had become complicated, largely in response to various requests for refinements.
 - A new cod recovery plan should not include specific target biomasses but should instead involve a substantial reduction in fishing mortality followed by a further review
 - Reductions in fishing effort broadly in the range 25%-75% would be equivalent to the current biomass target.
 - In the case of North Sea cod, the minimum target should be to reduce fishing mortality to the level specified in the long term plan adopted with Norway (0.4) from the current level of about 0.85.
 - There was a question over how fast cod mortality should be reduced.
 - The uncertainty over cod catches should be addressed as soon as possible and the means to do this were in the hands of member states and the fishing industry (e.g. through measures to reduce discarding of cod).
 - On technical measures, there were no simple practical solutions for improving selectivity, but there may be useful additional measures at a regional level.

- There might be specific uses for closed areas in some, well-identified cases, but the effects could be neutral or even negative if effort was displaced to other areas.
 - Existing closed areas were being evaluated by an STECF sub-group, which met on the 3-7 September 2007.
 - In the North Sea, efforts to avoid catching or discarding the more abundant 2005 year class could lead to a quick rebuilding of the stock – an increase in the TAC was not a suitable response to increased recruitment. Instead incentives should be sought for the adoption of fishing practices that caught fewer cod.
- 3.4 Essentially, the Commission was proposing further reductions in effort on cod applied across the fleets, and/or greater efforts aimed at ‘decoupling’. A much more complex and restrictive set of rules would be necessary, with more rigid segmentation of the fleet to separate those sectors that caught cod from those that did not. The Commission was also proposing a move away from the current Annex II arrangements, where permissible days absent from port were based on gear categories, to allocations to Member States based on the track records of vessels operating in specific areas with particular gears.
- 3.5 The chairman had prepared a draft paper for discussion. The paper drew on the ICES advice for this year and rose to the challenge from ICES for industry itself to avoid catching stocks identified as critical. It also tried to respond to the wish of the Commission to avoid catching and discarding the 2005 and 2006 year classes of cod. The draft presented a third way for achieving cod recovery and three initiatives were developed within it. Some comments had already been received - a series of comments from Christien Absil were presented to the meeting. We now had to decide how the draft could be amended to properly reflect the full range of views represented within the NSRAC.
- 3.6 It was pointed out that the summary of the Commission's views at the start of the draft gave it the wrong complexion. It was agreed that this section should be removed. Concern was expressed by fishers that the draft did not properly reflect the large numbers of young cod now being caught in the North Sea. The scientific assessments did not reflect the true state of cod. The paragraph of the draft which said that we accepted that ‘the scientific advice was clear and unequivocal’ was untrue and should be taken out or amended.
- 3.7 There was a general view that it would be difficult in such a large meeting to review and finalise the paper. It was suggested that a smaller drafting group should convene at the end of the WG to take the draft further forward
- 3.8 Kenneth Patterson reminded the WG that the wording of the draft was important. It should be a positive document. The scientific advice was now saying that the state of cod stocks was improving. However, fishing mortality on cod was still very high and this would have an adverse impact upon emerging cod.
- 3.9 Fishers believed that effort had already been greatly reduced. There were fewer vessels fishing for cod and fishing mortality must be lower. However, it was accepted that we had to avoid damaging the prospects of the emerging year classes of cod. The growing abundance of young cod through new recruitment

could not be dealt with by the current regulations – that would simply generate discards. We had to adopt an approach which would allow cod to recover fully. Fishers also thought that the ICES advice could have been presented in a more useful form, which properly addressed the presence of greater numbers of juvenile cod.

- 3.10 The chairman drew attention to the three initiatives discussed in the draft, viz:
- Real-time area closures
 - An observer programme
 - Cod avoidance plans for individual vessels

Real-time Area Closures

- 3.11 Michael Park described the pilot project for real-time closures, which had been developed by Scots fishers in collaboration with the Scottish Government. It was intended to deal with the incidental capture of cod below the minimum landing size. If more than 60 juvenile fish per hour were being caught then an area closure would be triggered. An area of 15x15 miles would be closed for a maximum period of 21 days. Regional safeguards had been introduced: there could not be more than 3 closed areas within a 45x45 mile square. Fishers themselves could notify the administration of the need for closure. Scientists on board vessels to monitor discards could also notify a need for closure. And the fisheries protection agency could propose a closure. Initially participation in the pilot would be voluntary. However, in time, the arrangements should be incorporated into the regulations, to allow member states to adopt the measure if they wished. That, alongside other measures, would allow a regional approach to be adopted. Michael Park pointed out that if fishers wished the Commission to propose sensible measures for dealing with discards of fish of legal size then fishers themselves had to show responsibility in reducing discards of fish below the minimum landing size.
- 3.12 Fishers' representatives from Denmark, France, Belgium and England supported the Scottish pilot. Danish fishers had adopted similar voluntary measures in the southern North Sea in the past. French fishers had agreed to a voluntary closure of an area in the Celtic Sea. Such closures could achieve positive results. The adoption of this pilot project showed that fishers could take constructive initiatives at a regional level. It was important, however, with real-time closures to provide for automatic re-opening of the areas - to allow fishers to 'test' the densities of juveniles. There was also a fear that juvenile cod were now so abundant that a very large number of area closures would result. The thresholds would have to be carefully set and they would have to be different in different regions. There might also be problems with differentiating between different gear types and in allowing some fishers to fish in the closed areas if they were using particular technical measures, or if they were not catching cod. Difficulties of enforcement were also discussed. In conclusion, the chairman thought that there was broad support from fishers for the scheme. The pilot project was welcomed, although there were some caveats about some aspects of its operation in practice.

Observer scheme

- 3.13 Michael Park then described proposals for an observer scheme which had been developed in the UK. One of the special conditions in Annex IIa of the Effort Control Regulation is that where vessels take less than 5% of cod they are entitled to additional days at sea. Section 8d of the Annex provides that one way they can demonstrate they have done this is to have an observer on board for the duration of the fishing trip. A 100 day pilot observer scheme is now operating within the UK, initially with three observers being deployed. The aim is to seek a pay back in terms of days at sea where the vessels are catching less than 5% of cod. Such a programme may also create a clearer picture of where catches of cod are high and where they are low. The observers would be trained in scientific procedures and would collect scientific data on the lengths and ages of fish. They would also play a part in real-time area closures.
- 3.14 Fishers from outside the UK saw some problems with this proposal. Who could guarantee that all vessels who wished to have an observer on board would get one? The availability of observers could become a limiting factor. It was not possible for all vessels to carry observers – would smaller vessels be penalised? Others thought that pressure for fisheries to achieve accreditation might require more observer programmes and that this was therefore an important initiative. Some fishers wondered whether fishers themselves could collect the necessary data, but it was pointed out that verification of the catches by independent persons was important. Overall the initiative was seen as a useful one especially if it could be generalised so that it applied to fleet segments rather than individual vessels. The pilot observer scheme in the UK would be followed very closely.

Cod avoidance plans for individual vessels

- 3.15 Cod avoidance plans for individual vessels were proposed by the English industry. Here, vessel operators would undertake, through various means, to keep cod catches within the vessel's quota allocations, and in any event below 5% by weight, over the course of the year. The vessels participating in the cod avoidance plan scheme would undertake to provide enhanced data on fishing activities, including estimates of discards. In return, the participating vessels would be exempt from effort control measures for the coming year. The concept was similar to the Commission's discard proposals, where limits were set and then operation within those limits left to the ingenuity of individual skippers.
- 3.16 There was support for this proposal, but a number of practical problems were raised. Hundreds of individual plans might be submitted, posing problems for administrations. Managers would also have to audit the performance of vessels in relation to the plans. The move away from micro-management by the authorities was praised, but it was thought by some to be too ambitious and radical. Who would authorise and audit the plans? Could it be done for collectives of fishers?
- 3.17 It was agreed that this initiative might go forward as a pilot. The approach had scope for achieving derogations for the participating vessels if the performance of

the vessels could be monitored and verified. In a sense this approach was moving towards the development of fisheries management plans for groupings of fishers. The emphasis on cod avoidance was considered by some to be an unfortunate choice of language based on the idea that cod were endangered. With cod stocks recovering – the current position - some vessels would wish to catch cod and although they might wish to avoid heavy exploitation of cod they would not wish to avoid them entirely, as the name of the project suggested

4. Effort capping

- 4.1 Michael Park presented a paper on effort caps in the cod recovery zone. The Commission's non-paper on the future of the cod recovery plan asked whether the current days-at-sea system should be improved and simplified, or whether there should instead be ceilings on kW effort deployed by member states in specific areas and using specific fishing gears. The paper from Michael Park suggested that in 2008 the Commission should allow member states the flexibility to operate one gear grouping under a kW effort ceiling, while remaining gears continued to operate under the existing days-at-sea arrangements. This derogation would give Member States the opportunity to test the benefits and issues associated with effort ceilings. Member States have to be able to manage effort. This initiative would give them the option to manage effort internally for one gear category.
- 4.2 Peter Breckling had written with a comment that a mixture of two effort management schemes might be difficult. Moreover, different countries had different ways of measuring the power of vessels. It might be better to determine effort levels on the basis of relative stability.
- 4.3 It was pointed out that currently each member state provides an annual return of kW.days. These are then added up by STECF. An effort cap within a member State would not change the country's effort allocation in any way. However, some participants expressed concern about the understatement of vessel power in some Member States which would complicate the setting of effort ceilings. Setting currently stated KW.days in stone was not appropriate. Moreover, we wished to move away from effort controls. This proposal might ensure that they remained in place! Others thought that as we already had effort controls, and these needed to be managed properly. This scheme would help Member States to take internal decisions. The kW effort ceiling could be calculated for each cod recovery zone, which might allow the cap levels to better reflect the state of cod stocks in each area. The capping of effort would give managers security that the level of effort would not exceed a given level. It would allow Member States to experiment with allocations under a given ceiling
- 4.4 Overall, Kenneth Patterson thought he had heard only a rather limited set of suggestions coming forward. He thought there was a reluctance to move from the current position. The chairman replied that the NSRAC was trying to develop a new regional approach to management. The Commission was not currently proposing anything other than limited TACs and effort restrictions in all areas. The NSRAC was trying to move in the direction of developing industry-led management plans for different regions. We wanted to develop new approaches,

with measures tailored to different fleets and fisheries, which provided incentives for fishers to behave responsibly. Clearly some sectors had reservations about these initiatives, and some fishers were emphatic in wishing to go for something other than effort management. We were unable to reach an immediate consensus on these initiatives. There was a diversity of views and further discussion was needed. The forthcoming meeting on technical measures would contribute to that discussion.

- 4.5 It was agreed that a small drafting group would meet at the end of the WG to take the draft paper from the NSRAC forward. In the longer term, we would try to develop more specific proposals on the subject of 'decoupling'. We were essentially trying to develop sustainable long term plans for different fisheries while taking account of the need to avoid any detrimental effect upon cod in the immediate future. What did we need to do within the different fisheries to achieve a positive outcome for cod? Should we be doing something different? However, it was recognised that for the moment we would be obliged to operate within the current effort management regime.
- 4.6 Discussion concluded with comments on the impact of the environment and other factors, including predators, upon cod. It was concluded that these other factors had been discussed thoroughly at the cod symposium, and that their importance had been firmly recognised. Currently, we were discussing those factors which we could influence. It was accepted that cod stocks might not recover to previous high levels as there were many factors other than fishing affecting them.

5. Long Term Management of Plaice and Sole

- 5.1 Hugo Anderson had written to the Commission on behalf of the NSRAC welcoming the Long Term Management Plan for plaice and sole, which incorporated proposals which had come from the NSRAC. It was noted that once plaice and sole were above safe biological limits there was scope within the plan for setting future targets based on social and economic factors. The NSRAC was now asking the Commission to request STECF to begin the process of defining social and economic targets, and to involve the RACs in that process. Michael Andersen and Nathalie Steins were willing to provide specific advice on this subject. The WG endorsed the letter from Hugo Anderson.

6. The Commission's Policy Statement

- 6.1 The Policy Statement from the European Commission on Fishing Opportunities for 2008 had been presented during the Vienna meeting and was briefly summarised again by Kenneth Patterson. The first part of the Communication (COM(2007) 295 final) provided a summary and review of the advice since 2003. Scientists were moving away from advice based on short term forecasts. The number of full forecasts had decreased from 40 to 29, either because of worsening data, or better knowledge about the limitations of the data. However, the Commission had concluded that it should continue to heed scientific advice and try to collect better data. The number of stocks at risk appears neither to be decreasing nor increasing. About four-fifths of stocks remained outside known

safe biological limits. TAC decisions had been on average substantially higher than the annual catches advised by scientists. This had led to only small decreases in the impact of fishing. Only three stocks under TACs (North Sea haddock, North Sea saithe and megrims in the Bay of Biscay) were exploited consistently within the commitments made at the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. Since the reform of the CFP fishing effort limitations had been fixed for western waters, for deep water species and for recovery stocks. According to data provided to STECF the overall fishing effort had diminished only to a limited extent and there had been an increase in the effort deployed using smaller-mesh gears (70-89mm).

- 6.2 The Commission now wished to make the rules on effort management more simple and effective. Changes would be made to harvest control rules. Where advice was provided to limit catches it should carry weight even if it was incomplete, and the rule of moving the TAC towards the advised catch level in steps of no more than 15% per year should be followed. Where there was advice to reduce effort, STECF should be asked to measure effort levels and to advise on the level of appropriate effort, and while such studies were being carried out, the TACs should be reduced by up to 15%. Where there was an indication that stock sizes were improving, a 15% increase in the TAC should be applied; conversely where a stock was at high risk or declining then a decrease of up to 15% should apply. Where there was advice from ICES for a zero catch or a reduction to the lowest possible level then the Commission would propose a reduction that was as large as was compatible with any mixed fisheries considerations and with relevant social and economic factors. Where there was no scientific advice and where catches were lower than the TAC then some expansion might be possible, but should be accompanied by scientific evaluation. Where stocks were outside safe biological limits and needed to be returned to within safe limits, fishing opportunities should be set that would reduce fishing mortality; which may mean reducing the TACs by more than 15%. Thus new rules were being set up for the setting of TACs, and the views of the RACs were being sought on these.
- 6.3 It was pointed out that the document had now been available for some time for stakeholders to come to their own conclusions. One view was that the proposals caused difficulties. TAC management may not have been as effective as it should have been but there were many reasons for this other than fishing. It was important to identify where problems were being caused to stocks and to do something about those problems. Others thought that the proposals made sense and should be welcomed, although the data presented on effort were flawed and had led to a false picture of current effort levels. The gradual approach inherent in the document was thought to be helpful and the guidelines were sensible. It was agreed that the science needed to be improved and that mechanism for achieving those improvements should be discussed.
- 6.4 It was noted that the Commission's statement on the banning of discards had come out after the policy statement, changing the position somewhat. Moreover, the current improved recruitment to cod stocks was not reflected in the document. How would these differences be dealt with? Kenneth Patterson declined to comment.

- 6.5 Concern was expressed by fishers over the position where scientific advice has been poor, the TACs have been under-shot, and where the Commission has reduced the TACs. In fact, it was often effort restrictions which had led to the reduced catches. In some circumstances, where catch per unit effort has increased, the TACs should be increased.
- 6.6 Other fishers stressed that a lack of scientific knowledge did not mean a lack of fish. Fishers should not suffer simply because the science was poor. It was also pointed out that the policy paper did not deal with the situation where there was disagreement between DG Fish and DG Environment. Fishers were emphatic that if forecasts are valid then they should be used for setting TACs. Last year, the table of forecasts produced by ACFM had not been used by the Commission. A table of forecasts has been provided again this year and it should be adhered to. In response, Chris Darby of CEFAS said that the results of the 3rd Quarter scientific surveys came in around now, and ACFM would wish to take these figures into account to make new forecasts at its October meeting. Thus the forecasts prepared by ACFM in May might be updated.
- 6.7 A further comment from fishers was that catch predictions had been given last year. This year a range of TACs had been provided but the actual figures were inappropriate. A key point in relation to the new policy was that the rules had to be followed. They should not be ignored if they delivered change. Currently the rules were used inconsistently. It was also pointed out that it would not be sensible to set zero TACs for any species. The whole scenario had to be looked at. However, the new rules were a definite improvement on what had gone before. This strategy by the Commission should be encouraged. However, rather than regard the statements as rules they should be regarded as guidelines. They should not be applied too rigidly, especially where TACs had not been taken up. There were genuine problems over quotas under the current effort restrictions.
- 6.8 Discussion turned to the need for closer partnerships between scientists and fishers. It was evident that in Norway there were better relations between scientists and fishers, resulting in improvements to the science. In the North Sea, there were strong differences of opinion. Fishers had seen an increase in plaice whereas scientists had reported a decrease. Fishers who had participated as observers on scientific surveys had been shocked by the inadequacies of the sampling carried out. This was true for both flatfish and for cod. There were a number of joint initiatives and surveys now underway from which there were high expectations.
- 6.9 Finally, there was concern that despite the setting out of the new rules and despite evidence that some stocks were increasing decisions were often taken on political grounds, as they had been on plaice and sole last year. Decisions by Council are often taken for political reasons. It was also pointed out that the EU/Norway negotiations often greatly influenced decisions. In reply, Kenneth Patterson said that discussions with the RACs could not compromise negotiations with Norway. Nevertheless, the Commission tried to take account of the views of both the RACs and the member states.

7. Discards

- 7.1 The NSRAC had submitted a comprehensive response to the Commission's Communication in July. A generic response had been received. The Commission had now begun work on implementation of a discard policy and legislative proposals were expected to come forward in 2008. In the meantime there had been a study tour of Iceland and Norway and reports had been presented by Barrie Deas and Nigel Proctor. The main impressions had been that there was much to learn from these two examples but they should not be copied slavishly. Our policies had to be customised and to provide incentives for fishers to behave responsibly. There were completely different relationships between fishers and managers under the CFP. Any discard ban had to be accompanied by supporting measures.
- 7.2 Tom Catchpole of CEFAS reported that the Commission was funding pilot projects to reduce discards. A few studies were currently being undertaken, and he would like to have information on these, as the Commission wished to ensure that the projects were well coordinated. He asked what RAC participants were looking for in terms of pilot projects. Were there any projects that they would like to take forward?
- 7.3 Willem de Boer reported that a number of Dutch skippers were carrying out studies together with a research vessel. They had visited the South West of England to learn lessons from earlier studies. Luc Corbisier mentioned that work was also underway with Belgian beam-trawlers. It was emphasised by Barrie Deas that many fishers showed great good will towards pilot studies. However, those studies needed to find a way of providing incentives for fishers to reduce discards – perhaps extra days at sea for those who participated.
- 7.4 Tom Catchpole said that the output from his study would be a series of guidelines directed at the RACs and setting out the best ways of setting up pilot projects and carrying them out. The guidelines would not just deal with the methodology but would advise on how to initiate studies. Michel Goujon thought there were lessons to be learned from those studies already carried out. In planning such projects fishers should be aware that they would themselves gain in terms of improved knowledge and improvements to the stocks. They did not always need extra quotas or days at sea to persuade them to take part.
- 7.5 Kenneth Patterson mentioned that STECF had been asked to consider discard reductions. The terms of reference had not yet been decided but the RACS would be invited to participate as observers.

8. Long Term Management Plans

- 8.1 The Chairman reported that progress had been made by the RACs in formulating advice on long term management plans. Meetings had been held of the *Nephrops*, Monkfish and Saithe Development Groups and useful insights had been gained. The position with flatfish was different. Here a management plan had been developed that drew heavily on NSRAC advice, and it had been adopted by the Council.

- 8.2 In the case of Cod/Haddock/Whiting, cod recovery had an especially important influence. CEFAS were pursuing an Ecopath/Ecosim modelling approach, as described at the WG meeting in Copenhagen and the Development Group would be meeting later in the year to consider the results of that study.
- 8.3 There had been delays in developing a consistent template for the Development Groups to prepare their long term advice. This still has to be completed. Lack of funding to the RACs from the Commission had prevented further progress. Under the new funding arrangements it should be possible for Development Group meetings to take place, some at the inter-RAC level. The Saithe Development Group planned to meet with the ICES Assessment WG to discuss long term management plans. The Nephrops Group was awaiting assistance from FRS in producing a blue-print for movement towards more sustainable fisheries. With Monkfish the priority was to improve the quality of data to understand better the stock status and dynamics of this important species. A Cod/Haddock/Whiting meeting was planned in the autumn.
- 8.4 Kenneth Patterson emphasised the need for area-based plans to link long term management proposals for a range of different species, especially in relation to discards and to the need for cod recovery. There were horizontal issues to be considered by both the RACs and the Commission. The Chairman underlined that it was the wish of the NSRAC to conduct its long term planning on an area basis, using the best possible science. The Edinburgh Workshop on Long Term Management Planning had emphasised the need for a regional approach. Michel Goujon pointed out that the NSRAC still had a great deal of work to do in involving fishers themselves in long term planning.

9. The Science Sub-Group; Improvement to the Stock Assessments

- 9.1 Tony Hawkins reminded the WG that a small Science Sub-Group had met in March in Brussels to look at relations between the RACs and ICES scientists. The Demersal WG had stressed that it was no longer satisfactory to have to draw attention to problems in the assessments from one year to the next – without any action to improve matters. The sub-group had reviewed the needs of the RAC for expert advice and had then gone on to consider concerns over the stock assessments. Both scientists and RAC representatives had concluded that there was a need for closer interaction between scientists and fishers over the assessments. There were particular problems over data quality and over the need for new data which could only be obtained with the help of fishers. The North Sea Commission was said to have set a good example by organising consultation meetings with the stock assessment scientists. Those meetings had been discontinued because of lack of funding. We now needed to reinstate this element of inter-action in order to make progress.
- 9.2 ICES itself had agreed that it would interact with the RACs over the stock assessments. ICES itself was currently considering changes to its advisory structure. In future, it was proposed that Expert Groups (currently, the Assessment Working Groups) would become the focus of the advisory process. They would transform knowledge into advice. Responsibility for preparation of

the advice would fall to the level of the experts themselves. The existing Advisory Committees –ACFM, ACE and ACME – would be joined into a single Advisory Group. The advice from the Expert Groups would be inspected by a Review Group, as before, but the Review Groups would not interfere with the advice but simply send it back for revision or strengthening if necessary. However, in planning their reforms ICES had made no mention of the need to involve stakeholders.

- 9.3 Under the new ICES system it was intended that a wider range of data would go to each Expert Group. The traditional data would be forwarded to the Expert Group by the National Institutes and in addition oceanographic and environmental data would be considered. It was intended that the Expert Groups would be regionally based and that they would interface with the appropriate RACs. With this system there might be a clearer role for stakeholders in the preparation and evaluation of data, and greater scope for a greater input into the Expert Groups from those with direct knowledge of the fisheries. Such a system should be more responsive to requests coming in – for example from the RACs – and could open up the advisory process to a wider range of data and new forms of knowledge. In the USA and Canada data workshops were held at a regional level to open up the advisory process to participants from outside, whether they were fishers, anglers, environmentalists or university scientists.
- 9.4 These proposals for reforming ICES would be discussed at the forthcoming ICES Delegates Meeting. There was no guarantee that they would be accepted, as some delegates had strong reservations about involving stakeholders in ICES affairs. Nevertheless, there was strong support from many of the scientists involved in the Assessment WGs. A paper was being presented at the ICES Annual Science Conference by Martin Pastoors, Tony Hawkins and Jean-Jacques Maguire suggesting the need for reform, and in particular the need for regional data workshops, held in cooperation with the National Institutes, where a whole range of data could be called for and then brought forward through cooperation with stakeholders and especially fishers. These data workshops would provide a route for the data collected by fishers themselves, or by national or international fisher/scientist partnerships, to be fed into the stock assessments through the ICES Expert Groups. There were other proposals for change. ICES was suggesting that the Assessment WGs should take place at the beginning of the year. The meetings should also be shorter.
- 9.5 Fishers agreed that there was a need for closer interaction between themselves and scientists. There was a real need for fishers to participate and assist with data collection and for scientists to look for new kinds of data from the fisheries. However, there was concern at reservations within ICES about the need for reform. Tony Hawkins thought that there was a great deal of support from key ICES scientists on the need to involve fishers in data collection. The current barrier to progress was lack of funding to hold the regional data workshops. A fisher asked whether such workshops could be funded by the Commission. Chris Darby said that a project had already been established to look at the gathering together of data for the North Sea. Funding had been obtained and the intention was to hold a meeting to decide how to take these initiatives forward.

- 9.6 Kenneth Patterson agreed that it was commonplace in the USA and Canada for fishers and others to meet with scientists at the very start of the annual cycle to discuss data. He thought that the gathering of data was a key activity, and that data collection should be seen as a part of the advisory process, not as a separate project.
- 9.7 It was agreed that the NSRAC should write to the Commission proposing that regional data workshops – linked to the Assessment WGs – should become an integral part of the advisory process, and that steps should be taken to establish such workshops in the near future.

10. Margin of Tolerance

- 10.1 Fishers had agreed that it was not possible to work within the 8% margin of tolerance between logbook estimates and landing declarations. A letter had been sent to the Director General and a response was awaited. The letter had arrived during the summer, when responsibilities had changed. The Commission would respond in due course. It was stressed that this matter was very important to fishers and the Executive Secretary, Ann Bell, offered to raise it at the next RAC Coordination Meeting.

11. Technical Conservation Regulation

- 11.1 The NSRAC had not developed a full position on the replacement of Regulation 850/98. However, a two day conference has now been planned on this topic by the Killybegs Fishermen's Association – emulating the very successful cod recovery symposium. The conference will bring experts and fishers together, and the Commission will be attending.

12. Gill Net Fisheries

- 12.1 Derk Jan Berends reported that there is great enthusiasm for a meeting of gillnet interests but the limited funding available to the RAC over the past year had so far prevented the planned meeting from taking place. It was agreed that now the RAC is operating on a different financial basis there should be more scope for focus group meetings. It might be possible to draw together a small gillnet group in the margins of the General Assembly meeting in Aalborg.

13. Electronic Log Books

- 13.1 Fishers had asked for this topic to be placed on the agenda, as they were concerned about the implications and the costs. A timetable had not yet been agreed, but the introduction of the logbooks will be a major change with implications for both capital and running costs.

13.2 Kenneth Patterson said that the subject would be discussed at the Management meeting on the 3rd October. He thought that the industry would benefit from electronic logbooks both in terms of better data organisation and more sustainable fisheries.

13.3 Fishers thought that there might be benefits for them in terms of the ease of recording information. However, the information could be used to penalise fishers. Currently, fishers could achieve the correct catch composition over a period. It could not be done on a haul by haul basis! The correct catch composition at the point of landing was what was important. However, Kenneth Patterson pointed out that with some vessels covering different TAC areas on a single trip the logging had to become electronic – at least for those vessels.

14. Any Other Business

14.1 Participants were reminded that organisations who wish to remain members of the NSRAC must write to the Secretariat to say so.

15. Date, Time and Place of next Meeting

15.1 The next meeting of the Demersal Working Group will be on the 1st and 2nd November in Brussels.

16. Action Points

1. A small drafting group would convene at the end of the WG to take the draft response of the NSRAC to the Commission's non-paper on cod recovery further forward (3.7, 4.5).	Barrie Deas, Michel Goujon, Michael Park, Michael Andersen & Secretariat
2. In the longer term, we would try to develop more specific proposals on the subject of 'decoupling' (4.5).	NSRAC DWG and ExCom
3. RAC participants thinking of embarking on pilot projects to reduce discards were asked to contact Tom Catchpole of CEFAS for advice (7.2).	Participants, Tom Catchpole
4. RAC participants to note that STECF will be asked by the Commission to consider discard reductions. RACs would be able to send observers (7.5).	NSRAC participants to note
5. Development Group meetings are being planned for later this year to prepare Long Term Management Plans (8.3).	Potential participants to note
6. The NSRAC will write to the Commission proposing that regional data workshops linked to the Assessment WGs should become an integral part of the advisory process. Steps should be taken to establish such workshops in the near future (9.7).	Secretariat & ExCom

7. Ann Bell will raise the issue of a Commission response to the NSRAC letter on margins of tolerance at the next RAC Coordination Meeting (10.1)	Secretariat
8. The NSRAC will need to developed a full position on the Technical Measures Regulation following the Meeting on this subject in Dublin (11.1)	Demersal WG
9. A meeting of the Gill Net Group may take place in the margins of the General Assembly meeting in Aalborg (12.1).	Derk Jan Berends & Secretariat
10. The next meeting of the DWG will be on the 1 st and 2 nd of November in Brussels (15.1).	Secretariat, participants

17. In Attendance

Participants

Barrie Deas (Chair)	National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations
Tony Hawkins	Rapporteur
Ann Bell	Executive Secretary
Michael Andersen	Danmarks Fiskeriforening
Fleming Kristensen	Danmarks Fiskeriforening
Dennis Clark	National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations
Michael Park	Scottish Fishermen's Federation
Luc Corbisier	Redercentrale
Derk Jan Berends	Dutch Fishermen's Union
Chris Darby	CEFAS
Fred Normandale	NFFO
Kenneth Patterson	European Commission
Michel Goujon	CNPNEM
Tom Catchpole	CEFAS
Morten Imer Moller	Danish Ministry
Vincent Toulounon	CME OP
Gaelle Kervella	UAPF/FROM NORD
Antoine Le Garrec	UAPF/EURONOR
Margolle Bruno	CME
Emiel Brouckaert	Rederscentrale
Louis Vantorre	Skipper/Owner
Ian Gatt	SFF
Simon Dryden	Scottish Government
John Crudden	European Anglers' Alliance
Joanna Messini	Scottish Government
James Thain	NESFO
Mark Dougal	NESFO
Willem de Boer	Federatie van Visserij
John Anderson	Seafish / EAFE
Susan Anton	Seafish/EAFE
Julia Dennison	N FFO
Geert Meun	Federatie Visserij
Karen Dijkstra	Netherlands Ministry