

The North Sea Regional Advisory Council



Executive Committee (ExCom) Record of Meeting November 17th, 2006, Brussels, Belgium

Rapporteur: A D Hawkins

Agreed Record for ExCom

1. Apologies & Welcome

- 1.1 The Chair of the ExCom, Hugo Andersson, welcomed participants to the meeting. He thanked Luc Mellaerts of Belgium for hosting the excellent dinner on the previous evening. He was especially pleased to welcome Jorgen Holmquist, from the European Commission. Apologies had been received from David Johnson of OSPAR. Henrik Svenberg was replacing Reine Johansson as the representative for Swedish fishermen. The agenda for the meeting was agreed.

2. Presentation by Jörgen Holmquist, Director General of the Directorate-General of Fisheries, European Commission

- 2.1 Jörgen Holmquist thanked the NSRAC for inviting him to address the ExCom. The NSRAC was the oldest of the RACs, and it had set the pace for the others. Four RACs were now in place, two were almost in operation and only the Mediterranean lagged behind. Much additional work had now fallen upon the Commission which he hoped to resolve through the re-allocation of staff.
- 2.2 Regular seminars took place between the Directors General of Fisheries of the Member States and DG Fisheries. At one of these, in September 2006, stakeholder involvement had been discussed and representatives of the RACs had been invited. In general, the RACs were favourably disposed towards the arrangements made by the Commission. The work programme for 2007 had been discussed and the need for closer cooperation between scientists and fishers underlined. ICES had been cooperative and was willing to make changes in the timing of scientific advice to allow greater time for discussion by the RACs and ACFA. Changes would take place in 2007 and be completed in 2008. In future, a policy document would be circulated in April and measures for most of the North Sea stocks would be decided in December.

- 2.3 The Commission was aware that there were problems in running the RACs because of the financial regime imposed upon them. It was intended that they should now become 'bodies pursuing an aim of general European interest', which would allow funding to become permanent and not regressive. The Parliament would be consulted and the Council would take the decision. The RACs were also due to be reviewed in 2007. He could not prejudge the conclusions but he believed their size and the two thirds/one third composition was right.
- 2.4 The Commission was interested in a trial effort management scheme in the Kattegat. However, there was concern that fishing pressure might increase and put stocks at risk, especially Kattegat cod which is very weak. Norway was not interested in such a management scheme and with fishing rights in the Skagerrak wished to ensure that its concerns were adequately considered.
- 2.5 He was pleased to see the North Sea and North West Waters RACs cooperating in the proposed Cod Recovery Symposium. The Commission wished to be closely involved in the event, as the discussions could produce results which would be useful for the review of the cod recovery plan. Commission rules on providing funding for such activities were complex but he hoped that greater flexibility would be possible in the future under the new arrangements proposed.
- 2.6 There were questions from the floor about the process of the cod recovery review itself. The Commission hoped to produce a policy paper in April. Both ICES and STECF would be involved and Norway would need to be consulted too. RAC Members wished to learn more about the actual procedures. They also needed to know the timetable, so that they could plan their own deliberations. Formally, the review was due to take place by March 16th 2007. Mr Holmquist replied that Parliament and the Council would both agree that the review needed more time. He offered to prepare a letter for the RACs, setting out proposals for the timetable and procedures to be followed.
- 2.7 In response to questions about funding, Mr Holmquist confirmed that the new arrangements would allow RACs to be funded for the foreseeable future, although funding would have to be reconsidered in the preparation of annual budgets. The Commission saw RACs as a long term commitment. They would be reviewed perhaps every 5 years, but adjustments could be made as we went along.
- 2.8 The need for greater scientific input to the RACs was emphasised by Nathalie Steins. There were also research proposals emerging from the RACs for which funding was being sought – like the scoping study for the Plaice Box. In reply Mr Holmquist hoped that the new Memorandum of Understanding with ICES would provide greater scope for the RACs obtaining advice from ICES, through the Commission. The Commission would also look seriously at emerging research proposals. The Study Tour to the USA and Canada had shown that in those countries there was closer dialogue between scientists and fishermen. We could learn from that. It was also clear that there was co-financing of projects between managers and the industry. In terms of stakeholder involvement, however, it was not apparent that arrangements were any better in the USA and Canada. The RACs would soon receive the report on the Study Tour.

- 2.9 On the effort management scheme for the Kattegat, Swedish and Danish fishers believed that the Commission's proposals were premature and needed further discussion. There was concern at the Commission's belief that fishing pressure would be higher. Fishermen hoped that they would be fully involved in any evaluation of the proposals coming forward. They also questioned whether Norway should decide on EU fishing policy in the Kattegat. Environmental interests wished the Commission to ensure that by-catches were adequately monitored as well as the impact of the changes upon habitats. In reply, Mr Holmquist emphasised the high interest in a pilot effort management scheme. However, a proper system would need to be devised for monitoring the impact on cod to ensure that real damage was not done and of course an ecosystem approach would have to be followed. The Commission recognised that it could not obtain absolute security but it did wish to get the parameters right in defining the level of effort. Norway was one of the parties to the management of the stocks concerned and would need to be consulted, but any difficulties could probably be resolved by discussion.
- 2.10 Asked about the delays in forming a Mediterranean RAC Mr Holmquist said that some Member States were concerned over the Mediterranean Regulation, which was still under discussion. If there was a decision at the November Council then the proposal for a Mediterranean RAC might move forward.
- 2.11 Sea anglers asked whether the information available on recreational and sport fishing was adequate. Mr Holmquist believed that sports fisheries were becoming more important. We were just at the beginning of understanding their impact. Information on the level of sports fishing was taken into account in some assessments (for example for salmon and cod) and the revision of the Data Collection Regulation would take the need for new data into account. The allocation of fishing rights between different users was a matter for member States however.
- 2.12 Nathalie Steins emphasised that one of the priorities of the NSRAC was the preparation of long term management plans for the key fisheries, including those for flatfish. RAC Members were pleased that the Commission had taken up the NSRAC suggestion that the socio-economic impact of the proposals for flatfish should be considered. The STECF WG had carried out a preliminary evaluation but the STECF plenary had decided that a proper bio-economic model would need to be developed first, and this would take time. Would the Commission be able to evaluate the socio-economic impact of their proposals before the December Council or would they table a management plan without such an assessment? Poul Degnbol of the Commission replied that the socio-economic evaluation was still 'work in progress'. In addition, a recovery plan now took priority over plans for long term management. When plaice had recovered then we could return to a long term management plan and that would be based on an economic assessment. We were now faced with a two stage process. The preliminary STECF WG assessment would be made available as a draft for circulation.
- 2.13 Mr Holmquist ended by summarising some of Commissioner Borg's priorities. The Commissioner was of course concerned with many different issues. However key priorities were;

Progressing the Maritime Green Paper

Involving stakeholders, and stronger consultation with them

Discard policy. The need to reduce by-catch and eliminate discarding

Fighting IUU (Illegal, Un-reported and Un-regulated) fisheries and providing better governance of those fisheries in international waters

The public were especially concerned about the discarding of fish. The Commission will give a high priority to reducing unwanted by-catches and it will be for the fishing industry to find practical solutions. A Communication from the Commission would be prepared in the first quarter of 2007.

2.14 The Chairman thanked Mr Holmquist for his presentation.

3. Update from the Commission

3.1 Many of the subjects Poul Degnbol had intended to deal with had already been mentioned in Mr Holmquist's presentation. The major initiative was the change in the timing of scientific advice to promote front-loading and to enable the RACs and AFCA the opportunity to comment fully on the ICES advice. The changes should be complete by 2008. ACFM will prepare numbers on most stocks by June, for the November/December Councils, with some updating of the assessments later in the year if stocks went up or down. For 2007, the North Sea Demersal WG would move to the spring, so that the numbers would be available by June.

4. Report of the Den Helder ExCom

4.1 The report of the Den Helder ExCom was agreed.

4.2 Flemming Kristensen, President of the Danish Fishermen's Association, and a fisherman for flatfish and industrial species, emphasised the great reduction of fishing effort in terms of kW.days which had taken place in the Danish fleet. Much of the fleet had disappeared. Whether cod stocks went up or down the fleet would catch the same regardless of the landings regulations. There were lots of young cod appearing in the North Sea, and the results of the Fishers' Survey had shown that cod stocks were moving in the right direction. However, the ICES assessments were out of date and the TACs were incorrect. The RACs must not behave like ICES. The words of the fishermen must be heard and the RACs should make clear statements on these issues. Mr Kristensen's views were echoed by Willem de Boer from the Netherlands and Patrice Leduc from France. Fishing vessels were meeting more and more cod. Henrik Svenberg from Sweden agreed. If quotas were lowered for cod it would simply increase discarding. Peter Breckling from Germany wished the Report of the Meeting to emphasise that fishermen believed that cod were increasing. It was pointed out, however, that the NSRAC should present the views of all interested parties, not

just those of fishers. Jan Kappel of the European Angling Alliance said that if there were more codling around then that would be a positive thing. We would just need to bring stocks back to their former levels and keep them there.

5. Presentation by Chris Ninnes of the Marine Stewardship Council

- 5.1 Chris Ninnes, Director of Operations of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), was introduced by Tom Pickerell of the WWF. His presence followed an earlier query about the relevance of the MSC to the RACs. Mr Ninnes gave a presentation on 'Promoting Sustainable Seafood with the MSC'. He began by pointing out that 50% of the world's fish stocks are fully exploited and about 25% are over-exploited, depleted or in fragile state of recovery. Eight percent of all fish caught is discarded dead or dying and there are other by-catch issues. Wider habitat and biodiversity impacts threatening the function and integrity of ecosystems that support target fish species. Over the years 1950-2000, world fish production has increased from 8m to 93m MT.
- 5.2 The MSC is an international not-for-profit organisation established in 1997. Its specific aims are to contribute to reversing the decline in global fish stocks, deliver improvements in the marine environment and contribute to securing fishers' livelihoods. It has developed the only internationally recognised and fully FAO consistent eco-label for environmentally well managed and sustainable fisheries, within which specific fisheries are measured against a rigorous environmental standard. The MSC is essentially a partnership-based organisation that works with industry, government and NGOs. The MSC has 28 staff, 6 permanent consultants and is located in London (Europe, Middle East and Africa), Seattle (Americas) and Sydney (Asia Pacific). It has a Board of Trustees of 15, a Technical Advisory Board of 15, a Stakeholders' Council of 35-50, and is funded by charitable trusts and gifts, with only 5% of its income coming from logo-fees and corporate sources. The MSC's activities are fully consistent with the FAO Guidelines on Eco-labelling (2005). They involve voluntary, third-party fishery assessments, utilising scientific evidence; transparent processes with built-in stakeholder consultation and objection procedures; and a three-pronged standard based on: the sustainability of target species, ecosystems and management practices. The certification process has three stages:

Confidential pre-assessment
Certification
Traceability

The MSC does not carry out the certification. That is done independently. The MSC simply sets the standards. Nor does the MSC accredit the certifiers. That is done independently.

- 5.3 Twenty one fisheries have now been certified, including large fisheries like those for Alaskan Pollock and North Sea herring and smaller fisheries like those for Thames herring and Loch Torridon langoustine. Eighteen fisheries are currently undergoing certification. About 6% of the world's total edible wild capture fisheries are now engaged in the programme (over 3.5 million tonnes of seafood). The drivers for certification are the commitment of the retail sector and supply

chain to the process, the new markets and price premiums which are generated and the enhancement of traceability which is provided. The costs depend on the complexity of a fishery and are very low in relation to benefits. Additional information on the MSC is available on www.msc.org.

- 5.4 Members of the NSRAC asked whether only one of several fisheries sharing a stock could become certified. The answer was yes; one example being North Sea herring. However, the sustainability of each stock was important. It was pointed out that many of the certified fisheries were in distant parts of the World, and that many of these were serving international markets. Were 'food mile' costs factored into the equation? It was agreed that food miles do not feature in the assessment, and there is potential for heavy food mile costs for many fish products.
- 5.5 Some questioned why MSC certification was needed for fisheries which were managed under existing management regimes like the CFP. Didn't certification simply add additional burdens? It was replied that not all current management policies had resulted in sustainable stocks. The MSC label effectively said that this fish came from an effectively managed resource. It added to the audit process. Fisheries could lose their certification if its sustainability changed and those which received certification were reviewed every 5 years. All those fisheries which had come up for review had so far sought re-certification.
- 5.6 The MSC campaigns actively with consumers; building consumer awareness was important and was carried out together with retailers. In response to a question about fish quality and higher prices Chris Ninnes agreed that a premium was not always paid simply for sustainability. The MSC would like to do more work to establish under what circumstances a premium was paid for certified fish. He felt that as retailers made greater demands on fish suppliers, certification would become more important for the industry.
- 5.7 Javier Garat Pérez did not like the MSC. There was already enough regulation of fishers. Certification was a marketing instrument used by large companies with a bad reputation in an attempt to clean up their image. That is why MSC certification had been especially popular with companies in the USA. Chris Ninnes agreed that it was a market-based eco-label, driven by retailers. However, retailers were in direct contact with consumers and were simply attempting to sustain their future. Tom Pickerell said that retailers had often come to the WWF for advice on sustainable fish stocks, following campaigns by Greenpeace and others. Help was needed in identifying sustainable fisheries and that gap was filled by MSC certification. He agreed, however, that food miles were also an issue and noted that this was one reason why WWF were asking the RACs to identify suitable fisheries for certification in European waters. Barrie Deas opined that if consumers were led to believe that a product was environmentally friendly but it had been flown thousands of miles to the supermarket then there was a problem. He did not believe that the RACs could participate in identifying particular fisheries as sustainable. If they did they would soon lose fishers' support. The NSRAC could discuss the topic within its meetings but it would be for those involved in particular fisheries to decide whether they wished to seek certification.

- 5.8 Matthew Gianni said that it was apparent that some retailers had bought heavily into certification. The MSC had come about because there was a perception that management had failed in some instances. Some of the US retailers had come kicking and screaming into certification, and some of those fisheries which had received certification had subsequently been criticised by the NGOs. It was asked whether the MSC works closely with EUREPGAP, which had developed a protocol for fresh food. Chris Ninnes replied that discussions were taking place with EUREPGAP.
- 5.9 It was pointed out that certification was expensive for small fisheries. For Thames herring the certification cost more than the value of the fishery. Erling Skatoy opined that ecosystem-based management involved a balance between different levels of the ecosystem. Where populations of predators like whales and seals were increasing there was a need to restore the balance. Did the MSC agree with the harvesting of predators? Chris Ninnes said that the MSC only dealt with wild-capture fisheries. Certification did not extend to the capture of marine mammals. Javier Garat Pérez sought guidance on whether fisheries which were fully exploited could be regarded as sustainable or whether they would be regarded as bad. Chris Ninnes replied that MSC certification only identified over-exploited stocks for exclusion from certification. However, a fully exploited fishery could have an impact on other aspects of the ecosystem and in that sense could be regarded as bad.
- 5.10 Hugo Andersson thanked Chris Ninnes for his most interesting presentation. Chris Ninnes invited any groups with an interest in certification to get in touch.

6. Election of Vice-Chairpersons

- 6.1 With the departure of Gerard van Balsfoort, the post of First Vice-Chairperson was vacant. Two candidates had been nominated by members of the General Assembly; Nathalie Steins and Michael Park. As no informal agreement had been reached there would be a ballot of ExCom members.
- 6.2 A closed ballot was held and resulted in equal votes for each candidate. Comments were invited before a second vote was held. Jan Kappel asked both candidates whether they would support a resolution that sea bass should not be caught before they had spawned at least once. Nathalie Steins remarked that such a resolution would need to come before the NSRAC for discussion before it could be adopted. It was also pointed out that the revision of the Technical Measures Regulation 850 would inevitably involve the NSRAC in discussion of issues like MLS. Michael Park believed that MLS should be set to allow fish to spawn, as it was for haddock in the North Sea.
- 6.3 Others thought that the posing of such a question was out of order. The candidates had been given the opportunity to speak at the General Assembly. It was proposed that the meeting should move straightway to a second ballot. This was done, with the same result as before; eight votes for each candidate.
- 6.4 The Chair proposed, against one objection, that the outcome should be decided by simple lottery. The lottery was drawn by Petter Maier, and resulted in the

appointment of Michael Park as the First Vice-Chair. Nathalie Steins led the meeting in congratulating Michael Park on his appointment.

- 6.5 Christien Absil was confirmed as Second Vice-Chairperson for a further year.

7 Reports of Working Groups

- 7.1 Barrie Deas reported briefly on the activities of the **Demersal WG**, following a full account given at the General Assembly on the previous day. He emphasised the intense discussion of unaccounted removals which had taken place at the London meeting following presentation of the ICES advice for cod. It had underlined the paucity of data for cod, and the weakness of the assessments. The next meeting of the Demersal WG would take place on 28th November at Scotland House in Brussels. A paper would be prepared to assist the deliberations of the WG. As the ExCom would not meet again before the December Council it would be necessary to deal with any issues by means of written procedures.
- 7.2 Danish fishers would be preparing a paper for discussion at the Demersal WG dealing with proposals from the Commission for reductions in North Sea fisheries catching cod. It would be circulated to all ExCom members and might form a basis for a common position.
- 7.3 Nathalie Steins added to Barrie Deas' report on flatfish issues presented at the GA. The Commission had said that there were no funding opportunities for a scoping study of experiments on the Plaice Box. The Dutch government had also declined to fund the study. There would be an opportunity for further discussion of funding at the next Inter-RAC meeting.
- 7.4 Pim Visser and others had attended the STECF WG which had discussed flatfish issues. The Commission had decided on the basis of preliminary reports from the ACFM meeting that the assessments were so poor that a recovery plan would be necessary for flatfish, rather than the management plan originally proposed. There would be discussion of the topic at the November and December Councils. It would need to be discussed at the Demersal WG. Michael Andersen had read the ICES advice repeatedly, but could not find any basis for the decision to move to a recovery plan. Barrie Deas reinforced the point and requested that someone from the Commission should attend the Demersal WG to explain the decision. It was agreed that the Chair of the ExCom would write to the Commission on this point.
- 7.5 Euan Dunn gave a report on the activities of the **Spatial Planning WG**. A Feasibility Report had been presented to the Stockholm ExCom proposing a project to map fishing areas in the North Sea. The idea had been to produce maps of priority areas of fishery interest, based on fishers' knowledge and supported by data, to enable the NSRAC to provide advice on spatial issues. Such maps would help to ensure that fishing was integrated with other uses of the North Sea and would provide support for future multi-national fisheries interests. Subsequently, to this end, CEFAS was contracted by Defra to undertake a feasibility study and planning exercise. The results of that study had

been presented to the Den Helder ExCom and members had given their approval to the project being developed to the next stage. Now, CEFAS had submitted the proposal to the Commission for funding under the 'Lot 7 Tender' for studies and pilot projects for carrying out the CFP. The project was entitled 'Joint data collection between the fishing sector and the scientific community in the North Sea'. Fisheries mapping is one of its elements. The Project Manager would be Chris Darby. The CEFAS-led bid is within the Commission's estimated budget of EUR 300,000 for such projects. Successful bids are 100% funded so no matched funding is needed. However, additional funding for the mapping project may be needed later on, as the project proceeds. The outcome of the tender is expected within the next 6 months. If successful the collaboration will bring together fishers' organisations and scientific fisheries institutes to provide expertise to collate, analyse and interpret technical, catch, and discard information gathered by fishers. The overall aim of the programme is to develop the framework for a study group able to report on fisheries information, based on fishers' knowledge, derived from their own data. The mapping component will include study of one or more pilot fisheries (to be decided by the Project Team during the Design Phase), analysis and mapping of VMS and logbook data, with supplementary information from the fishing industry (on fishing operations associated with the pilot fisheries). High resolution maps will be produced, with fishers' involvement throughout to ensure maps are representative and properly validated.

- 7.6 The issue of impact of wind-farm development on fisheries had originally been raised at the Demersal WG. The Spatial Planning WG had now taken the topic on board. Defra has an active interest in the subject, and will shortly publish (jointly with SeaFish) a report on the perceptions of the fishing industry into the potential socio-economic impacts of offshore wind energy developments on their work patterns and income. It is now proposed that Defra will host a meeting at a government venue in London in the spring of 2007, to bring together the science, fishermen's knowledge and other relevant stakeholders to address relevant issues and concerns on the interaction between wind-farms and fisheries. If the ExCom decided to accept the invitation we would need to collect together a list of those interested in attending so that we could propose to Defra provisional dates and numbers for the meeting. A provisional date was the week beginning February 5th.
- 7.7 There was strong support for a meeting on offshore wind-farms. Other technologies like wave power could perhaps also be included. It was pointed out that there is already a UK group funded by Defra called FLOW (Fisheries Liaison with Offshore Wind group). There had also been much discussion and work done on wind-farm issues in other countries around the North Sea and Baltic and that expertise should be drawn upon. The main issues will be compensation for lack of access and what fisheries and other activities could be allowed within exclusion zones. The dimensions of exclusion zones could also be considered. A list of 21 wishing to attend was collected at the meeting, and anyone else wishing to participate in the London meeting should forward their names to the Secretariat.
- 7.8 Nathalie Steins pointed out that the EU's new Maritime Policy had a strong spatial element. What role should the NSRAC play in developing Maritime

Policy? Consultation on the Green Paper ends in June 2007. Should the NSRAC prepare a response? It was agreed that this question would be considered by written procedure. Those who wished to comment should send their response to the Secretariat for circulation and discussion.

- 7.9 Nicki Holmyard reported on the work of the **Socio-Economic Focus Group**. She had covered most of the main points the previous day, including the scoping study proposal on the collection of socio-economic data, and the preparation of a socio-economic protocol for the NSRAC. She had recently attended an OECD expert meeting on the human impact of fisheries, where people were pleased to find that the RACs were addressing socio-economic issues. She was also pleased that the Socio-Economic Focus group had been made one of the development groups for funding for a meeting in 2007.
- 7.10 Tom Pickerell and a small *ad hoc* focus group had prepared a draft environmental protocol through written procedure. He asked whether members of the ExCom were happy with it. They were, although Euan Dunn suggested that 'fisheries' should be added to line 3 of the second paragraph. The amendment was agreed. It was agreed that the NSRAC would make a commitment to the environmental protocol. However, it would be regarded as a letter of intent rather than a paper which the RAC was obliged to follow to the letter. It should not unduly restrict the NSRAC's activities.
- 7.11 Niels Wichmann reported on the work of the **Skagerrak/Kattegat WG**. The Danish industry had asked the Commission not to proceed with its proposals for an effort management scheme for the Kattegat. The ExCom endorsed that request. There is a need for the Commission to discuss its proposals further with stakeholders, and to mend fences with Norway before proceeding with the proposal. The Secretariat would write to the Commission.

8. Representative & substitute to participate in the Control Agency Advisory Board

- 8.1 The NSRAC had heard at its General Assembly that representatives from the RACs had been invited to participate in the Advisory Board for the new Control Agency. An initial meeting of the Board had been held in September and Hugo Andersson and Barrie Deas had attended from the Inter-Rac Group. Hugo had been elected as the interim Advisory Board non-voting representative on the full Board of the Control Agency. The Agency was taking initiatives to improve the culture of compliance and to achieve simplification of regulations in both the Baltic and the North Sea, and it plans to have a round-table meeting with the NSRAC to discuss North Sea issues. Representatives of the Agency will also attend our Cod Symposium. Early dialogue with the RACs had already influenced plans for the Agency.
- 8.2 The Chair invited nominations for the NSRAC representative and substitute. Pim Visser was nominated by Peter Breckling because of his daily contact with the problems of control. However, Pim was unable to accept. Henrik Svenberg saw this as a task to be delegated to the Chair. It was agreed after discussion that

the Chair, Hugo Andersson, would be the NSRAC's representative for the first year, with the Vice-Chair, Michael Park, as substitute.

9. Intervention by Erling Skatoy

- 9.1 Erling Skatoy of the Norwegian Fishermen's Association wished to thank the NSRAC for allowing him to attend as an observer. He had participated in the North Sea Commission Fisheries Partnership, and then the NSRAC, from the start. He advised the NSRAC to keep its objectives simple and targeted, and not to spread its activities too widely. There was a particular need to focus on the relationship between fishermen and scientists. We had to get this right. He missed the opportunity which had existed within the Partnership to debate issues with the scientists. There were too few fishermen present at the NSRAC meeting and no scientists. It would be good to re-open the partnership so that fishermen could speak to scientists more effectively.

10. ACFM & STECF

- 10.1 Reports from those attending the ACFM and STECF meetings were considered. Nathalie Steins wished to see a copy of the STECF WG Report which had considered the socio-economic impact of the Commission's proposals for flatfish. Hazel Curtis had contacted the STECF secretariat and a formal request would be required. Ann Bell would contact STECF. Niels Wichmann said that many STECF WGs took place and that usually their reports could be found on the STECF website. There was one, for example, on the days at sea scheme, which we should be aware of. The Secretariat would obtain a copy of the relevant reports and circulate them to ExCom members.
- 10.2 Euan Dunn mentioned the MOU between the Commission and ICES. Had the NSRAC followed the NWWRAC and Pelagic RAC in responding to the consultation? The answer was no, and it was now too late to respond.

11. FishSafe

- 11.1 John Watt and Michael Sutherland of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation described the FishSafe system for promoting safety at sea. Sub-sea equipment and pipelines belonging to the oil industry are not visible from the surface. Yet there are 40,000 km of pipelines in the North Sea and more than 400 platforms, each with its own exclusion zone. The consequences of trawl and other gears encountering these obstacles can only be minimised. Well heads and other obstacles are supposed to be over-trawlable or fisher-friendly, but often have protuberances which snag trawling gear. The KISCSUK project provides fishermen with up to date information about oil and gas installations as electronic chart overlays. Sponsorship by UKOOA and PESCA had enabled the development of an offshore oil and gas installation database, with input from all 30 members, administered by the Sea Fish Industry Authority. The FishSafe system uses existing bridge infrastructure to maximise the application and

minimise the costs. FishSafe reads-in vessel position every second from the existing GPS or DGPS onboard. This is used to calculate position relative to any obstacles within a range of 1.5 - 6 miles. As the vessel approaches a hazard at fishing speeds, a mix of visual and audio alarms of increasing prominence are triggered. The equipment is very valuable. It is cheap but it increases safety tremendously. Three hundred devices were built for the UK fishing industry and are in use. The intention now is to develop the system further and to extend its use more widely to fishers from other countries around the North Sea. One current obstacle is that information on obstacles in Norwegian waters is limited. Making it available requires cooperation from Statoil and others. The SFF is seeking support from the NSRAC in planning the next phase of development.

- 11.2 Ann Bell, the Executive Secretary of the NSRAC, had been involved in obtaining funding for the original development of FishSafe. She now hoped to seek funding for the second phase. Commissioner Borg had been briefed on the system and had supported its aims. FishSafe is a safety tool which can benefit all fishermen. Hugo Andersson thanked John Watt and Michael Sutherland for attending the meeting and giving their presentation.

12. Strategic Plan

- 12.1 A new version of the Strategic Plan, incorporating suggestions made at the General Assembly, would be sent out for adoption by written procedure.

13. Joint Symposium with the NWWRAC on Cod Recovery

- 13.1 A Steering group had now drawn up a detailed programme for the planned Symposium, which was to take place on the 9th and 10th of March 2007. It was hoped that there would be good participation from the fishing industry. Konstantinos Kalamantis pointed out that the meeting overlapped with the FAO COFI meeting. However, the Chair said it was not now possible to change the date and there would always be other meetings taking place. Christine Absil suggested that a slot might be found within the programme for recreational fisheries to give their perspective on cod recovery. It was agreed that this perspective needed to be given. However, it would not be possible to insert an additional paper and it was suggested that recreational fishers should be able to get their views across during the discussion sessions which were an important feature of the programme. In response to a question about simultaneous translation of the proceedings it was agreed that translation into the key languages, including Dutch, would be provided.
- 13.2 Matthew Gianni was grateful for his inclusion as a speaker, but he might have to find an alternate because of the clash with the FAO COFI meeting. Euan Dunn might also have to attend FAO COFI. After some discussion it was decided that a poster session should be included to enable wider views to be put forward. The Secretariat was looking for an appropriate venue which was easily reached and had asked the Commission to fund translation.

- 13.3 Written comments on the detailed programme should be sent to the Secretariat for consideration by the Steering Group.

14. Administrative matters

- 14.1 A meeting with Commissioner Borg had taken place at the NSRAC office in Aberdeen during October. In response to remarks that ExCom members should be kept informed of any meetings involving the NSRAC it was pointed out that the Commissioner had been visiting Aberdeen for his own purposes, and the meeting had been arranged at short notice to fulfill his request to meet stakeholders.
- 14.2 There were comments that the NSRAC needed to improve its communications with interested parties. Members really wanted to know what was happening. Examples were given: we had not been informed at the time that some of the NSRAC Secretariat had been involved in a recent meeting with Commissioner Borg in Aberdeen and we had still not received any feedback on the Study Tour of the US and Canada. In reply it was pointed out that the Commission had undertaken to report on the Study Tour. A report was expected soon. In the wider issue of communication, the Secretariat intended to gather together a small team to prepare a Communications Strategy for the NSRAC. The Facilitator post which had been provided by Defra was in the process of being filled, and it would also assist with improving communications. In future, it was hoped that ExCom members would be informed of all meetings in advance, would be given the opportunity – if appropriate - to suggest input in advance, and would later be given feedback on what had taken place.
- 14.3 Concern was expressed that RAC representatives at an ACFA WG1 Meeting on TACs & Quotas were presenting only the views of fishers, rather than those of each RAC as a whole. Clarification was also sought on representation of the NSRAC at external meetings. Were only the Chair and Vice-Chairs able to represent the NSRAC? It was agreed that the NSRAC should be represented by the most appropriate people at these meetings. They did not have to be the Chair or Vice-Chairs. We could not prepare protocols to cover all eventualities and we would have to trust fellow members to represent the NSRAC appropriately on each occasion.
- 14.4 The Federation of European Aquaculture had resigned their membership of the ExCom and there was now a vacancy in the 'other interests' category. Potential candidates for the seat would be asked to write to the Secretariat, seeking nomination, and providing information about themselves.

15. Next meeting of the ExCom

- 15.1 The next meeting would take place to coincide with a round-table meeting with the Control Agency to discuss relevant issues for the North Sea. It would take place at the end of May/beginning of June.

16. AOB

- 16.1 Correspondents were asked to copy all their letters and emails to Joyce Walker in the Secretariat. The rapporteur was thanked for his efforts.

17. Action Points

1. A letter would be prepared by the Commission on the review of the cod recovery plan, setting out proposals for the timetable and procedures to be followed. (2.5).	Commission & Secretariat
2. A report on the Study Tour to the USA & Canada would be circulated to the RACs (2.7).	Commission & Secretariat
3. A request for the preliminary STECF WG assessment of the socio-economic impact of the Commission's proposals will be sent to STECF (2.11).	Secretariat
4. The next meeting of the Demersal WG will take place on 28 th November at Scotland House in Brussels. A paper will be prepared to assist the deliberations of the WG (7.1).	Demersal WG Chair & Secretariat
5. Danish fishers will circulate a paper to ExCom members dealing with Commission proposals for reductions in the North Sea fisheries for cod, for discussion at the Demersal WG (7.2).	Danish Fishers & Secretariat
6. The proposal of the Commission to prepare a Recovery Plan for flatfish will be discussed at the next Demersal WG (7.4).	Demersal WG Chair & Secretariat
7. A letter will be sent from the ExCom to the Commission requesting that a representative of the Commission attend the Demersal WG to explain the decision to move to a Recovery Plan for flatfish (7.4).	ExCom Chair & Secretariat
8. Those wishing to participate in a London meeting on Offshore Wind-Farms planned for the week beginning February 5 th should contact the Secretariat so that names and suggestions for a suitable date can be forwarded to Defra (7.7). Chair of the Spatial Planning WG to suggest provisional dates (early Feb 2007) to Defra and make other arrangements as necessary.	Members, Secretariat & Spatial Planning WG Chair
9. Those wishing to comment on the Green Paper on Maritime Policy should send their thoughts to the Secretariat for circulation and discussion by written procedure (7.8).	Members & Secretariat
10. The Secretariat will write to the Commission endorsing the request of the Danish industry to delay introduction of an effort management scheme for the Kattegat until further discussion has taken place (7.11).	Secretariat
11. Hugo Andersson & Michael Park will represent the NSRAC at meetings of the Control Agency Advisory Board as representative and substitute; for one year (8.2).	Secretariat to note
12. Relevant reports of the STECF WGs will be obtained and circulated to ExCom members (10.1)	Secretariat

13. A new version of the Strategic Plan, incorporating suggestions made at the General Assembly, will be sent out for adoption by written procedure (12.1).	ExCom Chair & Secretariat
14. Written comments on the detailed programme for the Cod Recovery Symposium should be sent to the Secretariat for consideration by the Steering Group (13.3).	ExCom Members & Secretariat
15. The next meeting will take place to coincide with a round-table meeting with the Control Agency at the end of May/beginning of June (15.1).	Secretariat

18. In Attendance

ExCom Members

Christien Absil
 Michael Andersen
 Hugo Andersson (Chair)
 Ann Bell (Secretary)
 Willem de Boer
 Peter Breckling
 Barrie Deas
 Euan Dunn
 Javier Garat
 Matthew Gianni
 Tony Hawkins (Rapporteur)
 Nicki Holmyard
 Konstantinos Kalamantis
 Jan Kappel
 Flemming Kristensen
 Patrice Leduc
 Michael Park
 Guus Pastoor
 Tom Pickerell
 Nathalie Steins
 Henrik Svenberg
 Pim Visser
 Joyce Walker (Secretariat)
 Luc Mellaerts

Observers

Annemiek Bais
 Johan Bais
 Raymond Bisset
 Dennis Clark
 Hazel Curtis
 Ben Daalder
 Mark Dougal
 Bengt-Olof Eliasson
 Katie Halter
 Michel Goujon
 Jenny Hatchard
 Gerd Koehler
 Petter Meier
 Geert Meun
 Malcolm Morrison
 John Nichols
 Maureen Rooney
 Erling Skatoy
 Barbara Strathern
 Michael Sutherland
 Despina Symons
 John Watt
 Niels Wichmann
 Derk Jan Berends
 Søren Eliassen
 Poul Degnbol
 Hansen Black
 Anne Berg
 Chris Nannes
 Julie Rigaud